MONTENEGRO

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Eastern and South Eastern Europe

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STATE IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN MONTENEGRO

Podgorica
2007
INTRODUCTION

Country Overview

According to the last census, Montenegro has the population of 672,565, including the people staying abroad. Montenegro became independent state, based on the results from Referendum held on 21st May 2006.

Appreciating the significance of the principles of basic human rights, among which is the children’s right to education, the principle of equal education accessibility and the concept of lifelong learning and the need for dedication to continuous improvement, Montenegro launched the reform of its educational system at all levels in 2000.

Educational System in Montenegro

The educational system in Montenegro, which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science (except for a certain degree of autonomy guaranteed to the University) consists of: a) preschool education, b) primary education, c) secondary education, d) tertiary education, and e) adult education (which is still in the process of establishing itself as a coherent and functional system).

Only primary education is compulsory according to the law and it is free for all the children in Montenegro, regardless of sex, national and religious affiliation, psychophysical features and other differences among children.

Levels of Education

Preschool education covers the population of children aged 0 – 6. It consists of nursery schools for children up to 3 years of age and kindergartens for children from 3 to 6 years of age. Activities are organized as half- or full-day programmes.

Preschool institutions are established and run by the Government and are funded by the state budget. An option of combining government and private or collective enterprise, or private enterprise on its own, exists.

Primary education Children between 6 and 15 are obliged to participate in compulsory, free primary education. Previous basic education is at the time being designed in the structure 4+4 years but the reform of educational system implements the new system of 3+3+3 years.

There are 161 elementary schools in Montenegro with approximately 77,000 pupils.

As pupils finish elementary school, they can choose to continue their schooling by entering gymnasium (for 4 years), technical or art school (4 years), or vocational school (3 to 4 years).

Secondary vocational education. Students can receive training for one of 178 vocational profiles arranged in 17 vocational fields. Vocational education has 5 different levels, which differ in complexity of training.

Gymnasium. There are 10 (+2 private gymnasias) gymnasiums in Montenegro, and the gymnasium curriculum is carried out in additional 11 locations across the country (those schools are otherwise focused on occupational secondary school curricula).
Basic Postulates of Educational Reform

Within the overall educational reform, the Ministry of Education and Science created a long-term vision of the system of education that Montenegro needs to establish in the forthcoming period.

Primary (compulsory) education is extended to nine years, the children starting to attend primary school at the age of 6 (meaning that compulsory education is extended to the lower end). The reformed primary education will be divided in three cycles of three years each. Furthermore, each cycle is apt for setting global developmental and educational goals, laid as standards of knowledge (that will correspond to standards of developed European countries).

Of course, the reformed school opens the door for integration of children with special needs in regular training, as can be seen in these basic postulates, and for the possibility of adjusting the curriculum and teaching process to such children, according to individual matrix.

Organization of “Special Institutions” – Kinds, Numbers, Users, Methods of Working

Special education provides both primary and secondary education for children with special educational needs.

Students, handicapped in growth, who cannot follow regular classes, are attending special schools (boarding school type) or special classes in the regular elementary schools. Attendance of these schools requires change of social environment and early separation of children from their families and in that way impacts their full integration in the environment in which they live.

There are five institutions specialized for education of children with special needs and children at risk. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Total:</th>
<th>Gender Distribution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institute for Education and Rehabilitation of Persons with Hearing and Speech Impairments in Kotor;</td>
<td>162 children</td>
<td>98 G and 64 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre for Education and Vocational Training “June 1” in Podgorica (mildly mentally retarded and autistic children);</td>
<td>136 children</td>
<td>50 G and 86 B</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center for Children and Youth with behavior problems</td>
<td>14 children</td>
<td>4 G and 10 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute for Education and Professional Rehabilitation of Disabled Children and Youth in Podgorica (physically disabled, blind and poor-sighted children);</td>
<td>99 children</td>
<td>45 G and 54 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Institute for Children and Youth (moderate, severe and most severe retardation);</td>
<td>32 children</td>
<td>12 G and 20 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRAND TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td><strong>443 (209 G and 234 B)</strong></td>
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The common denominator of all these schools is taking care of the pupils/wards, health care, upbringing and education and habilitation of children and the young with developmental disorders. For that purpose, special methods are used, adapted to each type and degree of the child’s impairment.

For the purpose of better understanding of education of children with special needs short background of the three institutions working in this field is given below:

1 See Annex 3 for the list of special boarding schools.
1. Institute for Education and Professional Rehabilitation of Disabled Children and Youth schooling:
   1) physically disabled children and youth (a. with disorders in locomotor apparatus, b. with neurological and musculature diseases and c. with chronic diseases that belong to the fourth category of developmental disabilities); 2) blind and poor-sighted children and youth, belonging to the first category, and 3) children and youth with multiple disorders with dominant physical disability, blindness and poor sight, combined with mild mental retardation.

2. Institute for Education and Rehabilitation of Persons with Hearing and Speech Impairments in Kotor habilitates, rehabilitates, educates and provides professional training to children with hearing impairment: 1) serious (moderately serious) or 56-70 db, currently the smallest percentage – 9%; 2) with severe hearing impairment (very serious) 71-90 db – 36%, and 3) with most severe impairment (extremely serious) 91 db – 50%.

3. The Centre for Education and Vocational Training “June 1” has specialist preschool, primary and secondary education for mildly developmentally delayed and autistic children. In addition to special education it provides social and professional habilitation aimed at integration in manufacturing work and social life after the completion of schooling.

   The Centre, through full-day stay, enables rehabilitation, education, and professional training and directs the children for further education in accordance with their psychophysical capabilities.

Current Legislative Framework

Special education in Montenegro is regulated by the Law for Education of Children with Special Needs, adopted on 29th December 2004. Main changes include: involvement of children with special needs in regular schools, reform of Commissions for categorization in Commission for direction children in schools and new concept of Mobile teams.

   The term “children with special needs” has been accepted in the world and with us and is used for children with developmental difficulties and gifted children, i.e., children with above-average capabilities.

Inclusive Model in Preschool Institutions

Process of integration of children with developmental difficulties started, in an organized way, in 1992, by setting up a development group in one of the kindergartens of the “Ljubica Popović” Public Institution in Podgorica, which integrated children with mild disorders of psychophysical and mental development such as Down’s syndrome, cerebral palsy, mild to moderate mental retardation, etc.

   At the next stage, in 1998, the same kindergarten started the pilot project “Integration of Children with Special Needs in Regular Kindergarten Groups” in cooperation with the British NGO Save the Children. During the implementation of the project, the process of integration grew into the process of inclusion of children with developmental disorders.

   Actually we have in preschool institutions 185 children with special needs - 73 girls and 112 boys.

Inclusive Model in Primary Schools

Before inclusive education was introduced, a survey was conducted in 37 primary schools in Montenegro. The questions were whether children with developmental difficulties were included in the schools, if they were, what kind of difficulties they had, whether teachers had had any previous experience with such children and, of course, what they thought about integration of children with special needs into regular education processes.
The findings of the survey clearly suggested, as expected, the need/imperative for the Ministry of Education and Science to take an active part in this field, in which cooperation with the UNICEF office, Pedagogical Centre and Save the Children Foundation was invaluable.

The core principles of inclusive education in primary schools are integration and special care for pupils with special needs. The primary objective is to enable a pupil’s personality to develop in conformity with his/her capabilities and laws of the development. Commissions will be formed that will set special norms and regulate the number of pupils, type and degree of impairment and scope of integration in regular school. Competent persons - professionals will perform these duties in cooperation with teachers and parents. The teaching plans and curricula shall be applied on the basis of the pupil’s capacities. In accordance with these principles, mainstream primary schools need to introduce additional professional services beside the existing ones (such as speech therapy, special pedagogue, oligophrenological, somatological, typhlological). Moreover, the school buildings need to be adjusted structurally to the children with developmental disorders.

At present in total of 161 elementary schools in Montenegro there are 1591 children with special needs - 631 girls and 960 boys. Out of them 1490 attend regular groups (597 girls and 893 boys), while there are 101 children (in 10 schools) attending teaching process in special classes (34 girls and 67 boys).

The implementation of individualized programs would require regular monitoring in order to adjust the program better to the child’s characteristics and adequate satisfaction of the child’s needs.

**Who Helps the Children with Special Needs**

In nurseries and kindergartens, teachers primarily help these children, but also professional counselors that underwent appropriate training. Teachers engage in regular activities with the children trying to respect the principle of individual approach, so that children with developmental difficulties are offered adequate different activities commensurate to their possibilities. Professionals prepare individual stimulation programs, respecting the opinion of both parents and teachers and using certain evaluation scale. Based on that program, individual work is carried out and constantly monitored for possible changes to better suit the particular needs of every child. Important assistance is provided by nurses. If found necessary, the child’s parent or caregiver may visit the group.

In primary schools, from grade 1 to grade 4, teachers work directly with those children, and later the children are expected to continue regular further grades.

Most frequently, the professional service of a school consists of a pedagogue, sometimes also a psychologist (if number of children is more than 1000, as prescribed by law), very rarely a speech therapist, and no social workers, special education teachers and similar specialists at all.

Another important innovation is the establishment of “mobile teams” of SEN specialists such as, on the first place, „defectologuests“(special teachers, mostly, from Special schools), psychologists, speech therapists and other trained staff in inclusive education. In the moment there are four mobile teams working in Montenegro, one for the north part of Montenegro, one for the coastal area, one for the Niksic municipality and one for Podgorica. The Ministry’s intention is that these mobile teams will help speed up change. After initial misunderstanding of the concept relationships with special schools are continuously improving.
Main “Supporters” of education of Children with Special Needs in Montenegro

In previous years and in the moment Ministry of Education and Science and other key education institutions had/have significant foreign support provided from various organizations and bilaterally supported Projects, such as:
- Save the Children,
- UNICEF,
- OECD,
- COSV,
- “Development of Education Sector in Montenegro…Toward Inclusive Education in Montenegro” (Project financially supported by the Finish Government),
- Handicap International, etc.

Statistics and Indicators

Ministry of Education and Science of Republic of Montenegro in cooperation with OECD implemented Project "Education Development for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities in South Eastern Europe" and "Project on Statistic and Data Gathering for Education Development for Disabled and at Risk Students in Montenegro". The overall aim of the Project was creation of database, which will contain data about all children with special needs attending schools (total of 161), secondary (total of 49) and special (total of 5) schools in Montenegro. For the purpose of data collection questionnaires were designed and sent to all schools in Montenegro, based on alignment of national classification and OECD standards and cross national categories.

Data processing has shown that in the moment there are total of 2415 children with special needs (1022 girls and 1393 boys) attending education institutions around Montenegro.

In addition to this introduction of systematic data collection and creation of database have provided possibilities for future informed decision making in the education reform process.

Conclusions and recommendations

Generally it could be stated that improvement of education of children with special needs in Montenegro will require further work linked with:
- analysis and definition of reasons for number of pupils and youth with special needs who are not involved in mainstream education, existing as “invisible” children; increasing awareness level about importance of education in general and education of children with special needs,
- increased capacities of pedagogical-psychological services in schools, especially with respect of informing about types of disorders;
- increased capacities of teachers working with children with special needs, especially when it comes to subject teaching and review of possibilities for more rational organization and delivery of training (through cascading form) and teachers working in secondary schools;
- capacity development for members of the Commission for Directing of Children with Special Needs;
- amendments of Regulation on Criteria for Determining Forms and Degrees of Disorders at children and Youth with Special Needs and Procedures for their Involvement in Curricula, especially with respect to re-definition of certain types of disorders which should be treated separately or for which sub-categories should be made;
- further support for mobile teams;
- improvement of architectural conditions in schools in order for these to enable easy access and teaching and learning process for children with special needs;
- strengthening of capacities with the Bureau for Education Services to work in the field of education of children with special needs.