

Fact Sheet: **Inclusive Education in Armenia**



Background

The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the **1994 Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education** held in Spain, and was restated at the **World Education Forum** in Dakar, Senegal in 2000. As a result, the challenge of exclusion from education has been put on the political agenda in many countries including Armenia. The goal of **"Education for All"** can be achieved if inclusion is the fundamental philosophy of programmes and if the main approach to programmes on education is based on human rights.

Basic facts on children with disabilities in Armenia:

Registered number of children with disabilities (**age 0-18**) – **8113**

(Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Issues- MOLSI, 2010)

Total number of school age children with disabilities (**6-18**) – **6800**

(Source: MOLSI, 2010)

Total number of school age children enrolled in special schools- **2817**

(Source: Ministry of Education & Science – MOES, 2009-2010)

Total number of children with disabilities enrolled in inclusive schools- about **1500**

(Source: MOES, 2010-2011)

How children with disabilities receive education in Armenia?

There are 22 specialized schools in Armenia to ensure education for children with special educational needs. These institutions provide boarding for those children that live far from the school or cannot afford transportation to/from school on a regular basis.

As of 2010, 1,500 children with disabilities in Armenia are enrolled in 63 inclusive schools and receive mainstream education. Given that the mechanism of identifying children with special needs and inclusive education system are not widely applied in the country, it is not possible to confirm whether 2,500 children with disabilities who officially are not classified as needing special education conditions are out of education or attend school. Further research is necessary to identify children with special needs who are out of education.

Is there a legal framework that supports inclusive education in Armenia?

The Rights Framework for Reforms in Special Education

- Convention on the Right of the Child Ratified by Armenia in 1992
- Law of RA on the Rights of Children adopted in 1996
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities signed in 2007

The Legal Framework for Reforms in Special Education

- Law on Education adopted in 1999
- Statutory Paper for Inclusive Preschool Curriculum adopted in *October 2000*
- Strategy for the Improvement of the Educational Boarding Institutions System adopted in *2002*
- Law on Education of Persons in Need of Special Education Conditions adopted in *2005*
- Inclusive Education Concept Paper adopted in *2005*

What is being done in Armenia to promote inclusive education?

Following the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by Armenia in 1992 and adoption of the Law of RA on the Rights of Children in 1996, UNICEF started to actively advocate for the introduction of inclusive education in the country. In particular, trainings and study tours for NGOs and other local organizations, including line ministries' staff were organized. In 1998, the first school (Yerevan School No. 27) opened its doors to children with disabilities. Since then the number of inclusive schools has been growing steadily.

In 2009 UNICEF Armenia office carried out an evaluation of inclusive education programmes and policies in the country in order to provide policy support to the government on the comprehensive strategies for addressing educational needs of children with special needs. The evaluation in particular highlights that over 10 years, great progress has been achieved in provision of educational services for children with special needs. The awareness on the needs of children with special needs has increased significantly, resulting in behavior changes at schools and in communities.

However, close monitoring of the initiatives has also identified some weaknesses:

- Most children with disabilities continue to be educated in segregated environments such as special schools
- Some normative documents adopted following the 1999 RA Law on Education contradict the "Education for All" concept. In particular, in parallel with the existing Law on Education, there is the Law on Education of Persons in Need of Special Education Conditions adopted in *2005* which regulates special education, thus violating the principle of "Education for All".
- In most cases allowing children with disabilities to attend schools and be present at lessons is perceived as inclusion, whereas the latter supposes full participation of a child in the education process and not just physical presence in a classroom.

The evaluation concludes that the main challenge to the future success of educational reforms in Armenia is the need for a clear vision supported by action and agreed upon by all stakeholders, and the capacity to maintain reforms on track.

What is the way forward?

- Collect adequate statistical data on children in boarding institutions and use such disaggregated data in developing a comprehensive and specific master plan on inclusive education ;
- Ensure that public education policy and school curricula reflect in all their aspects the principle of full participation and equality;
- Provide children with disabilities with access to adequate social and health services, including early intervention, psychological and counseling services;
- Support the cooperation of education and social services in assessing the situation of every single child with disabilities attending a boarding school for the purpose of reunifying those children with their families, integrating them in the community and including them in mainstream schools;
- Raise community awareness on responsibilities and obligations towards children with disabilities and involve communities in establishment of relevant services
- Ensure continuity of services and planning of periods of transition (childhood to adolescence, pre-school to school, school to adulthood);
- Monitor and evaluate the quality of services for children with disabilities and raise awareness of all services available