



# ROMANIA

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**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ROMANIA (1995 – 2007)**

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**Introduction**

After 1989 Romania has been a kind of laboratory for introducing and experimenting various systems and strategies to deal with children in schools and other learning environments. Many organisations – including UNESCO and UNICEF – have contributed to these pilot and experimental activities.

‘The special education sector is mainly responsible for the adoption of the inclusive education principle in Romania, with integration having been practised for some years. Before 1989 special classes had been operating within mainstream schools (and were even provided for in the 1924 Education Law). Similarly the speech therapy network had been working with children with speech impairments in both mainstream and special classes.’ (UNESCO, 2001, from the Forward, page 7).

Until 1994 very little was known about education for all and inclusive education in Romania. The Jomtien conference from March 1990 dedicated to EDUCATION FOR ALL could not have been under the attention of the education authorities in our country at that time, so fully engaged in many radical changes.

Starting with 1993, in a co-operation between the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and UNESCO two pilot projects have started in the towns of Cluj and Timisoara. The main aim of these projects was to demonstrate that integrated education and normalisation of the education for children with disabilities is possible in Romania, as in the majority of other countries which have embarked in these undertakings since late 1960 and/or early 1970.

Another complementary activity which started in 1994 was the RENINCO network. RENINCO means the National Network for Information and Co-operation in Promoting Community Integration for Children and Youngsters with Special Educational Needs. RENINCO became an independent non-profit organisation in 1998.

**1. The ongoing process of shifting from integrated to inclusive education;  
Some critical aspects of the conceptualisation and the definition of inclusive  
education in our country**

*Since 1995 until present there was a complex process of shifting from the integration perspective to the inclusion one in special needs education. Gradually other marginalised groups in education have started to embark on the inclusive education principles.*

*The integrated education has had and still has the meaning of ‘moving special education practices into the mainstream education’ (UNESCO, 2005). Special units and/or classes, resource centres and itinerant teachers only for children with special needs are examples of such ‘transferred’ practices from the special to the regular schools.*

The Salamanca Conference on Special Needs Education from 1994 came in a ripe time for Romania - one year after the two pilot projects have started – focusing on integration. It was an important moment in the educational reform. The concept of inclusive education was launched inside the two pilot projects and in the RENINCO activities, starting with the autumn of 1994. One year after, in 1995 three important documents for the promotion of inclusive education were

translated and published in Romania, due to UNICEF support: *The Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education* (1994), *The Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for People with disabilities* UN, 1993 (very important the Rule 6, on education,) and The UNESCO Resource pack for teachers (1993) entitled *Special Needs in the Classroom*.

### **1.1 Legislative, administrative and general aspects**

In 1990 the Romanian Parliament has ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The nondiscrimination principle (art.2), connected with the right to education (art.28 and 29) are clearly stating the need to include all children in the educational process.

A similar provision is present in the *Romanian Constitution*.

*The Education Law from 1995* has an *implicit inclusive approach*:

- All Romanian citizens have an equal right to education, at all levels and in all forms, regardless of gender, race, nationality, religious, or political affiliation and social or economical status;
- The State is ensuring the principles of democratically education, and guarantees the right to differentiated education, on the basis of educational pluralism.

*Legislative and administrative measures fostering inclusion in education*

\* Free services, studies, assistance, use of logistical base:

- free state education;
- free school books for primary and lower secondary education
- free medical and psychological aid for children in kindergartens, schools pupils and students;
- free snack during school time for preschool and school age children

\* Educational support for children in disadvantaged areas:

- school units with reduced number of pupils in isolated zones, areas with low population levels and those with difficult access;
- school buses for the above mentioned;
- salary benefits for teaching staff working in isolated areas;
- free school materials (notebooks, pencils etc) for poor children.

*Support for minority pupils and students* (OECD, 2006)

The education law envisages that the state will ensure teaching in their mother tongue whenever possible. For larger minorities, such as the Hungarian one an important network of schools is organized at all levels of education, with full instruction in their mother tongue. For smaller minorities, where full instruction in their mother tongue is not possible, due to insufficient human resources, some subjects are taught in the maternal language and some in Romanian. For very small minorities the study of the mother tongue is at least ensured (for example Romany language). Important efforts have been made by the Education Ministry in the last years on promoting Romany Language and Roma culture in the schools where they earn.

*The Common Memorandum on Inclusion signed by the Romanian Government with the European Commission in 2004* is an important normative document, focused on social inclusion, but also covering educational inclusion.

*The state of art presented here:*

Children living in poor families are having 2.3 times more chances to abandon the school, in comparison with children from non-poor families.

There are additional risk factors for children to attend schools in the rural areas.

The education of Roma children is a particular vulnerable and sensible area. 17,3 % from Roma children 7-16 years have not been to school. A clear indicator of the lower quality of education in Roma schools is the drop out quota: 11.3 – three times higher than in the average

educational system. The need for positive, affirmative actions was clear. There was a particular interest and support in Romania (from inside and outside – the EU in particular) for the education of *Roma children*.

An important source of the weak social inclusion is the *traditional school segregation of persons with disabilities*. The isolation in special schools has been slightly stopped in 2001, when 18.000 children with disabilities from special schools were transferred to ordinary schools. The conditions needed here were not realized: adapted curriculum, training of teachers and the development of a supportive attitude.

*Key challenges - some positive measures needed:*

- the rapid development of the social inclusion function in education; education for the integration in a cohesive society;
- the increase of school participation and of the quality of education.

The **Education law from 1995** has provided a wider range of educational opportunities for **children with disabilities** – special segregated education, integrated and also inclusive education were all three potentially there, in the range of possible educational structures:

- special schools;
- special classes in ordinary schools;
- ordinary schools and classes.

The last option that can really lead to full inclusion was not detailed and strengthened in the law. The provision for itinerant (support) teachers came only two years after, in 1997 (The law for teaching staff). Its real enforcement into a methodology was developed later in 2000, revised in 2004. The number of itinerant teachers has grown during these years up to 700 this school year (2006-2007). The training of itinerant teachers has started in 2001 (RENINCO did some pioneer work with UNICEF support, at the request of the Education Ministry).

There are recent legal incentives (established by ministerial orders) for ordinary schools to accept and work with special needs children:

- reduced number of children in the class when having SEN pupils;
- additional points in the appraisal system for a teacher having SEN pupils in the classroom.

**One problem – critical aspect** - in the special education legislative provision is the *mixed terminology, which is often confusing*.

The education law use several terms in the context of special education: *impairments, handicap and special educational needs*.

*The UNESCO and European term of Special Needs Education is not yet in the legislation (but experimental training at the university level on this domain has been undertaken by the authors of this paper).*

A Government Decree, 1251 from 2005 has introduced a new concept – *integrated special education – not clearly defined*.

The terms *inclusion, inclusive education and inclusive school* have been also introduced in this recent piece of legislation – but under the umbrella of *integrated special education...*

The *definition of inclusion* in the Decree from 2005 is the following:

*“Inclusive education means an ongoing process of upgrading the school institution, with the aim of exploiting (valuing) the existing resources, particularly human resources, in order to support the participation in learning of all pupils from inside a community.*”

It is easy to recognize the key words and phrases from the Salamanca (1994) definition: all pupils (learners) from a community, participation in learning, using community resources.

***It has taken 10 years since the inclusive concept already launched in the scientific***

***and practical work in Romania to be included in a piece of legislation...***

Children with disabilities are now part of the national policies for all children. This is quite obvious in the current law for the *protection and the promotion of the children rights in Romania (2004)* – which is for all children. The children with disabilities are also part of the law on persons with disabilities (No.448 from December 2006).

In the educational field the concept of *special educational needs* – SEN (wider than children with disabilities) is now currently used. New regulations are implemented in this respect (since 2005).

The concept of *inclusive education* has started to be promoted by the educational authorities in a wider sense than for children having SEN. Such children **at risk (or marginalised)** could include (OCDE 2006, the chapter on Romania): children from disadvantaged social environments and families, institutionalized children, children who are criminal offenders, children from ethnic or religious minorities, street children, abused or physically and psychologically mistreated, children suffering from chronic diseases.

Even if the legislation stipulates that all children have the right to education, there are still children who cannot go to school, temporarily or permanently. Among those who can be called **out of school children** there are:

- children suffering from a chronic disease (HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis, diabetes, etc) that requires long periods of hospitalization; education (schooling) in hospitals is one alternative for such children;

- children infected with HIV or suffering from AIDS; these children can be in a variety of situations: some can go to the neighborhood school without problems, some can go only from time to time (due to the need of going to a hospital); in the most serious cases the schooling is organized in the hospitals;

- street children – a complex problem in itself; those who live mainly in the streets, in makeshift centers or elsewhere most often do not attend school; some of them may temporarily attend day centers, where they can benefit from medical and some educational activities;

- children whose parents migrate from one locality to another (for job-seeking or another reason); they can be forced to leave school or be led to have many breaks between one school or another;

- children with severe or multiple/associated impairments; some of them are living in families some in residential institutions (formerly called ‘camin-spital’);

- average children, older by three or more years than their class peers; several measures have been taken to address this group to be included in schools: enrolment in literacy courses for adults (remedial courses - for those who have not finished a primary school - have a methodology in place since 2005); The ‘Second chance’ program has introduced an innovative school curriculum for attending gymnasium (low secondary school). These pupils follow the general education courses but also a vocational training (OECD, 2006, the chapter on Romania).

There are still ***sources of exclusion*** – society attitude and prejudices, old thinking and practices, the resilience of the old educational system (focussed on academics achievement and rigid evaluation procedures) incoherence and lack of continuity in the educational policies...

Several studies in the last years have indicated for instance that among the most marginalised and/or excluded groups are the children with disabilities and Roma children...

***There is still a need for conceptual clarification in the legislative provision – particularly between integrated and inclusive education - and the need for putting the inclusive education on a higher place on the list of priorities are there, for further future work.***

***Several personal books on inclusive education were published after the year 2000 in Romania (see references).***

One interesting issue we came across was linked to *the attempt of translating into Romanian the English word 'inclusive'*. The authors of this paper (who have been associated with most of the developments on introducing inclusive education in Romania) have felt the need to make a kind of *linguistically innovation*.

Inclusive ('*inclusiv*', in Romanian) is rather an adverb, referring to something (somebody) which is brought together with something (somebody) else. *Inclusive* (*includiv* in Romanian) was the new term chosen, rather an adjective, meaning a more clear emphasis on *the action of bringing something (somebody) together with something (somebody) else*.

## 1.2 National and international events

In the fall of 2000 (September 24-October 1) UNESCO and UNICEF Romania have organized in Bucharest (UNESCO-CEPES Center) a sub-regional workshop entitled ***Human Resource Development in Support of Inclusive Education***.

The workshop participants were invited and selected jointly by UNESCO and UNICEF from the following countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovenia.

The workshop objectives were:

- \* To build human capacities for co-operation for development in the region;
- \* To bring together a group of about 20 people who could take up later initiatives in their respective countries to enhance the development of inclusive education.

The workshop activities were focused on the following main questions:

- How do we define inclusive education?
- How do we formulate strategies for fostering inclusive education?
- What is involved in implementing inclusive education strategies?
- How can we manage change?
- What is the role of teacher education?
- How can we move forward in our countries?

*These questions are still very important for developing inclusive education.*

The main *conclusions* of this workshop were:

Inclusion in education is a complex issue.

'Inclusion is technically simple but socially complex'.

Inclusion is more than integration, it means the TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOLS, SYSTEMS AND SOCIETIES, OF US...

'The schools are what it represents in people's mind and what they constantly construct in their minds. The task of understanding schools is about understanding how different people perceive the school'. It is very difficult, impossible in fact to describe how 'an inclusive school' is. It about a continues process of addressing emerging barriers to learning in terms of participation in learning processes, curriculum and cultures of the school...(Report of the Workshop).

Another **national development** that helped to some extent (and for a period of time) to solve the controversy on the integrated versus inclusive education in Romania. That was the initiative from UNESCO (Paris headquarters), special needs education section, to undertake a case study on *inclusive education in Romania*. The study has started, with UNESCO and UNICEF support, in the spring of 1999 and appeared as an autonomous publication **in 2001 (*Including the excluded: meeting diversity in education. Example from Romania*)**. This study has involved as key partners almost the same involved in the training program presented above (Ministry of Education, UNICEF Office in Romania, University of Bucharest) but also UNESCO CEPES, the Institute of Educational Studies and the NGO Save the Children Romania.

This study published in the UNESCO languages, was also translated into Romanian with UNICEF support and disseminated via RENINCO Network.

The main content of this case study is covering:

- Introduction. Romania: the national economical and educational context;
- Inclusive education; law and practices; economical and financial issues affecting the inclusion of children in basic education; inclusive education policies and schools; the protection of children in difficult circumstances;
- Case study 1: A school for all. Education for everyone – inclusive practices in mainstream schools; the inclusion of HIV children in School no.37 from Constanta; the inclusion of children with disabilities in the schools no.18 and 22 from Timisoara and School no.43 from Iasi.
- Case study 2: The social and educational inclusion of Roma children; European and Romanian policies; schooling for the Roma population in Romania; positive initiatives.

## **2. Inclusive education and the curriculum**

### **2.1 Inclusive education and curriculum development**

*'Further attention is also needed in order to incorporate greater flexibility within the curriculum and related assessment procedures'* (Mel Ainscow, the report on the action research in developing inclusive education in three Romanian counties, 2001).

After 1998, the curriculum for the Romanian schools, developed by the Ministry of Education covers three main elements: the framework curriculum (plan of studies), the syllabi and the educational materials (including the textbooks for pupils and the support materials for learning in the schools).

The *framework curriculum* is a normative document including – the core curriculum, the differentiated curriculum and the school-based curriculum.

The *core curriculum* establishes the compulsory school subjects and the minimum number of hours per week for all pupils at a certain educational level (grade or class). In the case of children from minority groups it is compulsory to have now *Language and literature in the mother tongue* and *The history and traditions of minorities*.

The *differentiated curriculum* represents the additional number of hours allocated to school subjects from a curriculum area (from the minimal to the maximal number of hours) and the additional content accordingly.

The *school based curriculum* can be a new subject, an extension of a subject from the core curriculum or the differentiated curriculum (additional themes or chapters of an already studied subject or an in depth study of a subject).

We believe that the ***principle of inclusive education – in the sense of more flexibility, wider opening and response for the individual characteristics/the diversity of the learners – is embedded in the new curriculum from Romania***. This is quite obvious when referring to some of the ***principles***:

- the functionality – harmonizing the various subjects to be taught with the school age and psychology age features;
- the equal opportunities – the right of every child to have a core (common) school education;
- *the decentralization and flexibility – these allow for differentiation of the learning track for various groups of learners.*

There is a clear role and potential of the *decentralised curriculum* to address more seriously the learning needs of 'exceptional pupils (like gifted children or children with special needs). The

big question mark is how the decisions are really made at the school level, how the consultation procedures with parents, pupils and teachers are working at the school level?

### ***Curriculum for children with disabilities***

#### *Special education curriculum for special schools*

In the special schools the curriculum has the same structure as in the regular education, with appropriate accommodations (differentiation) for different groups of learners. The framework curriculum, the school syllabi and the textbooks are designed to respect the type and the level of impairment (deficiency).

From the inclusion perspective this principle has to be scrutinised:

- How and by whom is the type and level of impairment established? Difficult question to be answered, as there are two bodies intervening in this process: the child protection commission and the internal commission for ongoing assessment from the special schools;

- How can one decide for a child with a disability how much and how the national core curriculum is to be adapted? In other words how much has such a child the right to the curriculum designed for all children and how much for an adapted one to his needs?

- How is this principle in line with the equal opportunities principle?

A new framework curriculum has been developed recently for children with severe, profound and associated curriculum. One can talk here about an achievement in the road towards inclusion - an *including national curriculum* (before 1989 these children were not entitled to formal education); there is still a long road ahead on curriculum development for these children.

#### *Curriculum for children with special needs integrated into mainstream schools.*

These children can follow the same curriculum as the other children, but also benefiting from specific subjects for rehabilitation and specific intervention.

So, again like in the case of having finally a curriculum for children who had not been at all entitled to education until recently it is an important step to have an officially approved curriculum for children with special needs from the ordinary schools.

Romanian documents on curriculum are using after 2000 two types of educational and rehabilitation planning for these children: *the Individual Services Plan (ISP) and the Personalized Intervention Plan (PIP)*.

*The ISP* is an instrument for planning and co-ordination of services, for ensuring their continuity, complementarity and quality in responding to the various needs of children.

*The PIP* is a component of the ISP, an instrument of planning and co-ordination to assist in reaching the proposed objectives in each domain of intervention.

Basically the pupils with SEN attending mainstream school are following as much as possible the same curriculum as the fellows from community schools. This can be also adapted (differentiated) and complemented by typical intervention (rehabilitation activities) - which are usually implemented in the special schools.

The itinerant/support teachers are playing a key role in working with teachers from the main schools in developing the PIP and in adapting (if necessary) the curriculum for SEN children.

The individual plan could be an important asset for real inclusion but it should be designed and used with care, in order *to avoid a possible unwonted emphasis on the different learning task.*

## **2.2 The integration of the concept of inclusive education in the curriculum structure of basic education**

The concept of comprehensive education has been introduced to Romania. It includes the compulsory levels of primary and lower secondary school (grades V-VIII). In many places the primary schools have always function together with the lower secondary school – the so-called elementary school. This combination is an asset for transferring inclusive practices. The main

question is how *much at this level the teachers, particularly after the primary school are implementing and developing the curriculum in the spirit of a comprehensive school – a school that is open to and respects the diversity of children in learning?*

There are some advantages and facilitators for inclusion in the kindergarten and primary school – in comparison with the low secondary school:

- the curriculum is more flexible; in the kindergarten it started to be delivered in new ways of organising the classroom (areas or centres of learning); this is also the case in the primary classes using the Step by Step system;

- the official assessment procedures are almost non-existing in the kindergarten and more relaxed in the primary school (qualifiers instead of marks);

- there is mainly one teacher working with the class and implementing the curriculum; this creates the conditions for better adapting the curriculum to children's potential and needs.

In the lower secondary school the system is different. There are more teachers (subject teachers) who teach in the same classroom (consequently), the assessment system shifts to the traditional marks. The curriculum has been reduced and partly decentralised but due to the approach of the exams for the end of cycle (grade VIII) teachers, children and their parents start to develop (load) more the curriculum, sometimes unnecessary. Moreover, this examination becomes a real threat for SEN children. (from the study on support teachers)

The *need is obvious, for a coherent transition from primary to secondary education* in order to foster inclusion and reduce the selection, marginalization or even exclusions from the lower secondary school.

### **2.3 The on-going process of curriculum change**

The learning processes can be activated with children having widely different abilities.

Some new and alternative teaching strategies and methods from the literature and from the practice have started to be used in schools.

*How teachers are training and equipped with the required competencies to attend the growing diversity of learners' expectations and needs?*

RENINCO Romania and other organisations have experienced in this respect some pilot training activities and developed various support materials from out of which many became later on publications.

#### **Relevant training activities and publications**

Based on various training materials developed by UNESCO and published with UNICEF support, in 1995 the new concept of *inclusive education* was introduced in Romania and some attempts to develop more inclusive practices in the regular schools were made.

A training of trainers from various parts of Romania took place in august 1995 and January 1996, based on the UNESCO pack *Special Needs in the Classroom*. This pack is clearly tailored on the inclusive education vision. Two of the four modules have significant titles and subtitles:

Module 2: *Special Needs: Definitions and responses*; one subtitle (2.3) is called *Inclusive Schools*;

Module 3: *Towards effective schools for all*; subtitle 3.3 *Changing practices*

The trainers for the 1995-1996 activities were Mel Ainscow from UK and professors from Bucharest, Cluj and Timisoara universities.

As a second stage of introducing the UNESCO pack in Romania a series of training activities coordinated by the trainees from the previous stage took place in six counties of Romania (Bacau, Brasov, Cluj, Craiova, Iasi, Timisoara) and in Bucharest.

As a follow up of the assessment of these training activities - which took place in 7 places of Romania - two schools from Timisoara and one from Bucharest have agreed to start more intensive developments on inclusive education practices. A set of indicators (criteria) to collect data on children at the primary level was developed and used for monitoring and evaluation purposes in this undertaking, which took place during 1996-1997. These indicators were organised in several chapters:

- *Pupils* – they like going to school and remain there, are involved in active learning, work in co-operation, receive the needed support etc;

- *Teachers* – they accept being responsible for all children in the classroom, adapt the lessons according to the pupil's reactions; plan and work together with other teachers in the classroom etc;

- *Directors, managers* – they consult themselves with teachers, involve the teachers in developing new activities, promote ongoing training activities etc;

- *Parents* – they accept their children as they are, feel themselves as partners of the school and essential contributors to their children education...

- *Criteria for the special schools* – some children from the special school may pass some time in the ordinary schools; teachers from the special schools can work together with their colleagues from the ordinary schools on issues regarding the *prevention of learning difficulties*.

***During 1998-2000 an ongoing (in-service) teacher training program (for teachers in primary regular schools) on integrated education for children with disabilities took place in several counties of Romania.*** The main support of these training courses was published with UNICEF support in early 1999 - *Integrated education for children with handicap*.

The implementing agency was RENINCO, working in close partnership with the Education Ministry and having UNICEF support.

Even if *the title of the program was integrated education important elements of educational inclusion* were there. *The objectives* of the training program were:

- to raise awareness about the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for all children in a classroom;
- to raise awareness and inform about the main issues of teaching children with disabilities in the ordinary schools;
- to develop new attitudes at teachers towards SEN children (or to consolidate the existing ones) in order to foster their involvement to better support the school progress of these children
- to foster the development of new ideas and teaching strategies, to assist various types of children with disabilities in ordinary classes.

Inclusive education was highlighted particularly in the chapter entitled *Social fundamentals of integrated education*, drafted and presented by the head of educational (pedagogical) studies in Bucharest University:

- Ensuring *equal opportunities* in education means not only access but also participation and ensuring the quality of teaching and learning for all pupils – including those with disabilities
- Ensuring a *school for all children* means applying the *non-discrimination principle in school education*.

#### ***Lessons learned and critical aspects***

Through the course of implementing the above mentioned training program very interesting lessons learnt were drawn.

Sometimes the trainees were a bit confused on *receiving different views from their trainers*: more inclusive from some and more towards integration from others.

Many participants have deeply appreciated the *theory on the change process in education* – used by some trainers. This was much based on the *UNESCO pack from 1993 - Special Needs in the Classroom*, published in the Romanian language.

*Some participants have identified a gap between the inclusive education vision and the reality in some Romanian schools – critical aspects:*

- rigid practices and curricula, poor relationships and negative attitudes towards certain groups of learners (including those with disabilities) – at the classroom level;
- challenging existing relationships, attitudes and practices – at the school level: the attitudes and skills of the managers - critical for developing an inclusive school culture;
- there is no learning support offered in the mainstream schools for the children in need of such support (including children with disabilities); this idea came out particularly from a course (Cluj, 2000), where just as a coincidence there were two training courses going on at the same time (the one for primary teachers and a new one for support teachers – as Cluj is one of the more advanced city regarding the functioning of support teachers, since 1995).

*The needed shift in the vision, indicating a strategically made decision from the Ministry of Education was obvious in 1999*, when a new training material was issued and partly used in the last training course on integrated education (from 2000, Cluj). This new training material was called *Developing inclusive practices in schools (UNICEF and Ministry of Education, 1999)* and it has a **videocassette associated** (with the same title), showing best practices from Romanian schools (Timisoara). This new training material was developed in a direct cooperation between the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, involving again Professor Mel Ainscow from Manchester University.

In the above mentioned training pack we have the first official definition of inclusive education in a Romanian educational context (already mentioned at point 1.1 – in the Government Decree 1251 from 2005).

This training material was mainly used during 2000-2002 for the training of inspectors (educational managers), 2 from each county of Romania - (a senior inspector – deputy general inspector - and an inspector for preschool or primary education) - 90 people altogether have participated in this training.

One of the *problems (obstacles) in training senior educational managers* is linked with *sustainability* - they change quite often, many of them every four years.

The 1999 pack of training was also used in *an action research project for developing inclusive schools in two counties of Romania (Arges and Prahova) and in Bucharest (2000-2002)*.

Other two **publications of RENINCO, with UNICEF assistance**, which have appeared in **1999 and 2000** have added some help to the clarification and the ongoing change process towards educational inclusion:

- **RENINCO White Book. Integration/Inclusion of children with disabilities**, the story of the informal network functioning, between 1994-1998; one of the assets of this publication – in lobbying for the new vision - was the fact that it has tried to put equal value in its structure on all contributions: from NGOs and schools, from university and ministry representatives and individual members as well; the importance of *the social and civil dialogue* was very well reflected in this publication. The book has been recently translated into Russian (in April 2007), with Norwegian support.
- **The Teaching Guide for Children with Special Educational Needs – 2000**, which had the advantage of putting more emphasis on the issues of how to approach children with learning difficulties in the mainstream schools (in a way similar with the UNESCO publication from 1993 mentioned above). This publication started to be used in *further training activities after 2000 (mainstream teachers and support teachers)*.

The **UNESCO Guide from 2001 (Understanding and responding to children needs in inclusive classrooms)** was translated and published by UNICEF Romania, in 2002. A working group composed from various people from the educational sector, including from universities has supervised the translation. This was used in many further training activities (primary teachers, support teachers and educational managers).

As a follow up of the initial courses for primary teachers, in 1998-2000, another direction of work was opened - for training support teachers working in ordinary schools. This new teaching profession was encouraged by the educational authorities after 2000. RENINCO has developed during 2001-2004 and has recently published (**in 2005**), with UNICEF support a ***Guide for the support (itinerant) teachers in Romania.***

The **PHARE Programme 2003/005-551.01.02** was entitled ***Access to education for disadvantages groups.*** It aimed to facilitate access to and the quality of education for all children, regardless of their psychological, ethnic, linguistic or socio-economic features. The programme has piloted the creation of resource centers, in order to assist all teachers in developing more open and inclusive classrooms and schools.

This program has included important training activities focused on inclusion.

The ***main lessons learnt, particularly from the training activities*** are:

- Understanding and promoting inclusive education implies a lot of *joint efforts, involving the key actors in the educational field* (mainly the people responsible from the educational authorities - administrators - and universities, as opinion leaders in the field);
- UN agencies (like UNICEF and UNESCO) or UE institutions can play *a catalytic role* in this process, as well as the civil society (RENINCO and its members or other NGOs).
- There is a need for a *variety, alternative and complementary training materials*, in order to combine and merge the efforts towards persuading the teachers to engage in more inclusive educational practices; there is a need to combine in the training both the idea of changing classroom practices in general, to respond to a wide diversity of children but also to deal more in detail with the learning needs of particular children (in the spirit of the UNESCO Guide from 2001);
- *Involving educational managers from schools is essential* for the progress of more inclusive schools; their training needs have to be addressed in Romania at two levels – as teachers themselves and as managers;
- *The need for learning support in mainstream schools* has to be addressed – this is a key issue for future training to promote inclusive education; one important way is to connect this training to the training of primary and other teachers in mainstream schools, at least for parts of the training program;
- *The training activities should cover a wide range of topics* – school organization, curriculum work, teaching and learning strategies etc.

### **3. Main challenges and implications for developing inclusive practices in schools**

In a report to the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, linked to the action research project mentioned, the following interrelated issues were presented (Mel Ainscow, 2001):

a) Classroom level. Children experience barriers to their participation in classrooms where there are *rigid practices, poor relationships and negative attitudes towards certain groups of learners*. The research suggests that the most effective means of *making inclusion happening* is

through *the introduction of staff development in the school workplace*. The existing training materials, including manuals and videos can be used to support such activities. These need to be supplemented by opportunities for teachers to work together in one another's classrooms, observing and supporting efforts to introduce more flexible teaching arrangements. Such collaborative arrangements have to be introduced carefully in order to stimulate change and, where necessary, challenge practices and attitudes that create barriers to the participation and learning of some members of the class.

b) School level. These approaches to staff development help to provide greater support for teachers and students. At the same time they are *challenging existing relationships, attitudes and practices*. Consequently, their introduction has to be well managed. The action research has indicated that the attitudes and skills of managers are critical to the success of such activities. In particular, they require school directors to develop new *management approaches that emphasize wide participation in the planning and implementation of strategies for change*.

c) District (county) level. The need to emphasize more effective school management strategies means that school directors need considerable help and support. In this respect the research suggests that *district inspectors have a key role to play – that can influence in a positive but also in a negative way*. Within the districts ways of fostering more productive relationships between inspectors and school staff was experimented. These experiences indicate that inspectors *can provide an important and rich source of assistance*.

d) National level. The emphasis we have placed on reforms at *all levels of the Romanian education clearly has implications for national policy, including strategies for leading, supporting and evaluating reform efforts*. In particular, there is a need *to improve preparation and support for those who take on management roles at the school and district levels*.

Now in 2007 some of these *real challenges* were overcome. In many schools practicing for instance the Step by Step educational alternative the level of collaboration between the teachers is clearly increasing. Some challenges still remains to be addressed further.

Other important challenges now days are *linked to the type and the level of involvement and the coordination within*:

- *the key people from universities and research institutes*; working together in 1999-2000 at the UNESCO case study was an excellent opportunity to establish a shared vision (on inclusion rather than integration), to reach a higher level of involvement and coordination;
- *the civil society representing various sectors of marginalized groups*;
- *the local authorities*; there is a particular need for coordination between the county authorities for child protection and county educational authorities; the children in need (particularly children with disabilities) are benefiting from both educational and social services;

The old *challenge of ambiguity between integrated and inclusive education*, even if reduced is still there. The relative *confusion between integrated and inclusive education exists in many places*. Studies like the situation analysis from 2002 and more recent studies (from 2006, on the functioning of itinerant/support teachers) are showing that there is often still *a confusion between integration (sometimes only physical) and inclusion* in the schools surveyed.

***Some best practices*** (connected with the ***functioning of itinerant/support teachers*** which can enhance the progress towards inclusive schools (MER, RENINCO&UNICEF, 2006).

- the support teachers are natural members of the organizational structures - from the methodological and professional point of view - within the ordinary school; in one school (Iasi) the director even stated that the support teacher is considered as a key person in the school from the

methodological point of view; the support teacher is also attending the relevant activities with the class, including with all parents of the classroom;

- the support teacher is trying as much as possible to offer support in learning for all children in the classroom – not only for SEN children to whom he or she has a particular assignment (one example: before an assessment activity several children – not only those with SEN - have asked the support teacher to help them prepare for that assessment...;

- the support teacher is changing (shifting) sometimes his role with the class teacher (in a similar way that teachers in Step by Step alternative are working in some Romanian schools);

- the support teacher is considered a friend of all pupils in the classroom; some of them want to spend more time and communicate with her even during the school breaks; this in particular the case of young teachers...

- support teachers with more experience in overcoming learning difficulties at children in schools are gradually gaining a high profile in these schools.

#### 4. Final considerations

The obstacles in promoting inclusive education are important and complex.

Pilot projects and training activities are very important but **sustainability** is a key issue.

The balance and tension between *integrated and inclusive education* was (and still is) obvious in the terminology used during the training and other activities mentioned here.

There is still *mixed and confusing terminology* on these two key approaches, but also in the disability field.

As UNESCO has recently stated (2005) inclusion has its origins in special education. After passing through the 'integration period' (which in many countries was longer than in Romania), today there is *a clear need to think about and act upon the needed changes in the school organization, the curriculum and the teaching and learning strategies – this is really about inclusive education.*

The centralized and often rigid curriculum and the assessment procedures related have been gradually reformed, particularly after 1998. There is still a need to work on a shared vision of an inclusive curriculum for all learners.

Today, even if there are still organizations and individuals talking about integrated education in Romania, *the general trend – also from the education ministry - is since 2005 - towards inclusive education*, for promoting *training and changes in the mainstream schools*. There is now also a clearer role for the special schools, as future resource centers (some became already) and basis for support teachers, offering as well place for direct teaching and learning to children presenting more challenging needs. Important steps have been made for a more inclusive and differentiated curriculum for some groups of learners (children with SEN from the ordinary schools, children with severe and profound disabilities coming to special schools).

The biggest challenge ahead is *the vision on the school*, particularly when talking about *the comprehensive (elementary) school*.

Is the school a place for all children, different but equal (having equal needs) or a place for selection and fostering elitism?

Is the school a place for social interaction and social development or only a place for theoretical learning?

Is the school a place for learning and practicing equity and democracy through collaboration or a place for competition and exclusion of some pupils...?

### **Future directions of work**

a) *at the national level*: the need for a *National Strategy of Inclusive Education*, cover all areas of education, all levels and school ages; this should bring a shared vision of an inclusive curriculum for all learners, of a more flexible school organization and teaching-learning strategies and methods; this strategy must bring a more clear terminology – particularly to make the necessary distinctions between integration and inclusion in education); this strategy should cover also particular domains regarding vulnerable (children at risk) groups (Roma children, children with disabilities and other special needs, children from poor and isolated areas, street children etc);

b) *at the university and other training institutions level* – the initial and ongoing (in-service) training for all teachers – a component on inclusive education (education for understanding and addressing diversity in schools);

a) *at the school level*:

There is a lot to do in the mainstream schools in order to really create here an open, friendly, democratic and supportive learning environment for all pupils, to prevent and avoid as much as possible discrimination, marginalisation and/or exclusion of some learners.

Potential directions for future developments are:

- raising the general awareness about equity and non-discrimination in schools (for directors, parents, pupils, teachers, all staff);
- understanding and developing policies for inclusive education at the school level;
- school based training of all teachers on how to deal with diversity in their classrooms;
- support for the development of a school culture to be more responsive to diversity;
- support for the individual progress of pupils in schools (teachers, pupils, parents and community members);
- raising awareness and providing basic knowledge about SEN and other marginalized children for teachers in the secondary schools – starting with the lower level, part of the compulsory education in Romania;
- encouraging the needed partnership school-families-community to be addressed;
- using the parent's opinions to build and foster schools policies;
- listening more to the voices of the children in school.

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