



## Executive summary

### **CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) Workshop on “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future” (Minsk, Belarus, 29-31 October 2007)**

Ministerial representatives, policy-makers, and educators from Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Latvia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Uzbekistan, as well as representatives of the IBE-UNESCO, UNESCO Office in Moscow, the Belarusian and Latvian National Commissions for UNESCO, the UNESCO Division for the Promotion of Basic Education (ED/BAS) and the Finnish National Board of Education attended the workshop (26 participants).

It was co-organized by the IBE-UNESCO, the National Institute of Education of Belarusian Ministry of Education, the UNESCO Moscow Office, and the CIS Council on Cooperation in Education.

The discussion mainly focused on nine CIS country presentations and their conceptions of inclusive education, as well as of their challenges and policy proposals. It revealed the prevalent understanding of inclusive education in the region: (i) special needs education based on a defectology background of theory and expertise (this was referred to as the narrow conception of inclusive education); (ii) educational integration without implying a systemic change of education structural components and (iii) a concept that has been mainly circumscribed to students categorized as having physical and/or mental disabilities. At the same time, it is important to highlight that, during the workshop, participants revised the above approaches to inclusive education with a refined definition presented in a final regional statement. Inclusive education was addressed in terms of social inclusion, quality education and a revised defectology approach in the context of UNESCO's definition of inclusive education.

The participants stated that inclusive education, understood in its broad interpretation as engagement of all students in educational process, regardless of their age, gender, ethnic and religious background, previous achievements, differences in abilities and capacities, their social and economic status, is one of the main focuses of the development of the national educational systems in the CIS region. Though inclusion in its broad meaning is not widely used in official documents, still the ideas of inclusive education are more and more reflected in the CIS countries educational policies. One may also note that the region's strength is to have achieved an almost 100% of literacy levels and attendance. Moreover, the right to education as a human right is guaranteed by national constitutions.

The main challenges appear to be related to: (i) the need for creating awareness both in the education system and society about the importance and value of inclusive education;

(ii) fostering teacher training at all levels with regard to inclusive education practices; (iii) the imperative of addressing multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and migration changes in their populations in relation to the aim of a right to education for all (e.g. Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Uzbekistan); (iv) economic levels of the countries preventing from providing all the necessary facilities and professional staff training in relation to children with special needs (thus, as a default, they are in some cases integrated into mainstream schools); (v) the importance of providing and further developing early-childhood education with attention to pre-school education (pre-school institutions in the region were described as being in a very poor situation); (vi) the need for commitment from and coordinated involvement of other public sectors involved in social policy addressing children's development and welfare; (vii) understanding inclusive education as a flexible paradigm, not a limited unique model and (viii) the need to create awareness that inclusive education implies not only a reform of special schools but also of mainstream ones.

A regional roadmap was presented after three days of discussion and group work, combining the input of all CIS country representatives. The roadmap, encompassing the above mentioned challenges and proposals, became a regional declaration/final statement of actions and goals set in the context of a revised operational conception of inclusive education. The statement will be disseminated in the upcoming XIV Conference of the Ministers of Education of the CIS Member States taking place in June 2008, and it will also be presented as a regional document at the ICE 2008.