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PROTECTOR OF CITIZENS



Protector of Citizens
Ombudsman

SPECIAL REPORT OF THE PROTECTOR OF CITIZENS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Protector of Citizens

In 2021, a new Law on the Protector of Citizens was adopted, through which special attention was given to the promotion of child rights. Article 2 of the Law stipulates that the Protector of Citizens has the position of a special body that protects, promotes and improves the rights of the child.

By applying its competences and powers, the Protector of Citizens has monitored the development of the inclusive education system in the Republic of Serbia since its introduction, both through numerous control investigations and through legislative initiatives and the application of intermediary powers. In all cases in which shortcomings in the provision and functioning of the system of inclusive education were identified, the Protector of Citizens, by issuing recommendations and opinions, tried to eliminate the consequences of improper or illegal actions of state authorities to the greatest extent possible, or to improve their work in this area.

The Protector of Citizens notes that even after 15 years since the introduction of inclusive education in Serbia, additional support services in the education of children are still not sufficiently developed and made available to children.

Exercising the right to child and student support¹ is difficult because different types of support are financed through different state systems and from different levels of government.

The services provided by local self-government units are largely dependent on their economic strength. Waiting lists are still formed for the provision of a personal companion service in some local self-government units, while in some local self-government units, this service has not even been established.

The insufficient number of professional associates in educational institutions remains a problem for the effective implementation of inclusive education. Teachers, educators and associates are insufficiently trained when it comes to inclusive education and the methods and models of providing additional support to children and students, while some local self-government units justify waiting lists with an insufficient number of trained personal companions.

In the Special Report of the Protector of Citizens "Inclusive Education – Additional Support Services for Children and Students in Education" from 2018, the state of inclusive education at that time in the Republic of Serbia was shown.

6 years after the first research, within the project of the Protector of Citizens "Monitoring the Implementation of Inclusive Education in the Republic of Serbia", which is realized thanks to the financial support of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) within the Small Grants program, new research has been conducted, the most important results of which are presented in this report.

The report contains the findings and conclusions of the research conducted by the members of the Youth Advisory Panel of the Protector of Citizens² in their primary and secondary

¹ All terms expressed in the text in the grammatical masculine gender imply the natural masculine and feminine genders of the persons to whom they refer.

² Back in 2010, the Protector of Citizens established the Youth Advisory Panel of the Protector of Citizens as a form of permanent participation of children and young people in the work of this institution. Thus, the Protector of Citizens

schools on the perceptions of the implementation of inclusion in the education of children with developmental disabilities, children with learning disabilities and talented children. Previously, the members of the Youth Advisory Panel underwent training within which a lecture was held on the topic of inclusive education, as well as a workshop "Puppet-drama games in the process of inclusive education", where they received guidelines regarding the implementation of surveys in their schools. One segment of the report includes an analysis of the handling of the recommendations that the Protector of Citizens issued to the competent authorities in its Special Report published in 2018.

1.2. Legislative framework

*The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*³ guarantees that "everyone has the right to education" and prohibits "any discrimination, direct or indirect, on any basis, particularly on the basis of race, sex, national origin, social origin, birth, religion, political or other opinion, property status, culture, language, age and mental or physical disability.

Stipulating that every child has the right and the possibility to be educated and that every child has the right to quality education that will foster the development of the child's developmental capacities to their limits, *the Law on Fundamentals of the Education System* (hereinafter: LFES) from 2009⁴ introduced inclusive education. The law was based on the principle that the system of education and upbringing must ensure the equal right and availability of education and upbringing to all children, adapted to the age and personal educational needs of every child and at the same time guaranteeing the right of "persons with developmental difficulties and disabilities to education and upbringing which takes into consideration their educational needs in the regular system of education and upbringing, with individual, that is, group additional support", as well as that "people with exceptional abilities have the right to education and upbringing which takes into account their special educational needs, in the regular system, in special classes or in a special school. The LFES introduced into the legal system the individual educational plan (IEP), individual programs and the individualized method of work, as forms of additional support. Later amendments to the Law, as well as the current LFES, more precisely regulate additional support for children in the education of children with developmental difficulties and disabilities, and the detailed regulation is left to the by-laws.

The changes made by the LFES in the education system of Serbia also led to changes in the special laws governing primary and secondary education and upbringing and preschool education and upbringing, which elaborated the provisions of the umbrella law regarding the provision of additional support to students in specific environments of the primary school, that is, secondary school system. These laws introduced professional assistance for the implementation of inclusive education and upbringing for teachers, professional associates, educators, pedagogical assistants and parents in the form of cooperation of the school with the local self-government unit authorities, as well as with a school for students with developmental difficulties and disabilities,

became the first body to include children in its work. Members of the Youth Panel are chosen through a Public Call, which is announced by the Protector of Citizens. The number of young advisors is constant (30 boys and girls from all over Serbia), and new members are chosen periodically or as needed. The members of the Panel are students of the VII and VIII grades of primary schools and the I, II and III years of secondary schools, ages 13 to 17.

³ "Official Gazette of RS", number 98/2006.

⁴ "Official Gazette of RS", number 72/2009.

that is, a school that has a class for students with developmental disabilities, other organizations and institutions at the local and wider level.

The *Law on Social Protection*⁵ more precisely regulates social protection services, some of which by their nature represent additional social support for the education of children and students.

The *Rulebook on additional educational, health and social support for children and students*⁶ regulates the forms of additional support, the establishment and operation of the IMC and the procedure for assessing the needs of children and students.

The *Rulebook on closer instructions for determining the right to an individual education plan, its application and evaluation*⁷, provided the right to IEP also for children and students who need additional support due to difficulties in the access, inclusion and participation in education and upbringing, if these difficulties affect their well-being, that is, the achievement of the results of education and upbringing, or represent a risk of early dropping out of school, and refer to a child, student or adult who: has learning difficulties (due to specific learning disabilities or behavioural and emotional development problems); has developmental difficulties or disabilities (physical, motor, sensory, intellectual or autism spectrum disabilities); comes from, i.e. lives in a socially unstimulating environment (socially, economically, culturally, linguistically poor environment or resides in a health care or social institution for a long time), or who exercises the right to support in education for other reasons. A student with exceptional abilities, currently acquiring primary and secondary education, also has the right to an adapted and enriched method of education, according to the IEP.

The *Rulebook on criteria and standards for providing additional support in the education of children, students and adults with developmental difficulties and disabilities in the educational group, i.e. another school and family*⁸ regulates the criteria and standards for providing additional support in the education of children, students and adults with developmental difficulties and disabilities in the educational group, i.e. another school and family, by the school for the education of students and adults with developmental difficulties and disabilities, as well as institutions that have children and students with developmental difficulties and disabilities.

By adopting the *Rulebook on pedagogical assistants and andragogical assistants*⁹, the regulations in the area of inclusive education were improved, and the *Rulebook on professional-pedagogical supervision*¹⁰, which regulates the method of providing professional assistance and support to an institution, brought an improvement in the enforcement of this form of supervision over the work of educational institutions, as this procedure is normatively regulated for the first time.

The *Rulebook on closer criteria for recognizing forms of discrimination by an employee, child, student or third party in an educational institution*¹¹ has regulated in more detail what is considered discrimination during the educational process, and it specifically defined the prohibited and discriminatory activities in the achievement of standards and outcomes of education and upbringing, in the realization of the right to education and upbringing in an institution, in implementing the educational process. The Rulebook specifically deals with segregation as a

⁵ "Official Gazette of RS", number 24/2011.

⁶ "Official Gazette of RS", number 80/2018.

⁷ "Official Gazette of RS", number 74/2018.

⁸ "Official Gazette of RS", number 70/2018.

⁹ "Official Gazette of RS", number 87/2019.

¹⁰ "Official Gazette of RS", number 87/2019.

¹¹ "Official Gazette of RS", number 22/2016.

particularly difficult case of discrimination in the implementation of the educational process. Prescribing the obligations of educational institutions in the event of violence, abuse or neglect of children and students, as well as the steps to take in a situation when violence occurs, has happened or threatens to happen, the *Rulebook on the protocol regarding actions of an institution in response to violence, abuse and neglect*¹² ensures additional support for children and students in education, both for students who are victims of violence, and for those who committed violence, that is, were present or otherwise connected with violence.

The Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women for the period from 2022 to 2030 defined as one of the five special goals the provision of full inclusion of children and youth from the Roma community in quality preschool, primary and secondary education, a greater coverage of Roma men and women in the student population and the provision of support to the education of young people and adults who did not attend school or who left school, while increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of mechanisms for combating discrimination and realizing the conditions for the enjoyment of all minority rights for Roma men and women in the education system.

The Strategy for Education Development in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 establishes as one of the general principles of the entire education and upbringing in the Republic of Serbia – ensuring equality in exercising the right to education and the availability of education for all children, students and adults, based on social justice and equal opportunities, without discrimination, emphasizing that it is of priority importance to establish new and improve existing support mechanisms with a special emphasis on the specificities of different vulnerable groups.

¹² "Official Gazette of RS", number 11/2024.

2. METHODOLOGY

In a methodological sense, the part of the research referring to the examination of the implementation of recommendations of the Protector of Citizens issued to the competent authorities in 2018, builds on the recommendations defined in the Special Report of the Protector of Citizens on inclusive education from 2018, based on the research conducted at that time. The similarity of the methodology, primarily as to the subject of the research, the selected sample, as well as the structure of the questions that make up the instrument, enables a comparison of the state of development of inclusion in the research conducted at the end of 2023/beginning of 2024 in relation to the results obtained six years earlier.

However, in the thematic aspect, the research has been significantly expanded and it also includes an examination of the method of implementation of inclusion in selected primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia. The implementation of inclusion in schools was analysed from the point of view of peer relations and the social climate in the school, the adaptability of the school to the student and the assessment of the development of the teacher's competencies in adapting the work to the student.

2.1. Conducting the research

The research was conducted using a quantitative method, in two phases.

In the first phase (in November 2023), education was organized for members of the Youth Advisory Panel of the Protector of Citizens through: a) theoretical familiarization of the panellists with the topic of inclusive education followed by practical examples from school life; b) their active participation in the workshop on the importance of puppet-drama games in the process of inclusive education; c) familiarization with the content of the questionnaire for students, teachers and competent authorities, so that the panellists would approach the data collection process in a competent manner.

In the second phase of the research, data were collected during January and February 2024 in primary and secondary schools attended by members of the Youth Advisory Panel of the Protector of Citizens. In the data collection process, the panellists gave students and teachers questionnaires in a paper-and-pencil format. The collected data were analysed in the month of March 2024.

2.2. Description of the realized sample

The research sample consisted of a purposively selected sample of competent authorities, as well as conveniently selected students and teachers from a previously established sample of schools attended by members of the Youth Advisory Panel.

2.2.1. Sample of competent authorities

The purposive sample of competent authorities consisted of selected ministries and provincial secretariats that within their competences may have some activities related to the support and development of inclusive education, as well as local self-government units of the Republic of Serbia.

The questionnaire was sent to the addresses of six ministries¹³, of which the response was received by three ministries, namely:

1. Ministry of Education,
2. Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs,
3. Ministry of Sports.

The questionnaire was sent to the addresses of four provincial secretariats¹⁴, of which the response was received by two provincial secretariats:

1. Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities,
2. Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality.

Also, the questionnaire was sent to the addresses of all local self-government units on the territory of the Republic of Serbia¹⁵ (145 in total), of which some local self-government units forwarded the questionnaires to their city municipalities. The total number of local self-government units and their municipalities from which we received a response is 110.

2.2.2. Sample of schools

The sample of schools consisted of ten primary and secondary schools from Belgrade, Priboj and Kragujevac. The following schools participated in the research:

1. Primary school "Janko Veleninović" - Belgrade, Voždovac
2. Primary school "Danilo Kiš" - Belgrade, Voždovac
3. Primary school "Branko Ćopić" - Belgrade, Rakovica
4. Electrotechnical School "Nikola Tesla" - Belgrade
5. Third Belgrade Grammar School - Belgrade
6. Fourth Belgrade Grammar School - Belgrade
7. Thirteenth Belgrade Grammar School - Belgrade
8. First School of Economics - Belgrade
9. Grammar School - Priboj
10. Second Kragujevac Grammar School - Kragujevac

2.2.3. Sample of students

235 students participated in the research, of which 44.3% were male and 55.7% were female. Also, out of 235 students, 39.6% of students are currently attending primary school, while 60.4% of students are currently attending secondary school.

Table 1 shows the representation of the surveyed students according to the place of education. Given that the sample is convenient, most students are from Belgrade.

¹³ Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government

¹⁴ Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities, Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality, Provincial Secretariat for Sports and Youth, Provincial Secretariat for Health.

¹⁵ This number does not include the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, since the Protector of Citizens is still unable to exercise its competences in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, in the manner prescribed by the Constitution and the law.

Place of education	Frequency	Percentage
Belgrade	175	74.5%
Priboj	30	12.75%
Kragujevac	30	12.75%

Table 1: Structure of students according to place of education

2.2.4. Sample of teachers

In this research, the sample of teachers consisted of 56 participants, of whom 14.3% were male teachers, and 85.7% were female teachers. Through Charts 2, 3 and 4, we show the distribution of teachers based on the type of school where they are employed, place of employment and age.

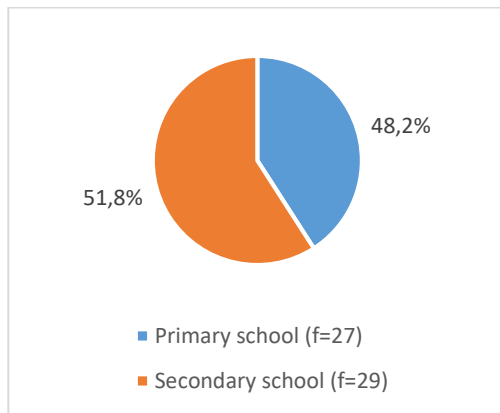


Chart 1. Structure by type of school

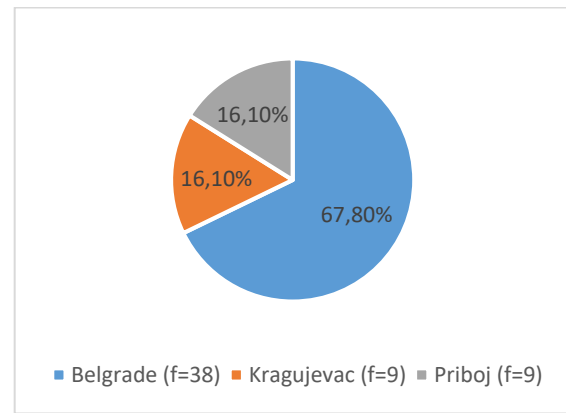


Chart 2. Structure by place of employment

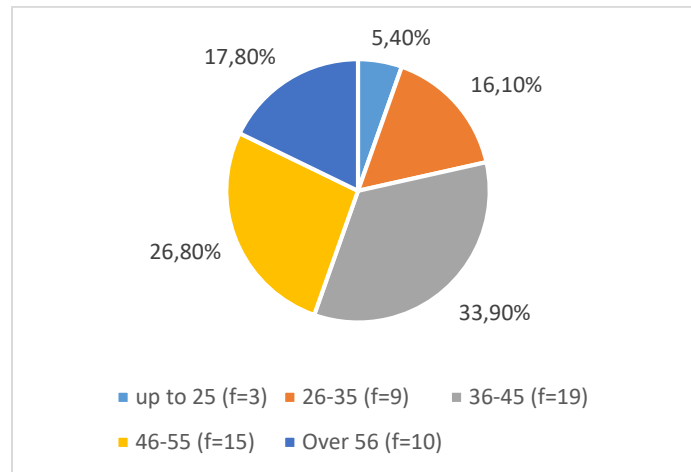


Chart 3. Structure by age

2.3. Instruments for data collection

Research data were collected on the basis of prepared questionnaires for students, teachers and competent authorities. Students and teachers answered the questions in the questionnaire anonymously, in paper-and-pencil format. The group distribution of questionnaires was carried out by the members of the Youth Advisory Panel of the Protector of Citizens within their primary and secondary schools, who had previously undergone a one-day training on the topic of inclusion and the method of properly collecting data in research. The questionnaires were sent to the competent authorities electronically by the Protector of Citizens, to whose address the questionnaires were filled out and returned.

The questionnaires for students and teachers started with a definition of what is meant by the term "person who needs additional support", in order to build a common understanding of the concept being discussed.

The questionnaire for students consisted of 10 closed-ended questions, one open-ended question, as well as questions examining the position of students (32 statements in total) based on a five-point position scale (I disagree, I mostly disagree, I am not sure, I mostly agree, I agree). The questions were divided into 3 thematic sections: questions regarding general information on the research participants, questions about peer relations at school, and questions about the adaptation and sensitivity of classes in relation to the student.

The questionnaire for teachers consisted of 10 closed-ended questions, one open-ended question, as well as questions examining the position of teachers (31 statements in total) based on a five-point position scale (I disagree, I mostly disagree, I am not sure, I mostly agree, I agree). The questions were divided into four thematic sections: questions regarding general information on the research participants, questions about the social climate in the school, questions about the adaptability of the school system to the student, and questions about the assessment of the teachers' competences in adapting the work to the student.

The questionnaires for competent authorities (ministries, provincial secretariats and local self-government units) had the same thematic structure of questions, but the number of questions and the wording of the questions differed in relation to their different competences in the area of inclusive education development. The questions were closed-ended, divided into five thematic sections: questions about the work of inter-ministerial commissions, questions about personal companion services, questions about additional support services, questions about providing support to schools and employees, and questions about education and trainings on inclusive education.

2.4. Method of data analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive analysis methods. Frequency and percentage analyses were performed, which showed the responses obtained by different categories of the researched variables. For greater transparency and readability, the results are presented narratively and graphically, and in some cases also tabularly.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSION IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Except at the level of the competent authorities, in this research, we were also interested in the implementation of inclusion in primary and secondary schools, that is, to what extent inclusion is present in the school and the school environment. Inclusion in practice requires observation and analysis of its important elements, by improving which we can perfect the inclusive approach towards every student in the school. On the basis of a better understanding of the students' and teachers' perspective on the quality of social and peer relations at school, the quality and possibilities of teaching, as well as on the basis of knowledge about their previous experiences, beliefs, prejudices, views on life and work with students who need additional support – we can draw certain conclusions about the extent to which the school system in the Republic of Serbia is ready for a more humane approach to observing diversity and providing support to the children and youth in schools.

We understand the term "inclusion" as creating equal conditions for all students, ensuring quality education for all children, respecting and nurturing their diversity and different needs. The questions in the questionnaire are designed according to generality, from general to specific, so that we get a view of the wider picture of the state of development of the quality of teaching and relations in schools – the necessary factors not only for the development of inclusive practice towards students with an increased risk of marginalization, but towards every student who deserves an optimal environment for the development of own potentials and opportunities.

In the special focus of this research is the examination of the implementation of inclusion in the narrower sense of its meaning, placing in the centre of interest the adaptation of the school to vulnerable categories of students who need additional support. By the term "student who needs additional support" we mean a student who has certain physical, cognitive, emotional and/or social difficulties in everyday functioning (impairment of vision, hearing, difficulty moving, difficulty speaking, difficulty understanding statements, frequent occurrence of anger that is difficult to control and the like).

3.1. Peer relations at school: perceptions and attitudes of students

Students who need additional support are social beings, with equal needs for building quality relations as their peers. However, they most often belong to the group of students who suffer exclusion from the social context of the school, due to difficult life circumstances they find themselves in (belonging to a minority culture or group, deprived environment which they live in, physiological or cognitive disabilities, etc.). An important role in the realization of their right to the satisfaction of basic human needs, such as being a friend and having a friend, is played by the culture of established relations at school – above all, the quality of peer relations. We asked students whether they know a person in their family, class or school who needs additional support, how they perceive the concept of friendship, how they see peer relations at school and how they see the functioning of a student who needs additional support in school or class.

When asked about knowing a student who needs additional support, 45.5% of students declared that they did not know a person who needed additional support either within the family or within the school system. On the other hand, 54.5% of students declared that they knew a person who needed additional support within their family and/or school system. An interesting fact is that

students from the same schools, in all ten schools that made up the research sample, gave opposite answers – certain students did not recognize a student who needed additional support within their class/school, while certain students from the same school did. Based on this piece of information, we may wonder whether, to what extent, and in what ways, have the adults made students aware and developed their ability to recognize students who need additional support.

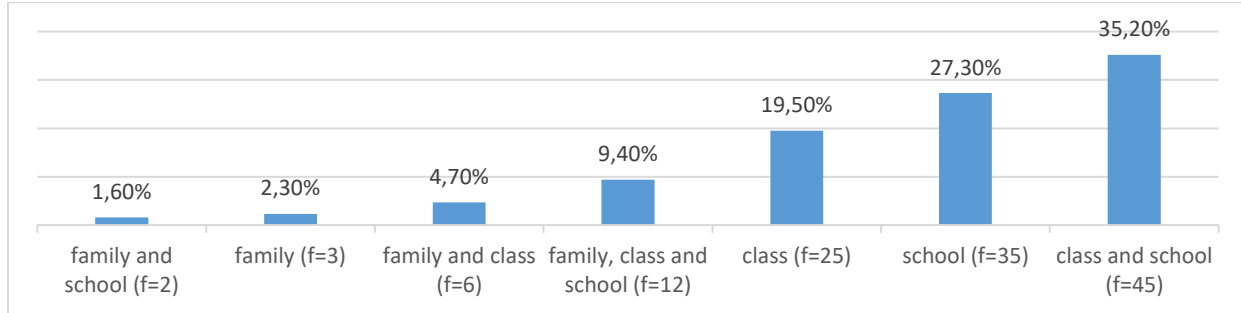


Chart 4. Context of knowing a person who needs additional support

If we exclude students who know a person who needs additional support only from the family context, we notice that the largest number of students who declared that they knew a person who needed additional support knew a person within the school system (97.7%). This piece of data could be logical, considering that the school is a meeting place for a large number of students who come from different life contexts. Also, out of 93 primary school students, 48.4% of students recognized a person in school who needed additional support, while out of 142 secondary school students, 57% recognized a person who needed additional support in the school environment. The higher percentage of recognition of students who need additional support in secondary schools may trigger further considerations as to whether older students are more aware of people who need additional support in the school environment than primary school students.

Most students recognize friendship as a basic human need, as well as a feeling of support and acceptance as a basic value of friendship. However, more than half of students (62.6%) will rather look for common similarities when choosing a friend, than show openness to diversity.

Perception of friendship	Claim: Every person needs a friend.	Claim: A friend accepts you as you are.	Claim: Similar people are more likely to be friends with each other than different ones.
I disagree	0.8% (f=2)	1.3% (f=3)	7.7% (f=18)
I mostly disagree	1.7% (f=4)	1.7% (f=4)	9.4% (f=22)
I am not sure	3% (f=7)	3.4% (f=8)	20.4% (f=48)
I mostly agree	11.9% (28)	14% (f=33)	43.8% (f=103)
I agree	82.6% (194)	79.6% (f=187)	18.7% (f=44)

Table 2: Students' perception of friendship

We were interested in how students perceive peer relations in the school and class. In response to questions concerning the general and group functioning of the school or class, the majority of students evaluated the interaction as harmonious. However, leaving the perspective of the collective atmosphere and looking at things from an angle of the individual, as many as 29.4% of students agreed with the statement that there was at least one person in the class whom everyone makes fun of. If we pay attention to the number of students who answered neutrally, we will notice that an almost similar percentage of students could not judge whether their classmates were ridiculed or not. The high percentage of undeclared answers is significant information, which leads to a conclusion that it could be possible that students are not able to recognize whether everyday teasing is a form of mockery or a form of joking and fun.

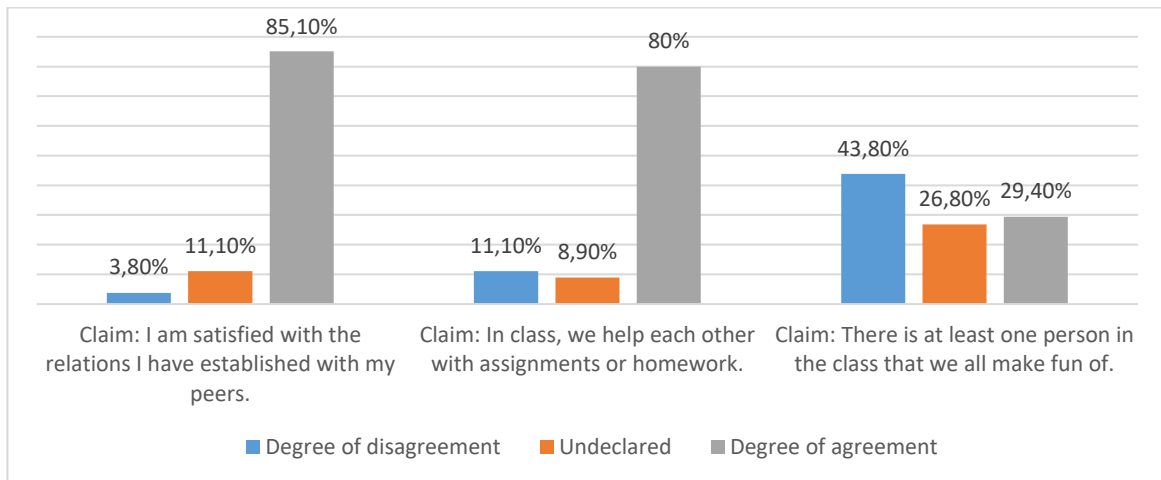


Chart 5. Students' perception of peer relations in class and school

The next part of the questions referred to the attitude towards students who need additional support. Below, we present an overview of the statements related to the attitude towards students in relation to their financial status.

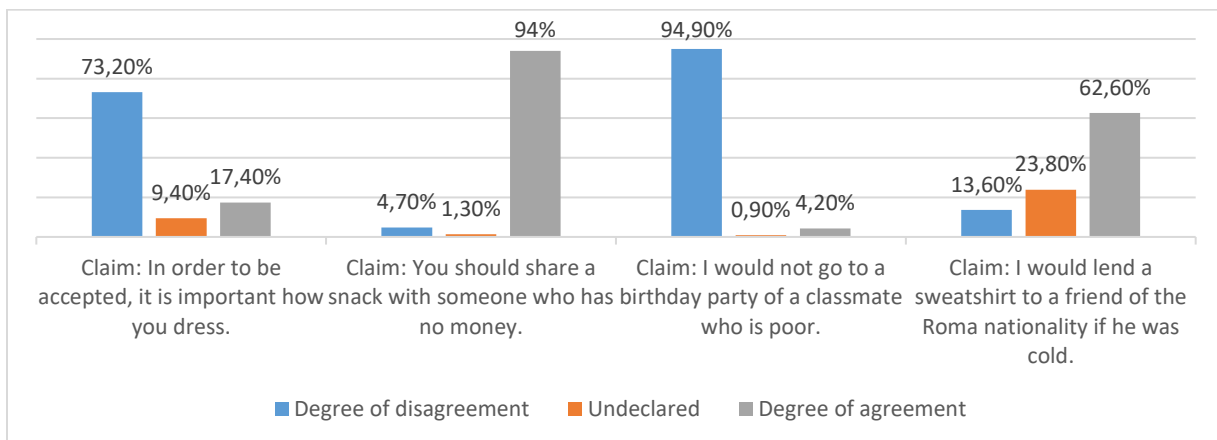


Chart 6. Attitude towards the financial status of students

If we look at the statements from left to right, we will notice that a large percentage of students do not show a negative attitude towards a student who is poor. An interesting fact is that these

claims even showed the highest degree of student agreement in relation to all other claims (the biggest number of them chose the same answer within this category). We assume that if we defined the last claim as "I would lend a sweatshirt to a poor friend if he were cold", we would get a similar result as with the previous claim. However, just pointing out that the friend is of Roma nationality led to a decrease in the degree of agreement, so 13.6% of students decided that they would not borrow the sweatshirt (we assume because the friend is of Roma nationality). Also, 23.8% of students cannot say with certainty that they would lend a sweatshirt to a Roma student, which is why they chose a neutral answer. The negative answer was mostly chosen by male students (22.1% of the total number of boys), while there were significantly fewer girls (6.8%).

A common prejudice that can affect the building of an image of a student at school is the association of the obtained grades with the type of student and the method of learning. "In an inclusive school, the student competes with himself. In a real school, we are far from that. Teachers (and under their influence also students) evaluate their peers not by how much they have progressed personally, but by their rank in terms of success"¹⁶. The answers show us that 68.9% of students show understanding towards students who are determined to succeed, and do not consider that this is their only activity during the day. However, there was a noticeable degree of inconsistency in responses referring to students who receive the lowest grades in class. Resistance to learning is hardly recognized as a call for help in the system of the majority, but is interpreted as a negative characteristic of a student, that the student accepts over time and manifests through behaviour.

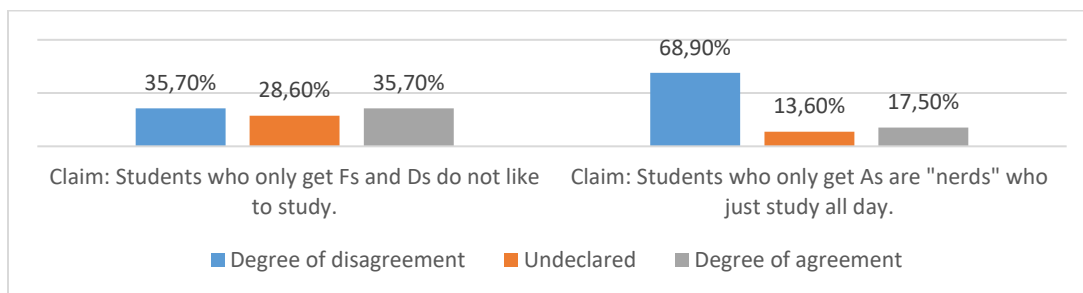


Chart 7. Attitude towards the students' method of learning

Three statements in the questionnaire concerned the general attitude of students towards students who need additional support. The analysis of the results indicates that the inclusion of a student who needs additional support in their personal environment is not a problem for a larger percentage of students. However, about 20% of the total number of students expressed a negative attitude towards their stay in a regular school and towards closer social relations.

Differences in responses between students who know and students who do not know a student who needs additional support are minimal. The assumption that students who know a student who needs additional support will be more sensitive and ready to be involved is not present, moreover, students in the "I don't know" category showed a greater readiness than students in the "I know" category in the examples of sharing a desk and sharing a room on an excursion.

¹⁶ Hrnjica S. i sar. (2009). *A school tailored to the child 2: a manual for the implementation of the inclusive model of transition from classroom teaching to subject teaching for students with developmental difficulties*, Belgrade: Save the Children UK, Program for Serbia.

Claim: Students who need additional support should go to a separate class.		
	I disagree / I mostly disagree	I agree / I mostly agree
I know a person	56,3% (f=72)	18,8% (f=24)
I don't know a person	56,1% (f=60)	20,6% (f=22)
Claim: I would share a desk with a student who needs additional support.		
	I disagree / I mostly disagree	I agree / I mostly agree
I know a person	20,3%(f=26)	45,3% (f=58)
I don't know a person	17,8% (f=19)	59,8% (f=64)
Claim: On an excursion, I would share a room with a student who needs additional support.		
	I disagree / I mostly disagree	I agree / I mostly agree
I know a person	32% (f=41)	35,9% (f=46)
I don't know a person	17,8% (f=19)	44,9% (f=48)

Table 3: Attitude of students towards persons who need additional support

The order of the claims formed a degree of companionship, starting from simply not separating a person into a special group, to spending time together in class, to being on an excursion as a place of mutual relaxation and bonding. The answers suggest that the students in the "I know" category were increasingly less ready for a higher level of socializing, which is why almost half of the respondents chose the option that they would not share a room together; at the same time, their position was twice as prevalent than that of the students in the "I don't know" category.

Such interpretation is confirmed by the results of the questions in which students were directly asked what kind of relations they have with students who need additional support. The answers again went from lower to higher levels, and the students had the following options: I don't socialize, I don't socialize but I would offer them help, I don't socialize, but I help them function, I socialize (each answer offered is even more closely and precisely determined in the questionnaire). Every sixth student establishes a friendly relation with a student who needs additional support, and of the 83 students who declared that they do not socialize and do not support them - 47 of them knew a student within their class.

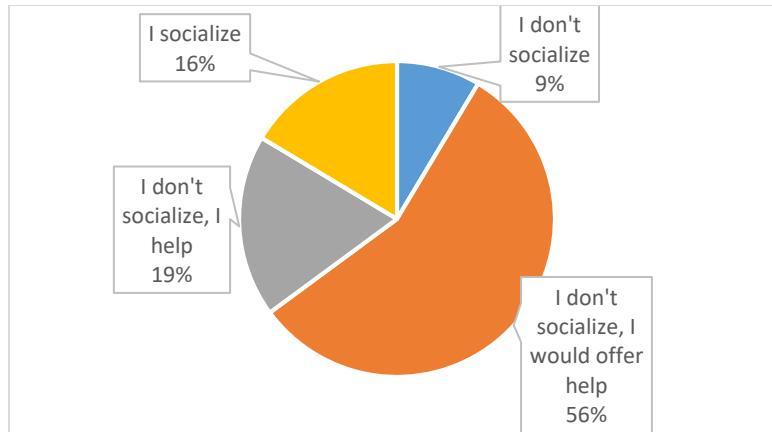


Chart 8. The attitude of students in the "I know" category towards students who need additional support

In the homeroom class, students have the opportunity to talk to each other, consult with the teacher and solve various questions and issues. The homeroom community can strengthen the educational role of the school by creating an atmosphere of understanding, respect and acceptance. We asked the students whether their homeroom classes are held regularly, whether the homeroom community has the power to strengthen relations, and whether it fulfils such a role in their class. The obtained results are motivating. 74.9% of students (f=176) stated that homeroom community meetings are held regularly and that it can be a place where problems are solved and relations are strengthened with students who need additional support (71.5%). The majority declared that their homeroom community achieves this purpose (76.2%).

	The purpose of the homeroom community in the class	f	%
1.	Conversations on current topics, giving suggestions, discussion	179	76,2%
2.	Talks about grades, grading and absences	32	13,6%
3.	Socializing and relaxation time	16	6,8%
4.	Learning and listening for the next lessons	8	3,4%

Table 4: Students' answers about the purpose of the homeroom community in the class

The last thing we asked the students from the peer relations category was whether they attended lectures/workshops on the topic of peer relations (tolerance, understanding, inclusion, peer violence), and whether they consider this type of meeting useful. Although the results showed that more than half of the students attended this type of lecture/workshop at least once, the percentage of students who never attended the mentioned event (41.7%) is worrying. The assumption that the lectures/workshops will be more useful to the students belonging to the "I know" category did not turn out to be correct, considering that they even show a lower percentage of agreement with the claim compared to the students from the "I don't know" category.

Lecture/workshop	Not once	Once	Two or more times
Primary school	43%	20.4%	36.6%
Secondary school	40.9%	19%	40.1%

Table 5: Frequency of attendance at a lecture/workshop on the topic of peer relations

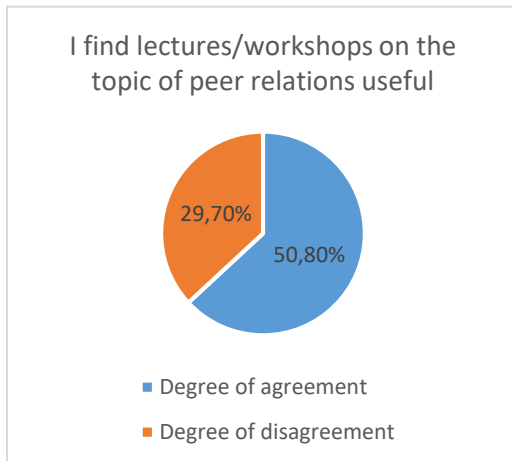


Chart 9. Students from the "I know" category

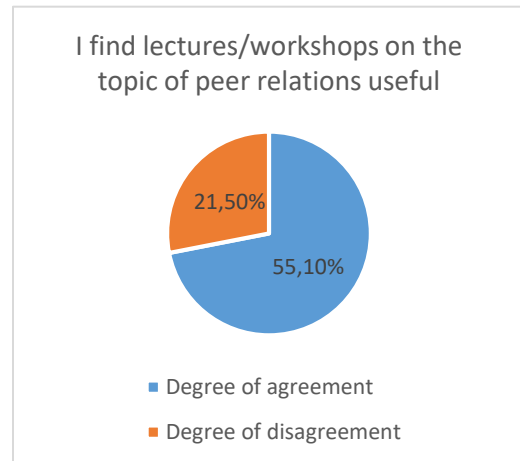


Chart 10. Students from the "I don't know" category

3.2. Adaptation and sensitivity of classes in relation to the student: perceptions and attitudes of students

Peer support at school is important for a student who needs additional support, in order for him to feel accepted and as part of a group, however, the school should also fulfil its educational role by providing the student with the tools to successfully master knowledge in various scientific areas. If we expect a student who needs additional support to adapt to a system that does not recognize the possibility of learning and developing in different ways and in accordance with different capacities, we will not get positive results. Adapting the school system to the student as its inseparable part results in improving the quality of that system. Listening to the needs, cooperation and interest of adults, diversity of teaching tools, methods, forms of work, changes in the curriculum, complexity and scope of the teaching content, flexible adjustment of time for learning, equipping with materials and aids are the requirements to initiate and develop changes in the direction of the transformation of the school, and not the simple survival of students in the system.

We asked the students how they perceive the pace of work and the adoption of the content from the lessons, and no differences were observed between the attitudes of students of primary and secondary schools. To a greater extent, the students declared that they manage to write down all the information in their notebooks, but they had approximately equal differences in their attitude regarding the speed of the teacher's presentation and the time left to solve the tasks. Almost half of the students who made up the research sample (45.1%) agreed that they do not have enough time to solve certain tasks.

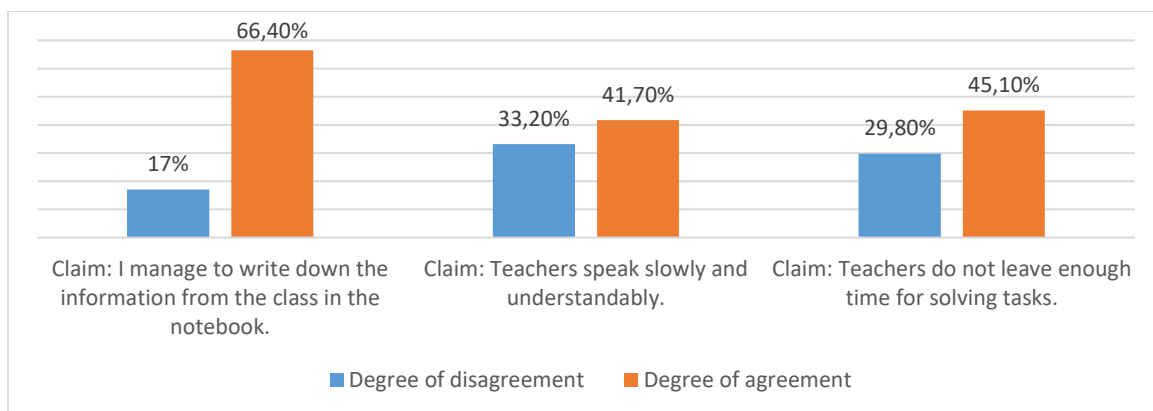


Chart 11. Students' attitude towards the pace of work in class

Building on the dynamics of work in the class, the students also expressed their attitude towards the volume of the teaching material, where 48.1% of the students expressed the opinion that lessons contain a lot of information that makes it difficult for them to understand the material.

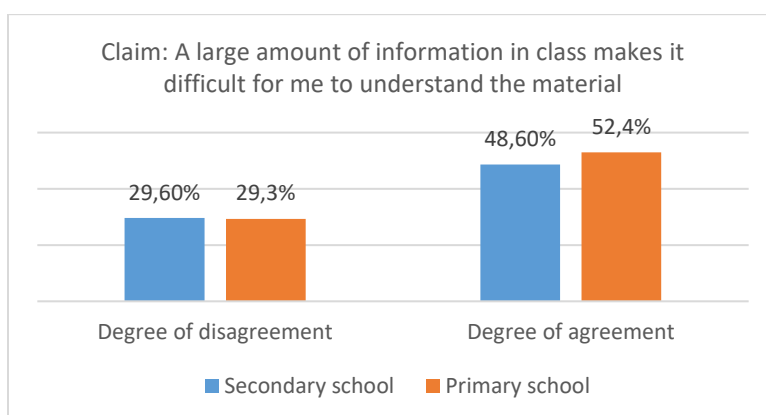


Chart 12. Attitude towards the volume of the teaching material

Supplementary and additional classes at school are an additional opportunity for students to adapt the learning process to their own pace and interest. Based on the answers of students, we learn that this type of additional class is mostly organized within the school and that the students evaluate it as useful. There is a difference in the responses of high school students: 11.3% of them stated that the school does not organize supplementary classes, while three times as many students (34.5%) stated that the additional classes were not organized.

	Supplementary classes	Primary school	Secondary school
1.	They are organized and I find them useful	75.3%	73.2%
2.	They are organized, I don't find them useful	17.2%	15.5%
3.	They are not organized, I find them useful	5.5%	8.5%
4.	They are not organized, I don't find them useful	2.2%	2.8%

Table 6: Supplementary classes at school

	Additional classes	Primary school	Secondary school
1.	They are organized and I find them useful	67.7%	51.4%
2.	They are organized, I don't find them useful	20.4%	14.1%
3.	They are not organized, I find them useful	9.7%	16.2%
4.	They are not organized, I don't find them useful	2.2%	18.3%

Table 7: Additional classes at school

We were interested in how often, in their previous experience, students visited supplementary or additional classes. The results show that primary school students go to supplementary and additional classes more often than secondary school students, as well as that they choose supplementary classes more often than additional ones. A smaller number of secondary school students than primary school students attend supplementary and additional classes, and only every sixth student chooses additional classes.

Supplementary class	Not once	Once	Two or more times
Primary school	24.7% (f=23)	20.5% (f=19)	54.8%(f=51)
Secondary school	55.6% (f=79)	27.5% (f=39)	16.9 (f=24)
Additional class	Not once	Once	Two or more times
Primary school	52.7% (f=49)	18.3% (f=7)	29% (f=27)
Secondary school	76.1% (f=108)	11.3% (f=6)	12.6% (f=18)

Table 8: Frequency of students attending supplementary and additional classes

The following claims were related to examining the students' attitude towards the adaptation of the classes to a student who needs additional support. We could say that the obtained results are somewhat contradictory. Although the majority of students (49.8%) declared that they could support such students in class, as many as 80.5% of them believe that the tasks should be the same for everyone. Also, the majority of students agreed that they did not fall behind in adopting the material because a student needs constant help, but 73.2% of students characterized the behaviour of screaming, throwing and hitting as disruptive. Also, in the answers, a significant number of students in the "undeclared" category were noticed who could not assess whether and in what way it is necessary to adapt the atmosphere in the classroom to a student who cannot access the learning process equally.

Adaptation of classes to the student who needs additional support	I disagree / I mostly disagree	Undeclared	I agree / I mostly agree
Claim: The tasks we get should be the same for everyone.	5.5%	14%	80.5%
Claim: A student who screams, throws, hits, disrupts the attention of the class.	10.2%	16.6%	73.2%

Claim: Peers cannot help him in class because of his developmental difficulties.	49.8%	33.2%	13.6%
Claim: He requires constant engagement, as a result of which others fall behind in adopting the material.	41.3%	35.7%	18.7%
Claim: Teachers pay equal attention to him and to other students.	26.4%	32.8%	40.8%

Table 9: Adaptation of classes to a student who needs additional support

Claims about gifted students caused different attitudes among students. A higher percentage of students (69.4%) estimate that the teachers have different attitudes towards different students when it comes to respect and that teachers are more inclined to students who adopt the material easily. Differentiation of classes in the form of giving more complex tasks to certain students was not recognized by 45.1% of students.

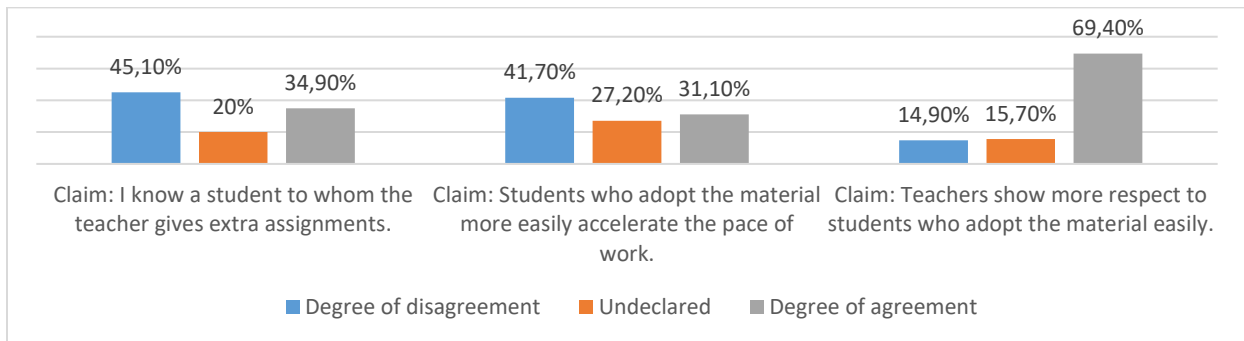


Chart 13. Attitude towards a talented student in class

The only open-ended question in both the student questionnaire and the teacher questionnaire required research participants to describe their observations of a student who needed additional support at school. We divided the observations of students into four categories, within which some students described a student, described the student's environment, or expressed an opinion on what needs to be done and in which direction to act. Although students recognized different types of obvious and hidden categories of those vulnerable and although frequent responses were formed in the direction of a positive attitude that such students should be given support, due to certain comments and descriptions of events, it is clear that when dealing with this kind of topic, the majority's attitude is not important, if we also have the minority facing the described opinion.

Categories	Sample answers	f
Relation with teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they should have support from teachers (5) - they have support from teachers (3) - they don't pay attention during class, teachers just make concessions for their grades (3) - teachers help them with the material, easier testing, evaluation (2) - they treat them the same as the others - some try, some not at all - they have no understanding 	19

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teachers only help 5.0 (straight As) students - teachers just focus on getting through the material - he is overly sensitive and has emotional reactions, which is why teachers sometimes belittle him 	
Behavioural characteristics /traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - shy, reserved (4) - functions normally with patience and will (3) - doesn't come to school often, looks like he's sick, gets bad grades (2) - the foreigner has a hard time following class, he only hangs out with friends of the same nationality (2) - when he has nothing to eat - problem child, swears, cheats - reacts badly to grades - has autism and the whole school loves him - he is different from others and it is often not easy for him - he doesn't have a dad - he isolated himself from the class, that means he needs help 	18
Peer relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students should provide support (6) - has student support (3) - I would help by talking about something he likes, e.g. football, basketball - to tell him when there is a test so he doesn't get the wrong day - peers focus only on themselves - has a health problem, he is ridiculed and imitated every day - a couple of students seem to have a problem and they are the ones who are made fun of the most - he should be told that not everything revolves around him 	14
Student in class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - he asks for something to be repeated several times during class, he cannot adopt the material at the same speed (3) - they need an assistant (2), normal children should not suffer - he should be given special tasks, a special plan (2) - they don't get additional attention in class - we have the same degree, and he uses the phone and gets solutions, he should go to a special school - he should go to a special school, I would help him, but that is not my responsibility - put the screaming child in a special class, the foreigner too, to learn the language, get the child with a problem to a psychologist 	11

Table 10: Observation on the functioning of a student who needs additional support

3.3. Social climate at school: perceptions and attitudes of teachers

The second part of the research sample on how inclusion is implemented in schools consisted of teachers. We were interested in how they perceive the school's social climate, given that the established relations in a school are a key determinant of the school's readiness to develop an environment of acceptance, appreciation and diversity. Although the inclusive community means the community of all who are directly or indirectly involved in school work, teachers expressed their attitude towards the direct participants in the practice of education: their colleagues, students and the students' parents.

We asked the teachers if they perceive their colleagues as a significant source of support when designing their work, and the results show a majorly positive attitude of teachers (85.7%). However, positive examples of work as initiators of changes in inclusive schools are recognized by twice as less teachers (41.10%), which represents a significant statistical difference in terms of perceiving the possibility of jointly constructing quality education.

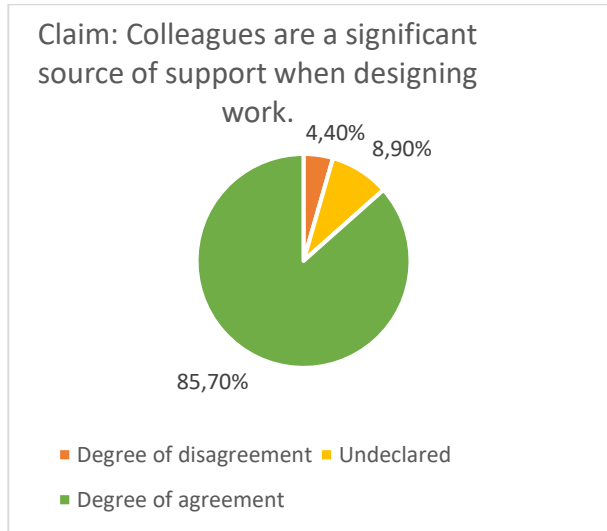


Chart 14. Support in designing work

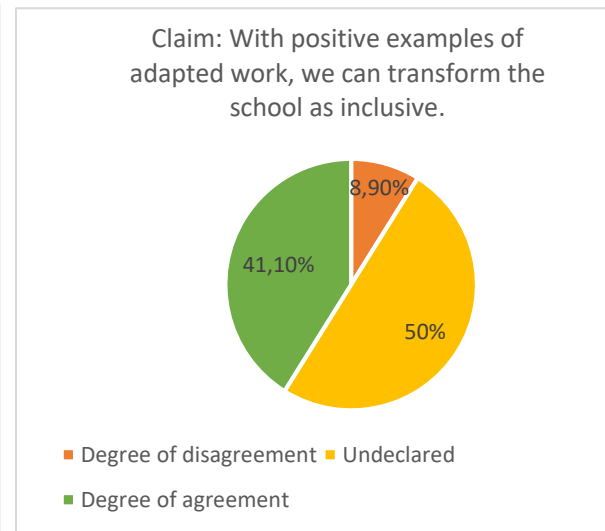


Chart 15. Positive examples of work

Claims about understanding the role of parents in school show that every other teacher does not recognize the partner role of parents in the educational development of students (51.8%), but that this role is divided into educational-parental and educational-scholastic. Also, if a student is assessed by an expert as needing an individual educational work plan, parents have the option to reject that assessment for their child, with which 71.4% of teachers disagree.

Claims of teachers about the role of parents in school	I disagree / I mostly disagree	Undeclared	I agree / I mostly agree
Claim: The role of the parent is to raise the child, and the role of the teacher is to educate him.	30.3%	17.9%	51.8%
Claim: The decision whether a child needs additional support should not rest with the parent.	8.9%	19.7%	71.4%

Table 11: Teacher's attitude towards the role of parents in school

We asked the teachers if they had experience in communicating with a person who needs additional support within the family or the classes where they teach. Out of 56 teachers, as many as 83.9% of teachers confirmed that they had such experience working in the classroom.

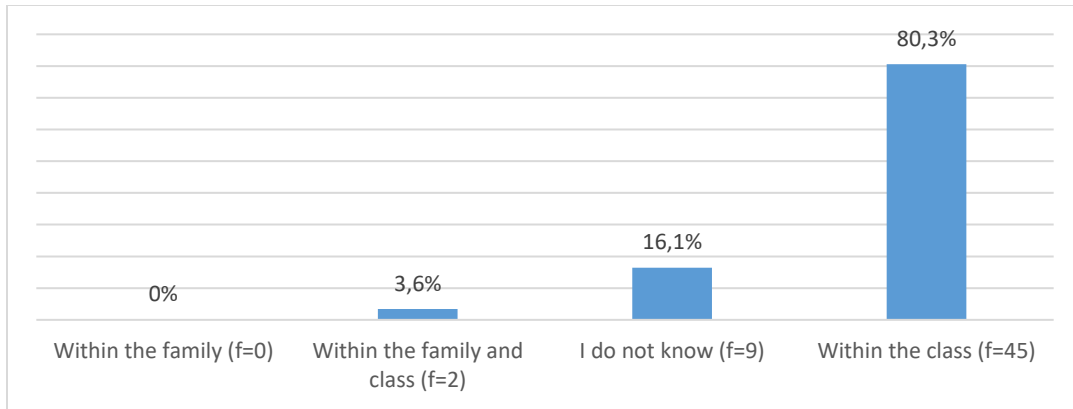


Chart 16. Context of knowing a person who needs additional support

A high percentage of responses indicates the presence of persons who need additional support in the school system, as well as the necessity of trainings for teachers for an inclusive approach to work. During the collection of data, a certain number of teachers did not show interest in participating in research dealing with this topic, although the obtained results indicate a high probability that they meet students who need additional support within the scope of their work in school. As with students, a certain number of teaching staff also did not recognize a student in need of additional support in their work (16.1%), while colleagues from the same school did. The results indicate that there is a need for additional work by experts in the direction of motivating teachers to recognize and work with students who need additional support.

The following statements were related to the assessment of the attitude of peers towards a student who needs additional support. We see that teachers recognized peers as the driving force in providing help and support to students more often, yet half of the teachers do not recognize inclusion as a solution to the problem of peer violence (58.9%). Let's recall that in the statements concerning relations with parents, teachers mostly declared that their role is to educate the student, however, in the statements concerning peer relations, we see a contradictory statement: as many as 83.9% of teachers believe that they have an influence on the regulation of peer relations at school, which also represents one of the most important educational roles that a teacher can fulfil at school.

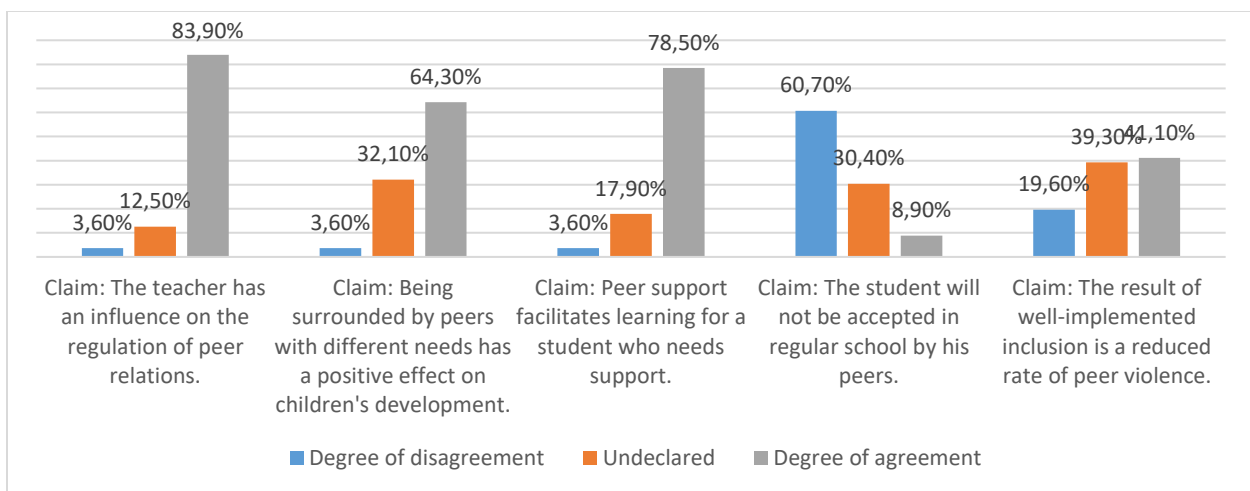


Chart 17. Attitude of peers towards a student who needs additional support

3.4. Adaptation of the school system to the student: perceptions and attitudes of teachers

The first claims within this category were related to the teachers' perception of the flexibility of the curriculum in the practice of their work. The majority of teachers estimate that the curriculum is extensive and that they would be able to professionally assess which information provided by the curriculum is not needed. Although there are slight discrepancies in the perception of the scope of the curriculum, as many as 76.8% of teachers believe that regardless of the offered curriculum, they have enough freedom to adapt it.

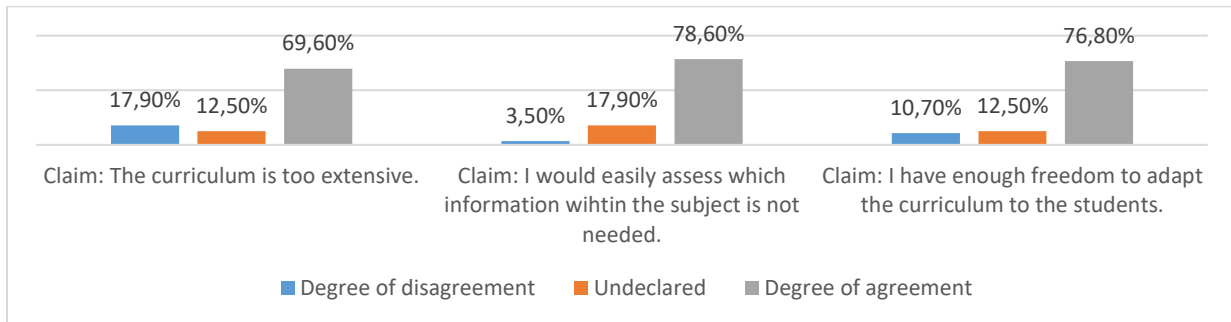


Chart 18. Attitude towards the curriculum

The following claims provide an insight into how well the class is adapted to all students, not just to students from vulnerable categories. Although students declared that they have time to write down information, but not to solve tasks, the majority of teachers estimate that students have enough time even for more active roles in class (69.6%).

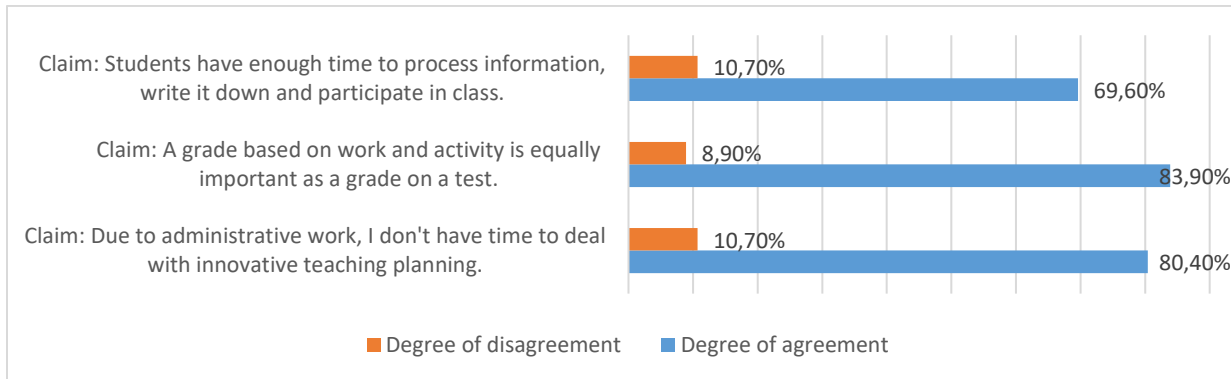


Chart 19. Adaptation of the class to all students within it

For 80.4% of teachers, administrative tasks represent a time barrier in planning innovative approaches in teaching. However, the assessment of the representation of different forms of work in class tells us otherwise. All forms of work are present in the teacher's work: individual work, pair work, group work; where group work on different tasks is the least represented.

Forms of work	Never	Rarely	Often	Very often
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Individual work on the same task	3.6%	8.9%	44.6%	42.9%
Individual work on different tasks	3.5%	10.7%	55.4%	30.4%
Pair work	3.6%	10.7%	66.1%	19.6%
Group work on the same task	3.5%	28.6%	55.4%	12.5%
Group work on different tasks	1.8%	46.4%	39.3%	12.5%

Table 12: Forms of work in a class

The claims regarding students who need additional support in teaching evidently show that the teachers who made up the sample of the research mostly do not recognize the positive aspects of the inclusion of the student who needs additional support in the regular class. Based on the results, we assume that they perceive the special work plan as useful for the teacher's work in class (75%), rather than useful for the development of students who need additional support.

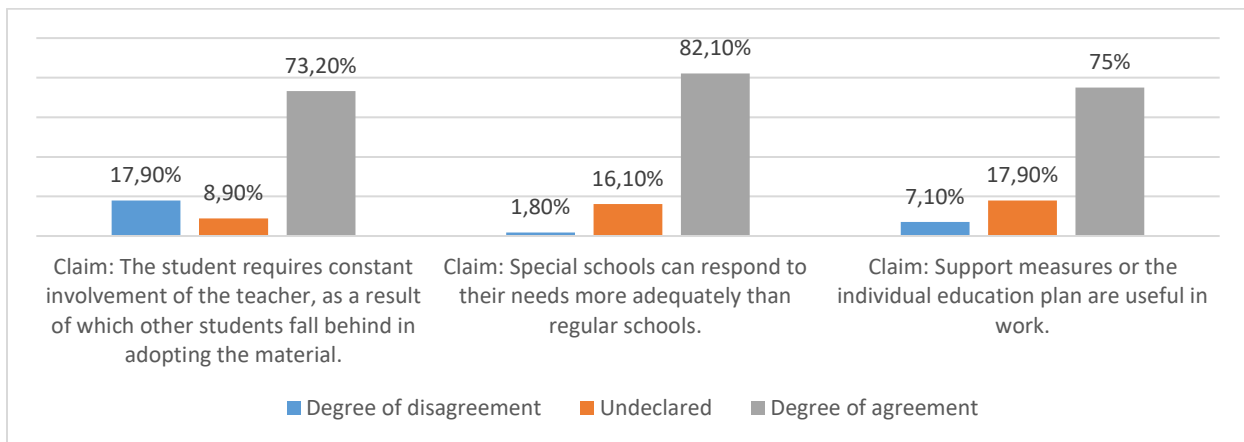


Chart 20. Adapting the class to a student who needs additional support

The potential insecurity of teachers in working with students who need additional support can also be seen on the basis of a high degree of agreement that teachers need the help of various associates and experts whose help they usually do not have in full: the help of a personal assistant, a specialist doctor, a special education teacher, school teams, experts from areas of education and upbringing. The teachers mostly agreed that they need the support of special education teachers and specialist doctors.

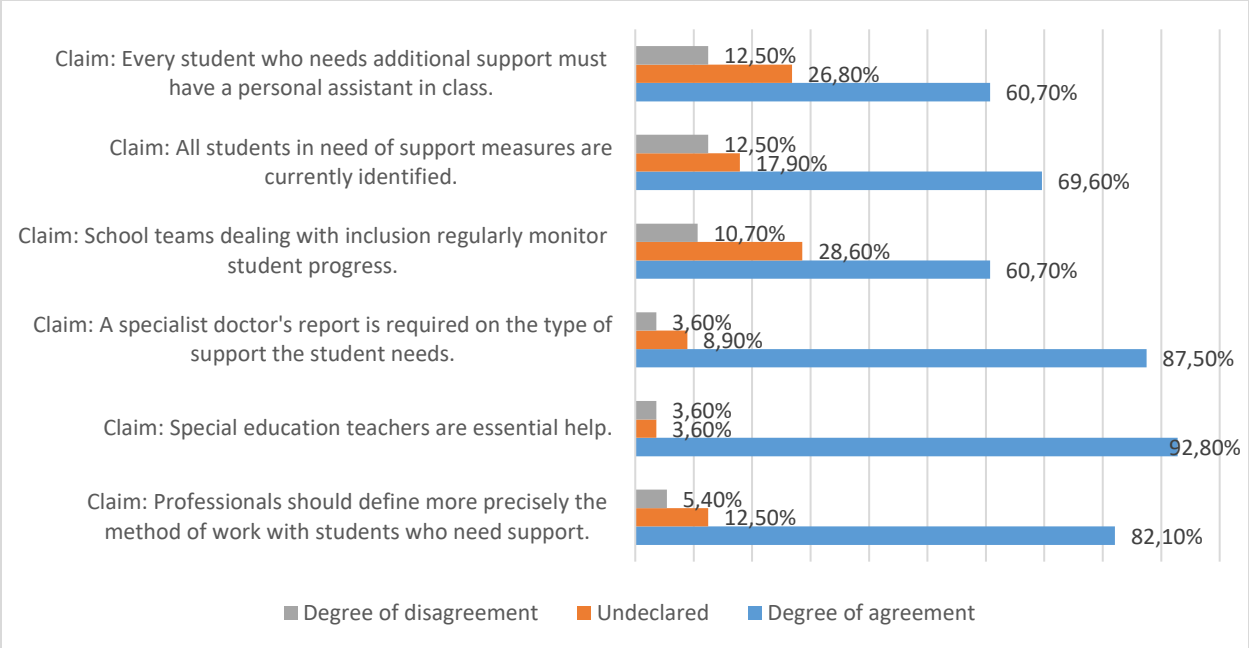


Chart 21. Support from experts and associates

The next segment consisted of claims related to working with gifted students. The results show greater inconsistency between teachers, thus greater openness to work with talented students compared to the entire category of students who need additional support. To a greater extent, teachers see classes in a regular school as an opportunity for the development of talented students (44.7%), but the opinion that segregation of such teaching into a separate class is good for their development is also minimally predominant (37.5%).

Talented students	I disagree / I mostly disagree	Undeclared	I agree / I mostly agree
Claim: Talented students should be grouped into one class.	33.9%	28.6%	37.5%
Claim: Talented students can realize their potential only through extracurricular activities.	44.7%	32.1%	23.2%
Claim: I have experience in adapting the work to a student who easily adopts the material.	26.8%	25%	48.2%
Claim: I am familiar with the procedure for forming an individual educational plan with an extended program.	17.9%	25%	57.1%

Table 13: Work with gifted students

At the end of the category of adaptation of the classes to the student, we asked the teachers whether they organize and whether they consider supplementary and additional classes useful. In tables 14 and 15, we see that the majority of teachers organize both forms of additional classes,

and that they consider them useful. Greater differences in the answers of teachers in relation to the type of school where they teach were not observed, except for the fact that secondary school teachers consider additional classes more useful than supplementary classes. One in five secondary school teachers declared that they organize supplementary classes at school, but that they do not consider them useful.

	Supplementary classes	Primary school	Secondary school
1.	They are organized and I find them useful	88.9%	69%
2.	They are organized, I don't find them useful	11.1%	20.7%
3.	They are not organized, I find them useful	0%	10,3%
4.	They are not organized, I don't find them useful	0%	0%

Table 14. Organization of supplementary classes by teachers

	Additional classes	Primary school	Secondary school
1.	They are organized and I find them useful	96.3%	86.2%
2.	They are organized, I don't find them useful	3.7%	10.3%
3.	They are not organized, I find them useful	0%	3,5%
4.	They are not organized, I don't find them useful	0%	0%

Table 15. Organization of additional classes by teachers

3.5. Competences of the teacher in adapting the work to the student: perceptions and attitudes of teachers

In order to talk about the successful implementation of an inclusive approach towards students within the school system, it is necessary to assess whether the direct creators of such an approach – the teachers – understand what inclusion means, and how they evaluate their own abilities and skills in developing inclusion in practice.

Tables 16 and 17 show the answers of teachers to the questions about what inclusion is and who are the students who need additional support. The vast majority of teachers believe that inclusion refers only to the integration of students into the existing system (92.8%), whereby students who need to be integrated are students with psychophysical disabilities (100% of teachers recognized this category). Talented students are again not noticed enough, as a result of which the teachers' opinions on whether they belong to the category or not are divided. It is surprising that only 6 teachers recognized a student of Roma nationality as a student who needs additional support.

Definition of inclusion	%	f
Support in the adjustment of students who need additional support to the school	58.9%	33
Inclusion of students who need additional support in regular schools	33.9%	19

Support in adapting all students to the school and the school curriculum	3.6%	2
Transforming the school and ensuring quality education for all	3.6%	2

Table 16. What inclusion is from the perspective of the teacher

Categories of vulnerable students	Yes	No
A student with psychophysical disabilities	100%	0%
A gifted student	41.1%	58.9%
Refugee student	19.6%	80.4%
Student of Roma nationality	10.7%	89.3%
A student who is always late for class	1.8%	98.2%

Table 17. Who are the students who need additional support from the perspective of the teacher

According to this research, 57.2% of teachers attended professional trainings that dealt with the topic of inclusion, most often organized by the school. Given that 80.3% of teachers have encountered a student who needs additional support in their work, we note that the coverage of those who dealt with this topic should be greater.

Professional training	Not once	Once	2 times or more
Organized by the school	42.8%	28.6%	28.6%
Self-funded	69.7%	23.2%	7.1%

Table 18. Frequency of attendance at professional development related to inclusion

Also, the teachers did not declare themselves or consider that they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills for inclusive work with students, and they would like to learn more about working with students who need additional support.

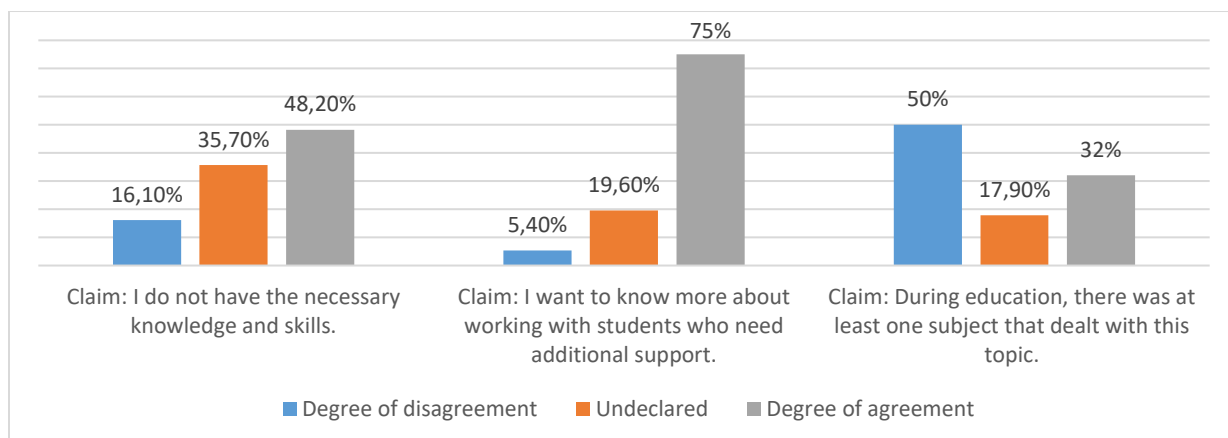


Chart 22. Assessment of own competencies for inclusive work

The only open-ended question required the teachers to describe what concrete changes are needed to ensure the quality of life and work of students who need additional support. We

divided the teacher's observations into six categories: changes in the form of inclusion of associates, systemic changes, program changes, additional educations, changes in the direction of peer relations, changes in the direction of connecting all actors and institutions. The most frequently observed needs are the need for a special education teacher, the need for a personal assistant for the student and the need to reduce the number of students in the class.

Categories	Sample answers	f
Inclusion of associates	- necessary assistant (15) - necessary special education teacher to work with them (15) - necessary expert in teacher guidance and content selection assistance (3)	33
Systemic changes	- reduce the number of students in the class (7) - reduce teacher administration (2) - enrol them in special departments/schools where special education teachers will work (2) - organize special groups for the gifted	11
Teacher competencies	- necessary teacher trainings (4) - necessary trainings for the identification of the gifted	5
Program changes	- write a better curriculum, reduce the volume of material (3) - write a curriculum for working with them	4
Cooperation of all actors	- cooperation of employees, children, institutions (3)	3
Peer relations	- work on the empathy of other children - they are not accepted by their peers	2

Table 19: Observation on the functioning of a student who needs additional support

3.6. Perceptions and attitudes of students and teachers towards the implementation of inclusion in schools – conclusions

Based on the results of the research, we conclude that students did not show a strikingly negative attitude towards students who need additional support in regular school. Students from vulnerable categories will be accepted, but not equally involved in achieving closer relations among peers. Considering that more than half of the students declared that they do not socialize with students who need additional support in the class, we assume that such a student exists and functions in a group in a marginalized way, without visible violence. From birth, a child develops a sense of belonging to certain groups and accepts the characteristics of that group, which can be potentially dangerous as at the same time it can make someone close up in front of things and persons that do not conform to the group characteristics¹⁷. If we look at students who need additional support as a minority within their peer group, we can assume that at the very

¹⁷ Šaljić, Z. (2023), *Inclusive Education: Ideal or Reality?* Belgrade: Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy

beginning of building relations, such students have a problem fitting into the rigid values of a group of similar individuals.

The students showed the lowest degree of tolerance in situations when the student, with his "difficulty", interferes in any way with the wishes and needs of the student or the group (staying in the room on an excursion, disrupting the class with his behaviour, unequal treatment by the teacher, etc.). Such students do not bother them physically, but their peers do not fully understand that they need additional support not only from the system, but also from themselves. The necessity of educating children in the direction of understanding that certain behaviours require additional support, through learning how these behaviours are manifested and how we can help them, is also seen on the basis of the comments of students such as: "He needs to be told that everything does not revolve around him", "We have the same degree, he should go to a special school." Greater presence of empathy was not recognized among students in the "I know a student who needs additional support" category compared to students in the "I don't know" category. At the same time, a lower readiness of the "I know" category of students to create better friendly relations with a student who needs additional support was observed, as well as a lower recognition of the importance of discussing the topic of inclusion through lectures and workshops at school.

Peer acceptance depends on the culture of acceptance of diversity of the entire school, above all on the culture of acceptance of students who need additional support from teachers. Teachers, as well as students, recognize the needs of students who need additional support partially: with the attitude that they do everything professionally possible in a system where inclusion in the classroom is not possible. By not recognizing their personal role or not knowing what inclusion is and how to act, with their behaviour, teachers can reject any possibility of developing inclusion, they can remain neutral, which equally leads to the absence of action, or they can unjustifiably show sensitivity towards a student who needs additional support, from which neither students from vulnerable categories, nor their peers really benefit. "If a teacher shows excessive sensitivity towards a child with developmental difficulties, "gives" him grades or takes his side when he is in conflict with his peers, regardless of whether he is right or wrong, it is possible that peers will form resistance towards the child which can lead to rejection, exclusion from group activities, and even aggression."¹⁸ The teacher's negative attitude towards inclusion is justified by the experience that the teacher does not have the conditions for individualizing work, that some students do not have the same capacity for learning, and that a special school can be the best solution in certain cases.¹⁹ Such an attitude can be reformed and changed (as well as among students) primarily through the training of teachers in the direction of assessing what inclusion is in the broader sense of its meaning, what its value is, what its possibilities are and what the role of teachers is in implementing inclusion in the practice of educational work. The need to define inclusion is confirmed by the results of the research, which show that teachers did not recognize what is meant by inclusion, as well as which categories of students suffer unequal treatment in schools.

Where to start with changes at the school level? A possible solution would be to develop a culture of joint learning and participation through strengthening the competences of teachers in designing, implementing and monitoring classes – not only for a specific child, but for all students

¹⁸ Hrnjica S. i sar. (2009). *A school tailored to the child2: a manual for the implementation of the inclusive model of transition from classroom teaching to subject teaching for students with developmental difficulties*, Belgrade: Save the Children UK, Program for Serbia.

¹⁹ Šaljić, Z. (2023), *Inclusive Education: Ideal or Reality?* Belgrade: Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy

towards whom they have the responsibility of creating optimal opportunities for their development. It would be desirable to define a quality program on pedagogical-didactic knowledge that future teachers from all teaching areas would be familiar with, in order to create a theoretical basis for understanding how to build a school adapted to the student, and not adapt the student to the school. Also, teachers should be provided with various types of professional development that will not end with a one-day presentation on the basic principles of work, but at the end of the training, teachers would be given concrete possibilities as to what the further steps would be in the implementation of the knowledge from the training. A significant role in the implementation and preservation of the quality of work would be played by the director of the institution, as someone who would monitor and direct the construction of further plans in relation to the obstacles that arise in practice, as well as colleagues with similar experiences, who would share advice and exchange opinions about the students they teach together.

If we look at the example from the answer of teachers that related to the representation of different forms of work, we will see that the majority of teachers estimate that they apply all forms of work in class. However, the artificial implementation of student-oriented teaching elements (for example, group work) will not give good results if we do not change the entire approach to the teaching process: how the lesson is planned, how active the students are during the group task, what levels of learning the task encourages, how the groups are formed, how the task is related to the previous experience of the students, how the completed task will be evaluated, what is the goal of the lesson, and similar.

However, only organizing professional training and changes at the school level are not enough to implement inclusion in school practice – teachers need help and support from other initiators of changes in educational work – primarily from its competent authorities.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS ISSUED TO THE COMPETENT AUTHORITIES IN RELATION TO THE SPECIAL REPORT OF THE PROTECTOR OF CITIZENS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FROM 2018: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Recommendations issued to the competent authorities in the report of the Protector of Citizens from 2018

Within the project "Monitoring the implementation of inclusive education in the Republic of Serbia", the Protector of Citizens sent requests to the competent state authorities for the submission of data at the end of 2023, i.e. at the beginning of 2024, in order to assess, on the basis of the collected information, the scope of the recommendations of the Protector of Citizens issued to the competent authorities in the Special Report of the Protector of Citizens on inclusive education from 2018.

In the Special Report of the Protector of Citizens on inclusive education from 2018, based on the results of the conducted research, the Protector of Citizens formulated recommendations for improving inclusive education in the Republic of Serbia. The recommendations were issued to the competent authorities for the purpose of undertaking activities and measures within the domain of their competences. One part of the recommendations related to the formation and provision of conditions for the smooth work of inter-ministerial commissions, as well as an up-to-date and timely handling of requests for providing additional support to students in education. The second group of recommendations included activities that competent authorities should undertake in order to provide additional support for children living in poverty, children of the Roma nationality, children living in remote areas and children pedestrians, talented children and children with developmental difficulties and disabilities in all local self-government units. Providing the service of a personal companion in all local self-government units, organizing trainings for personal companions, as well as the accessibility of facilities, were also included in this group of recommendations. Part of the recommendations from the 2018 report referred to the actions of the competent authorities to provide support to schools and employees in the implementation of inclusive education through the provision of continuous education and trainings.

4.2. Work of inter-ministerial commissions – a comparative review

The Ministry of Education states that the development of a system of additional support for children, students and adult participants implies inter-ministerial cooperation, which is most directly established by the Law on Fundamentals of the Education System from 2009, when the Institute of the Inter-Ministerial Commission (hereinafter, the IMC) was introduced. The IMC evaluates the needs of children, students and adults for additional educational, health and social support, i.e. within the framework of its Opinion, it combines the form of support that are needed

in order for children, students and adult participants to be included in education and life in the community.

a) Establishment of inter-ministerial commissions

In the report of the Protector of Citizens from 2018, almost all local self-government units declared that they have established IMCs (141 local self-government units). In the research conducted in 2023/2024, all local self-government units from which we received a response confirmed that they had formed and established a working IMC (109 of them, the municipality of **Bački Petrovac** did not answer questions regarding the work of the IMC). The establishment, work and financing of an IMC, was regulated by local self-government units by the Decision on the Creation of an Inter-Ministerial Commission, relying on the Law on Fundamentals of the Education System, as well as the Rulebook on additional educational, health and social support for children, students and adults. In the municipalities of **Ražanj** and **Malo Crniće**, in the survey conducted in 2018, the work of the IMC was suspended due to the lack of permanent members, but this problem was not observed in 2023/24.

In most cases, IMCs were formed for one local self-government unit, the exceptions being **Prokuplje**, **Žitorađa** and **Blace**, **Požarevac** and **Malo Crniće** and **Sremski Karlovci** and **Novi Sad**. The municipalities of **Prokuplje**, **Žitorađa** and **Blace** formed an inter-municipal commission whose work is financed from funds provided by the municipalities, with each municipality bearing the costs of the work of the commission for children from its territory who are referred for an assessment. The commission was formed on the basis of an agreement of three municipal administrations and its headquarters are in Prokuplje. According to the data from the earlier report of the Protector of Citizens, the municipality of **Kuršumlija** was also part of the mentioned inter-municipal commission as its fourth member, however, today the IMC of the municipality of Kuršumlija operates independently. **Požarevac** and **Malo Crniće** also co-finance a joint IMC that works in the space provided by the city of **Požarevac**. The IMC service for **Sremski Karlovci** is provided by the **Novi Sad** City Administration for Children and Social Protection, i.e. by the IMC which is formed within the City Administration. Based on the Decision, the city of **Novi Sad** appointed four IMCs, in order to successfully carry out an examination and assessment of a large number of children and students who are referred to IMCs every year. Also, the Decision stipulates that the Commission can perform tasks for other municipalities as well, based on the concluded agreement between the City Administration for Social and Child Protection and other municipal administrations. 17 IMCs were formed in **Belgrade**, one for the territory of each city municipality. Since 2013, their financing has been taken over by the city (until then they were financed by city municipalities).

The local self-government units declared that the functionality of work of the IMCs was ensured on the basis of the adopted Decisions on the establishment of the IMC, and by providing all conditions for the organization and functioning of the work (providing space, financial compensation, forming the commission, appointing a coordinator, etc.). As for the work space, 76 IMCs meet in the offices of the municipal or city administrations, of which 14 declared that the space suits their needs. The city municipality of **Obrenovac** and the city of **Kikinda** declared that the space was not adequately adapted to the needs of work. In addition to administrative offices, a smaller number of IMCs additionally use the premises of the centre for social work and preschool institutions, and go on field visits.

Municipalities of **Beočin**, **Svilajinac** and **Novi Kneževac** declared that they have special offices for the work of the IMC. Of the premises used for the work of the IMC, the local self-government units also mentioned a healthcare centre (eight), a centre for social work (two, of which the municipality of **Aleksandrovac** declared that the space did not meet the needs of the work), a resource centre (**Kragujevac**), an organization for helping mentally underdeveloped persons (**Kula**, **Trstenik**), premises of a day care facility for children and youth with developmental difficulties within the "Stanko Paunović" Home (**Negotin**), and a cultural centre (**Vranje**).

The municipality of **Mionica** does not have a specific office for work, but the commission meets in one of the free rooms at the necessary time. The municipality of **Nova Varoš** and the city of **Zaječar** have an office within the municipality, but they go out into the field during an assessment. The municipalities of **Veliko Gradište**, **Paraćin**, **Lapovo**, **Novi Bečej** and **Čoka** do not have an office but visit the local environment of a student for whom an assessment is requested.

A significant number of local self-government units report that they have allocated funds for the work of the IMC, which was not the case when conducting research by the Protector of Citizens in 2018. The range of the planned funds is varied, and the minimum amounts are 1,300.00 dinars (**Niš**), 13,155.00 dinars (**Mali Zvornik**), 30,000.00 dinars (**Gadžin Han**), 50,000.00 dinars (**Blace**), 69,500.00 dinars (**Ražanj**), while the maximum amounts are 3,500,000.00 dinars (**Kruševac**), 3,984,105.00 dinars (**Sombor**), 5,588,000.00 dinars (**Pećinci**), 11,783,068.00 dinars (**Novi Sad**). For 2023, the municipality of **Ub** allocated funds in the amount of 29,710,000.00 dinars, and 235,648.00 dinars were spent. In a certain number of local self-government units, funds for the work of the IMC were increased for 2023 compared to 2022 (44), while in some local self-government units, funds for 2023 were reduced (13). Some local self-government units have not clearly allocated funds for the work of the IMC, but the funds are allocated from different budget positions, mainly from the municipal budget or the position of services (**Bela Crkva**, **Negotin**, **Priboj**, **Golubac**, **Koceljeva**, **Kuršumljija**, **Novi Bečej**, **Novi Pazar**, **Opovo**, **Prijepolje**, **Raška**, **Šabac**, **Vranje**, **Vrnjačka banja**, **Žagubica**).

The method of determining the amount of compensation paid to the persons and the compensation amounts are very different. Fixed compensation amounts range from a minimum of 500.00 dinars (**Vranje**, **Koceljeva**, **Niš**) to a maximum of 5,000.00 dinars (**Ub**) "per child/opinion", i.e. from 800.00 dinars (**Bač**) to 6,000.00 dinars (**Vladimirci**) "per session". The municipality of **Bujanovac** announced that the "compensation for the work of IMC members and IMC coordinators is 1,000.00 dinars per child, which, you will agree, is a symbolic amount of money", while the municipalities of **Despotovac** and **Stara Pazova** report that payments are not regular and are late. Compared to the report from 2018, no significant differences were observed. Some local self-government units determined the amount of compensation as a percentage, in relation to the average salary in the Republic of Serbia (**Bosilegrad**, **Kruševac**, **Lajkovac**, **Nova Varoš**, **Opovo**, **Titel**, **Trstenik**, **Veliko Gradište**, **Vrnjačka Banja**), and the municipality of **Beočin** defined the compensation in the amount that is determined according to a daily wage, i.e. its non-taxable part. The compensation can also be determined as a monthly amount (**Jagodina**, **Kikinda**, **Novi Bečej**, **Piroć**, **Svilajinac**). The amount of the compensation differs in some local self-government units depending on whether it is a consideration of a new request or a review/revision of an already given opinion, so the fee is reduced when it is a review procedure (**Bačka Palanka**, **Ćićevac**, **Kanjiza**).

The city of **Leskovac** and the municipality of **Velika Plana** reported that they have secured compensation for the work of regular members and their deputies. Most local self-government units only finance the work of permanent members of the IMC, while in 16 local self-government units, the work of the president of the IMC is valued more than the work of the remaining two permanent members, and the compensation for the president of the IMC is increased by 12.5 to 100% compared to the compensation of members of the IMC. Only 20 local self-government units pay the compensation for the work of the coordinators, mostly in the same amount as for the members of the IMC. The municipality of **Lapovo** stated that according to the adopted Decision, the coordinator is to be paid an amount of 2,000.00 dinars for his work, but that this is not carried out in practice, while the municipality of **Lučani** and the city of **Prokuplje** pay coordinators for the overtime work. Where they are paid (21), temporary members of the IMC receive less or the same remuneration as permanent members of the IMC. In the report of the Protector of Citizens from 2018, it was stated that three municipalities did not pay the members of the IMC, while according to the research conducted in 2023/24, all local self-government units provided compensation for the work of the members of the IMC.

In relation to the report of the Protector of Citizens from 2018, local self-government units took measures regarding the formation and facilitation of the work of the IMC. Assessments are still, in the majority of cases, carried out in non-adapted spaces within the municipal offices after the working hours of the municipality, when the offices are free for work. Local self-government units mostly provided funds for the work of the IMC, as well as remuneration for the work of its members, but the financing of the work of the members is still not uniform, and there are significant differences in the payment of persons with identical duties. Compensation for the work of permanent members is most often provided. While, on the one hand, certain local self-government units have provided compensation for the work of coordinators, others refer to the legal regulations according to which they do not have the possibility to pay for the work of coordinators within the IMC.

b) Handling of requests by the IMC

In a large number of cases, local self-government units declared that it was not necessary to take concrete measures to ensure timely, effective work and fulfil legally prescribed deadlines due to the good organization of the IMC, the existence of a coordinator, the definition of work through the Rulebooks on work and good communication and cooperation with other institutions such as the centre for social work, a preschool institution, a primary school (88). A certain number of local self-government units (11) stated that they have provided all the necessary conditions for the smooth work of IMC members (transportation, space, equipment, finances). **Aleksinac** conducts various types of research and monitors research reports, **Novi Sad** increased the number of commissions to four, **Niš** made it possible for the permanent members of the commission to have deputies from the same structures which members are from. **Kanjiza** takes additional measures if the specified contact phone is faulty and visits the addresses of the families in order to obtain information based on a submitted request. **Zaječar** mentioned the largest number of implemented measures, including: organization of workshops and webinars, organization of the training "Improving the capacities of inter-ministerial commissions in the implementation of the procedure for assessing the needs for additional support for children, students and adults" within the project of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, in cooperation with UNICEF, establishment of a team for early interventions, within the development counselling centre in Zaječar, as part of the "Dad, Mom, we are with you" campaign, organization

of meetings with the director of a primary and secondary school director in order to agree on the implementation of special education support for beneficiaries.

As the main causes of untimely and inefficient work of the IMC, the local self-government units mention the following: non-response, delay or absence of parents (13 local self-government units: Despotovac, Lazarevac, Obrenovac, Stari grad, Kanjiža, Kladovo, Knjaževac, Kragujevac, Kruševac, Pećinci Sombor, Topola, Trstenik), submission of incomplete documentation or waiting for it (10 local self-government units: Irig, Kikinda, Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Kruševac, Kučevo, Stara Pazova, Niš, Topola, Trstenik), coordination of the work of members (nine local self-government units: Čičevac, Jagodina, Knjaževac, Kosjerić, Kovin, Kragujevac, Priboj, Rača, Užice), a large volume of requests (eight local government units: Aleksandrovac, Vrnjačka Banja, Kanjiža, Kikinda, Kragujevac, Leskovac, Majdanpek, Smederevska Palanka), absence of members due to illness or vacation (seven local self-government units: Bečej, Vrnjačka Banja, Stari grad, Lajkovac, Pećinci, Srbobran, Trstenik), lack of a commission member (two local self-government units: Bela crkva, Čičevac), delay in the payment of compensation for work (Despotovac), deprived and inaccessible family environments (Pirot). Sixty-six local self-government units declared that they had no problems with inefficient and untimely fulfilment of requests.

The city of **Zaječar** states that the need for a personal companion service is greater than the existing possibilities (two personal companions), as well as that the "Oblutak" daycare facility for children and youth with disabilities is the only one of its kind in the city. "We believe that we should consider the possibilities for expanding the capacity numerically and differentiating the activities by age (beneficiaries are between the ages of 5 and 35, with different needs, opportunities and interests)". **Raška** states that "insufficient knowledge of the competences of institutions and organizations that implement measures of inclusive education occurs due to insufficiently elaborated operational procedures and practices that give the opportunity for different application and interpretation." It is necessary to strengthen the mechanisms at the level of the institution, that is, only when all support measures within the education system are exhausted, the request for additional support should be initiated. It is also necessary to strengthen the role of parents on the importance of providing support measures for the child and student. It is necessary to establish a mechanism at the level of the Ministry of Education to support the work of the IMC, as well as to engage resources again within the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, in order to support local self-governments, with the aim of exchanging practices in the work of the IMC".

Although the majority of local self-government units declared that good work organization enables the smooth operation of the IMC, according to the answers regarding the causes of inefficient work, we notice that pauses in work are still present and that the reasons for untimely work are identical to those from six years ago. A small number of local self-government units give an answer to the question of what measures are taken to ensure the removal of the identified causes, while it is not emphasized that the measures are regulated by a specific document, but are used based on practical actions in the direction of solving current problem situations.

4.3. Additional support services – a comparative overview

a) Support measures for children living in poverty

The results of the research by the Protector of Citizens from 2018 showed that a small number of local self-government units (14) took measures to provide children with recreational,

extracurricular, sports and cultural activities (workshops, sections, activities, trips, excursions). Processed data obtained in 2023/24 shows a threefold higher number – 45 local self-government units declared that they provide this type of service to children living in poverty. At the same time, this service turned out to be the most represented among the responses of local self-government units. The next three services in terms of their representation at the municipal level are the free or subsidized transport (12), where the municipality of **Majdanpek** has provided children with free transport to the doctor, financial aid including scholarships (12), free school textbooks and accessories (13). Free stay in a preschool institution was made possible by six local self-government units, and free extended stay in the school by the municipalities of **Kocaljeva** and **Ruma** (in 2018, this service was provided by four local self-government units). Free meals were provided by 10 local self-government units.

As for support in education, the municipalities of **Srbobran** and **Svilajinac** provide assistance in learning, the municipality of **Šid** highlights the organization of individual educational plans and supplementary classes, while **Kragujevac** provides support to young people in finding a job. Financial support in the form of payments for accommodation of students is provided by **Majdanpek** and **Pirot**. Assistance in the form of procurement of clothes was indicated only by the municipality of **Ruma**.

Services intended for children living in poverty are still insufficiently developed (increased representation of the service was observed only in relation to extracurricular activities). In particular, there is a lack of activities aimed at supporting students in learning and integrating with their peers, while financial support services through organized transportation, awards, scholarships, meals, school textbooks and free school supplies are more present.

b) Support measures for children of Roma nationality

The Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality reports that its budget finances the work of the Roma Inclusion Office, an institution founded in 2006 by the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, with the aim of improving the position of the Roma in the area of education, employment, housing, human and other rights, as well as creating conditions for the inclusion of Roma in all spheres of social, public and political life in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. With the Financial Plan and the Work Program of the Roma Inclusion Office, approved by the Provincial Government, program activities are financed which are aimed, among other things, at supporting education through affirmative measures:

1. **Scholarships for male and female students of the Roma national minority** who are enrolled in basic vocational studies at the Vocational Educational and Medical School in Vršac, who attend classes in the Romani language, as well as for graduate students who enrol in master's vocational studies at this higher education institution.
2. **Awarding of one-time financial assistance to students of Roma nationality**, who were enrolled in higher education institutions founded by the AP of Vojvodina through the application of affirmative measures, and are enrolled in the first year of studies.

In order to enrol as many members of the Roma national minority as possible in secondary and higher schools, at the beginning of each year, the Roma Inclusion Office hires one person:

1. which carries out the tasks of organizing a campaign on affirmative action measures for the enrolment of students belonging to the Roma national minority in secondary and higher education schools,

2. informs potential candidates about affirmative action measures.

The Secretariat further reports that every year it transfers financial resources to the National Council of the Roma National Minority for permanent expenses and regular activities (which include financing or co-financing of programs and projects in the area of education, culture, information and official use of the language and script of the national minority, as well as financing of the work of institutions, foundations and companies whose founder or co-founder is the national council or whose founding rights have been partially or fully transferred to the national council). In the previous year, the National Council of the Roma National Minority received from the Secretariat a total amount of 4,395,383.00 dinars. In addition to the above, financial resources are transferred every year to the citizen associations of members of the Roma national community which deal with the advancement of the rights of the Roma national minority, in order to develop the position of members of the Roma community in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. In this sense, associations of the Roma were awarded an amount of 3,350,000.00 dinars within the framework of the Public Call for co-financing programs and projects aimed at improving the rights of national minorities – national communities in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in 2023.

When we summarize the results of actions at the municipal level, as well as in the case of providing extracurricular activities for children from poor areas, progress is also visible in this area and the number of local self-government units that provide services for the Roma children has increased. A total of 81 local self-government units specified that they had established specific services for children of the Roma nationality (in 2018, this was the practice in 47 of them), either through the implementation of local action plans for the improvement of the position of the Roma, or independently of the existence of this strategic document.

Measures intended for children of the Roma nationality are similar to those provided by local self-government units for children living in poverty. The involvement of employees who will primarily deal with the position of Roma children in the place where they live is most often ensured: hiring a Roma coordinator, a Roma pedagogical assistant, a team for improving the position of the Roma and resolving issues of the Roma (49). Only 14 local self-government units declared that they had a health mediator, while the municipality of **Raška**, "in 2020, based on the recommendation of the Protector of Citizens, sent a letter to the Ministry of Health to launch an initiative to hire a health mediator, and the answer was negative." The next most frequently represented services are free or regressive transportation (17), educational workshops for students and parents (16), pedagogical assistant service (16), financial assistance and/or scholarships (14), free food (13), free stay in a preschool institution (13, of which 4 municipalities have this possibility for every third child), free school supplies (11), involvement in free extracurricular activities (10), additional assistance with learning (eight).

Some municipalities reported in more detail on the steps taken in the direction of providing services to children of the Roma nationality. Workshops on early marriage and early dropping out of education are organized with girls in schools in the municipalities of **Bački Petrovac**, **Bujanovac**, **Kovin**, **Krupanj**, **Kruševac**, **Mionica** and the city of **Vršac**. In eight schools in **Novi Sad**, teams were formed and action plans were drawn up for the prevention of dropout of students. As a continuation of this project, the project *Novi Sad for the equality of boys and girls of the Roma nationality* was implemented through the program EU support for Roma inclusion – empowering local communities for Roma inclusion. In **Vršac** and **Subotica**, intercultural days and commemoration of the International Day of the Roma and the Roma language are organized.

Mionica reports that the "Neven" preschool institution launched a unique project called "To get Nanomir moving and going to kindergarten", aimed at children from the largest Roma settlement. As part of the project, a "mobile kindergarten" was organized – the teachers organized kindergarten workshops in the centre of the village where young children gathered, in order to be informed about the work of the kindergarten and shown the advantages of children staying in this institution. **Pirot** founded the Roma Cultural Centre, while **Novi Pazar** launched a housing project for the Roma families. The municipality of **Rača** helps the majority of families to maintain humane conditions, to introduce electricity and water, so that children would have the basic living conditions "as this is one of the main reasons why most children of the Roma nationality will not attend classes every day".

According to the data of the Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality, the school subject Romani language with elements of national culture is taught in 28 primary schools, spread over the territory of 16 local self-governments (Ada, Alibunar, Bač, Bačka Palanka, Bečej, Vršac, Žabalj, Zrenjanin, Kikinda, Kovačica, Kovin, Novi Sad, Odžaci, Sombor, Sremska Mitrovica and Stara Pazova). However, in the research of the Protector of Citizens from 2023/24, only four local self-government units mentioned that they had introduced the Romani language subject in schools (**Bački Petrovac, Vršac, Vranje, Novi Sad**) as part of their activities.

The methods of monitoring services for children of the Roma nationality differ greatly: 50 local self-government units do not monitor the effects of services, of which 14 did not respond, 12 declared that there is no need, because they are an integral and non-exclusive part of the community, 11 that they do not have a developed service, seven stated that they do not monitor the effects, six that they do not have Roma in the community. Most local self-government units monitor the implementation of the service through reports or communication with institutions and associations that directly or indirectly deal with the issue of the position of the Roma (schools, preschool institutions, municipalities, the Roma coordinator, centre for social work, parents, IMC). Services intended for children of Roma nationality are more present than all other services intended for different categories of students: not only through the offer of a specific service, but also through the formation of teams of experts who specifically deal with this issue, the establishment and involvement in various projects, the organization of thematic activities and events, and similar. Still, a surprising fact is that the aforementioned services are not monitored and evaluated in almost half of the local self-government units. Absence of monitoring of the effects of services gives the impression that the service is "offered" to the beneficiaries, but that it is not analysed whether it is used purposefully, by assessing the quality of the service.

Local self-government units monitor the implementation of measures for the enrolment of children of the Roma nationality, as well as other vulnerable social categories, in preschool institutions in the following ways: preschool institutions are most often the ones that submit reports to municipalities (47), or different institutions that deal with this issue are involved in the enrolment monitoring process (health centre, centre for social work, IMC, municipality, court, registry offices). Although the responses mostly related to the connection of relevant institutions without giving more specific answers, only 15 local self-government units declared that they do not directly monitor the implementation of enrolment measures.

In order to prevent the unjustified enrolment of Roma children in schools and departments for the education of children with developmental difficulties and disabilities, a large number of local self-government units (15) state that the IMC does everything it can to prevent this from happening, by recommending services provided by local self-government units in practice. At

the same time, **Čačak** and **Kruševac** stated that the final decision on enrolment in a regular school rests with the parents of students. The preschool institution in **Subotica** does not have an adequate volume of spatial capacity to meet the needs of enrolling children at an early age, "since there is no legal obligation to place preschool children in an institution, and preschool institutions, in parts of the city where there is a greater concentration of the Roma population, do not have facilities that could accommodate all children, there is no immediate agitation for the enrolment of Roma children". Support measures for the inclusion of Roma children in regular schools, such as: free preparatory preschool programs (14), affirmative measures for enrolment in secondary schools (two), prescribed priority enrolment (0), diversification of the program offer of preschool institutions (0) and similar, are almost completely absent in the responses of local self-government units.

Through the Competition for financing and co-financing of programs and projects in the area of education in 2023, the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities stated that 1,120,000.00 dinars have been allocated for programs and projects that support inclusive education and for the prevention of early dropping out of formal education, which are implemented by 18 educational institutions on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

c) Support measures for children living in remote areas and children pedestrians

The Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities stated that every year, through a competition, it allocates funds for regressing the transportation of secondary school students in the AP of Vojvodina in intercity traffic, who travel daily from their place of residence to school and back. The criteria for the distribution of funds are the development of the local self-government, the number and length of travel routes, and the cost of transportation. Thus, in 2023, 151,000,000.00 dinars were distributed to 44 local self-governments on the territory of the AP of Vojvodina, which certainly ensures the availability of secondary education, as well as all curricular and extracurricular activities.

Speaking about children living in remote areas and child pedestrians from the perspective of the work of municipalities, 42 local self-government units declared that free transportation is provided for all children, including them. The justification for the absence of a specific service is that the local self-government unit is small and that there is no need for such a service, or that a regular line transportation service is provided that covers the territory of the local self-government unit in its entirety. At the same time, free transportation usually applies to children of preschool age whose place of residence is more than two kilometres away from the preschool institution and to primary school students who live at a distance of more than four kilometres from the school. According to the report of the Protector of Citizens from 2018, most local self-government units provided the service through full or partial reimbursement of transportation costs, while in 2023/24, only 13 local self-government units opted for this method (**Pirot, Kanjiža, Priboj, Rača, Aleksandrovac, Arilje, Blace, Čajetina, Kosjerić, Mali Iđoš, Srbobran, Trstenik, Vrnjačka Banja, Majdanpek**), whereby **Vrnjačka Banja** refunds the costs of transportation to the parents who use their own vehicles to go to and return from school. Providing special transportation is more common than providing reimbursement of costs, and transportation is not only organized for children pedestrians, but also for children of the Roma nationality, children who need additional support, children whose school is outside the municipal borders, children whose school is at a defined distance from home (mostly over two or four kilometres). Transportation is organized using minibuses (**Jagodina**), buses (**Koceljeva, Vladičin Han**), taxis

(for example **Lučani, Negotin, Raška**), school buses (**Mionica, Nova Varoš, Rača**), vans (**Niš, Senta**). We see that within the period of six years, the system of regulating transportation for child pedestrians has developed to a greater extent and that such a method is more common than paying the monthly/annual transportation costs to the parents of the children. For secondary school students, certain local self-government units have defined which students have the right to free transportation according to the percentage and distance they travel, so the municipality of **Aleksinac** regresses 50% of the price of the monthly ticket, **Topola** regresses 50% for students attending secondary schools in neighbouring municipalities, **Pirot** regresses 50% for students who are more than 4 kilometres away from the secondary school, **Lajkovac** pays for transportation of students whose secondary school is up to 30 kilometres away, while the municipality of **Kula** provides free transportation for all secondary school students. The Municipality of **Bosilegrad** has established satellite classrooms in areas where students live far from the school, which is why the municipality has provided transportation for the staff working in those classrooms. The municipalities of **Kanjiža** and **Plandište** and the cities of **Kragujevac, Novi Sad** and **Sombor** have opted for the free transportation of personal companions.

Specially organized transportation (not regularly scheduled) for extracurricular activities was provided by much fewer local self-government units (43). Transportation is organized using minibuses (**Aleksandrovac, Čičevac, Knić, Mionica, Novi Pazar, Plandište, Ruma, Žitorađa**), school transportation (**Bela crkva, Blace, Kučevo**), buses (**Srbobran**) or van transportation (**Kosjerić, Pećinci, Nova Varoš**).

d) Support measures for gifted children

Based on the report of the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities, for the second year in a row, the Competition is announced for financing and co-financing of projects in the area of raising the quality of the educational process within primary and secondary education – the costs of the training of *talented primary and secondary school students* from the territory of AP of Vojvodina and the engagement of professional associates in *Andrevlje*, with the aim of realizing the planned activities in the sphere of natural and social sciences, art and culture, which are held throughout the school year at the Centre for Economic and Technological Development "Andrevlje" in *Andrevlje*. The main goal of the project is to support talented children and to strengthen their self-confidence in terms of the knowledge and skills they possess. In the previous year, 2023, through the above-mentioned Competition, about 10,000,000.00 dinars were distributed for the training of 360 talented students from 36 secondary schools and about 5,000,000.00 dinars for the training of 180 talented students from 18 primary schools.

Developed services for talented children in local self-government units are most often established in the form of monetary awards (43) or material awards in the form of gifts (15), as well as in the form of financing costs for participation in competitions (10). Although the form of support, as in 2018, is most often financial, in the last report from 2018, very few local self-government units reported on an individual educational plan with an expanded and enriched program as a measure of support or on other measures of direct and continuous support, aimed at development of the students' potential, and measures aimed at developing the knowledge of educators who work with gifted children. The results of this research show that 15 local self-government units have established the service of organizing an individual educational plan with an expanded and enriched program for students, additional classes, activities, workshops, forums. The municipalities of **Titel, Vrnjačka Banja** and **Sremski Karlovci** organize free

transportation for students attending special programs or additional education outside the municipality. **Temerin, Vladimirovci, Žitište, Žitorađa** and **Zrenjanin** provide professional training and education for students, while 14 local self-government units ensure the stay of talented children in special centres or specialized camps.

Another way of providing services is the additional education of professional staff to work with talented children, which unfortunately was provided by only two local self-government units (**Čajetina, Sombor**). Five local self-government units also supported talented children by equipping the school in accordance with innovative approaches to learning (**Čajetina, Knić, Veliko Gradište, Vrnjačka Banja**), and in connection with this, "the Vrnjačka Banja Grammar School received the Makers Lab in 2023 – the classroom of the future, a multidisciplinary space that provides opportunities for students and teachers to explore, create and connect with the local and wider community together".

A common problem in the practice of working with talented students is not only adapting the curriculum and lessons to their abilities and aspirations, but also recognizing talented students within the class. The Ministry of Education states that for the aforementioned reason, at the beginning of the 2023/2024 school year, it also prepared and delivered to schools the Expert instruction for the recognition, support and monitoring of the education of students with exceptional, that is, special abilities. The Expert instruction includes ways of demonstrating exceptional abilities, principles and procedures for recognizing and identifying students with exceptional abilities, as well as various forms of providing support and monitoring the effects of recognizing and supporting students with exceptional abilities.

e) Support measures for children with developmental difficulties and disabilities

On the basis of the statement of the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities, within the Competition for financing and co-financing of programs and projects for raising the quality of primary and secondary education – promoting and improving the safety of students in primary and secondary schools in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in 2023, 120,000.00 dinars was allocated to the school for primary and secondary education of students with developmental difficulties and disabilities, for the participation of students in an inclusive sports league, which, in addition to the safety of students, encourages the development of tolerance and respect for diversity. Through the competition in 2023, the Secretariat allocated about 2,400,000.00 dinars for equipping four schools for primary and secondary education of students with developmental difficulties and disabilities. Funds were earmarked for school furniture and teaching aids for theoretical and practical teaching (computers and other teaching aids).

The Ministry of Sports states that the Law on Sports²⁰ recognizes the Paralympic Committee of Serbia as a national umbrella organization for sports of persons with disabilities, which in the period from 2018 to today implemented two international projects that dealt with the inclusion of children and youth. In the first project, camps for children with disabilities were organized with the aim of including children and youth with disabilities in sports activities, specifically children who normally do not have regularly organized sports activities. In the second project, children from a total of thirteen countries participated in sports activities together.

²⁰ "Official Gazette of RS", number 10/16.

As for municipalities, the service of a personal companion is provided in 93 local self-government units and it is the most represented service, the same as during the 2018 survey. A total of 29 local self-government units pointed out that they do not have more specific services than those prescribed by the opinion of the IMC and that thanks to the work of the IMC, different ways to ensure the smooth functioning of the child in a regular school are designed. In addition to a personal companion, to a greater extent, local self-government units also recognized advisory work with parents, employees and students (15), the hiring of special education teachers, psychologists, assistants and related experts (12), creation of individual educational plans and working according to them (10), provision of free transportation (10), good cooperation between relevant institutions (six), adaptation of school space (five), free stay in a preschool institution or school (four), provision of assistive technology (three). Given that the report of the Protector of Citizens from 2018 listed a significantly larger number of services provided by local self-government units, we assume that in this questionnaire, local self-government units did not include or recognize all the services they offer in practice. Thus, the services of a personal companion, within the question related to services for children with disabilities, were recognized in only 29 local self-government units, but in the questions related to the service of a personal companion, we see that the service was established by 92 of them. Although the services differ statistically, the relation between the services, the representation the most characteristic ones, as well as the types of services, are identical to those six years ago.

The municipalities of **Batočina** and **Stara Pazova** have made it possible to reimburse costs for various health treatments outside the municipality based on the opinion of the IMC, while **Kruševac**, **Prijepolje**, **Sopot** and **Užice** state that it is the parents who get to make the final decision whether to enrol their children in the regular education system or not.

The municipalities of **Blace**, **Bujanovac**, **Krupanj**, **Temerin**, **Velika Plana** and **Žitište** state that all students with disabilities go to regular schools and are integrated with their peers, in the municipality of Plandište, six students go to a special class, in **Kosjerić** two students, and one student each in **Trstenik** and **Majdanpek**, while in **Rača** "only a couple of students" go to the special class. 12 local self-government units did not respond to the question, and five of them declared that they had not established specific support measures for children with developmental difficulties and disabilities.

f) Accessibility of facilities

Local self-government units ensured accessibility to the greatest extent by installing ramps (46), and some ensured the installation of handrails (**Beočin**, **Vranje**, **Knić**, **Osečina**, **Pirot**, **Čajetina**, **Kikinda**), access paths (**Beočin**, **Vranje**, **Knić**, **Pirot**, **Prijepolje**, **Titel**, **Čajetina**), adapted toilets (**Bečej**, **Stara Pazova**, **Čajetina**, **Rakovica**, **Kikinda**, **Kragujevac**), elevators (**Stara Pazova**, **Prokuplje**, **Raška**, **Ražanj**, **Šabac**, **Svilajinac**), boards, area maps, road signs (**Bečej**, **Kikinda**), a mobile crawler (**Stara Pazova**). In **Ćićevac**, the reconstruction of toilets suitable for children with disabilities is currently underway. In several schools in **Kikinda**, the entrance for people with disabilities was provided by creating an inclined path in front of the entrance to the school and to the gymnasium. Based on the results, we can note that the provision of accessibility in educational institutions is still very underdeveloped, and that institutions most often provide accessibility at the entrance to the facility, but not facilitated functioning within the facility itself and accessibility of communications and information. It is alarming that many local self-government units do not correctly understand the term "accessibility", so among the answers, the respondents mentioned the provision of transportation, food, accommodation, personal

companion services, financing of various health treatments, sports activities, provision of staff, adoption of an individual education plan, the possibility of education at home, the provision of measures determined by the IMC. Most local self-government units considered the forms of accessibility that they mentioned sufficient.

Where accessibility is not provided, it is stated that the reasons are that the need was not established, because there were no children who needed additional provision of accessibility, that is, there were no such requests. The city of **Kruševac** points out that around 50% of preschool institutions, primary schools and secondary schools do not provide accessibility due to the impossibility of removing architectural barriers due to the architecture of the buildings.

g) Personal companion service

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs states that the Law on Social Protection²¹, the Rulebook on closer conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services²² and the Rulebook on the licensing of social protection organizations²³, prescribe the conditions for providing the service of a personal companion of a child, and the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Social Protection Sector, the Inspection Supervision Department, issues a work permit (license) to social protection organizations for the provision of the specified service. In accordance with Article 44 of the Law on Social Protection²⁴, the service of a personal companion of a child, as a daily service in the community, is provided by the local self-government unit. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs keeps records of the number of licensed providers of the personal companion service for children and the list of licensed providers can be found on the website of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, while the Republic Institute for Social Protection has data on the provision of this services on the basis of the reports that service providers submit to it on an annual basis. Article 19 of the Rulebook on closer conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services²⁵ prescribes that the service provider conducts an internal evaluation of the quality of the services provided at least once a year, which includes examining the satisfaction of beneficiaries, that is, their representatives. The evaluation report is submitted to the founder of the service, the social protection institutions, and is available to the professional public.

Although the Law on Social Protection and the Rulebooks that more closely regulate it have been amended in relation to 2018, the regulations are still equally general and there is a lack of a document that will more closely regulate specific issues for the work of personal companions, such as: the method of selecting a personal companion and the criteria for his engagement, the relation of the personal companion with other associates, teams, teachers and educators, the method of monitoring, directing and evaluating the work of the personal companion, the responsibilities and obligations of the personal companion and the supervision of his work, the amount of remuneration for work and other provisions of importance for arrangement of this service.

Also, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs explains that in Article 87

²¹ "Official Gazette of RS", number 24/11, 117/22 – CC decision.

²² "Official Gazette of RS", number 42/2013, 89/2018 and 73/2019.

²³ "Official Gazette of RS", number 42/2013.

²⁴ "Official Gazette of RS", number 24/11, 117/22 – CC decision.

²⁵ "Official Gazette of RS", number 42/2013, 89/2018 and 73/2019.

of the Rulebook on closer conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services²⁶, it is prescribed that the associate-personal companion cannot be a member of the family household where the beneficiary lives, a relative in accordance with the law or a brother and sister, i.e. a nephew or niece of the beneficiary, which in practice can lead to the student being left without the service of a personal companion because a family member is the only possibility of having one in the place where the student lives.

Hiring and starting the service of a personal companion is largely regulated in local self-government units now compared to the moment when the research was conducted eight years ago. In 2018, the personal companion service was established and provided in 65 local self-government units, and in 2024 in 93 local self-government units, while in 10 local self-government units the service is still not established, most often for the following reasons: lack of licensed accredited training programs for personal companions, failure to pass an act on the establishment of a service in a local self-government unit, lack of funds or staff, absence of requests for the provision of services. **Kladovo** launched the service in January 2024, for which 6.5 million dinars are planned in the budget of the local self-government unit. In the municipalities of **Kanjiža** and **Majdanpek**, the service was established in 2023.

Previously, the method of providing the service differed greatly between the local self-government units that established the service, while now the service of a personal companion is provided through the public procurement procedure, after which a contract is concluded with the selected service provider for the provision of the service within a pre-defined and planned number of hours. The municipality of **Senta** provides a personal companion service, but states: "The personal companion service is an extremely expensive service. One natural person – service provider is hired for one beneficiary, which practically means that at least 1,000,000.00 dinars should be set aside for one beneficiary per year. If we want to achieve equality for all students in the Republic of Serbia with such needs, the financing of that service should be taken over by the Republic of Serbia".

In 2018, only 23 local self-government units reported that personal companion trainings were provided, while in 2024 personal companion trainings were provided in 87 local self-government units organized through service providers. Local self-government units generally did not specify which trainings were involved "because trainings are the responsibility of the service providers"²⁷. The reasons given for not organizing the trainings are that the service of a personal companion has not yet been provided, that there were no people interested in the training and that there is no licensed organization for personal companion trainings in their vicinity. The municipality of **Bačka Topola** states that personal companions attended trainings in 2016, 2017 and 2018, but that after 2018, funds were not foreseen in the municipality's budget for these trainings. In **Žitište** and **Zrenjanin**, personal companions personally finance the provision of trainings.

As many as 44 local self-government units do not keep records on the implementation of trainings for personal companions, and the reasons given are that the Rulebook on closer conditions, procedures and methods of exercising the right to material support and the use of services in the

²⁶ "Official Gazette of RS", number 42/2013, 89/2018 and 73/2019.

²⁷ The most frequently mentioned service providers are the organization "Dečje Srce" and "Imperijal plus doo" in cooperation with the Play centre Novi Sad, and the trainings are "Personal companion of a child Step by Step", "Training of personal companions for the provision of adequate support for children with developmental difficulties – children with disabilities" and "Starting the child personal companion service".

area of social protection, prescribes that for hired personal companions, trainings according to an accredited program are organized by the selected service provider. The number of personal companions who completed trainings in the period from 2018 to 2023 ranges from two (**Ražanj**) to 654 (**Novi Sad**). At the same time, **Kruševac** notes: "A certain number of personal companions undergo training, but give up work engagement in providing the service, so if we look at the situation by years, the number of persons who have undergone training is greater than the current number of persons engaged".

4.4. Providing support to schools and employees

Giving special rewards and encouraging schools and employees who have become successful in setting up, developing and providing additional support services has not been developed yet. The Ministry of Education states that, considering that quality inclusive education has become a standard in education and training institutions, as well as that the number of indicators related to inclusive education has been increased in the new Rulebook on the quality standards of educational institutions, inclusive education represents the focus of external evaluation, as well as the self-evaluation of the work of educational institutions. Because of everything mentioned above, there is no special reward system for employees or educational institutions that have introduced innovative additional support services.

The main problem of implementing the legal framework is the gap that exists between the document on paper and the realistic state of school work. If we analyse the Rulebook on quality standards of educational institutions more closely, we notice an attempt to look at educational work from different areas and to define how these areas are realized and what is the role of certain employees in the implementation of specific actions. The difficulty arises when employees need to adapt a huge number of duties and "tips" to the practical work. The demanding scope of work usually includes basic school staff and associates, of which there is usually a maximum of one per school. Also, certain "regularities" are more difficult to legally define because they are not measurable, nor can they be further specified, because they depend on the context and culture of the individual schools, while schools do not have the tools, resources or knowledge to implement them. Thus, for example, in the area of "Teaching and learning", the Rulebook on the quality standards of educational institutions defines the following: the teacher functionally uses the existing teaching aids, the teacher adjusts the pace of work to the students, the student applies feedback to improve learning, the teacher uses various procedures to motivate students and so on. In practice, teachers usually do not have enough teaching aids, teaching aids are outdated, non-functional or individual, and they need to be adjusted to the large number of students in the class. In practice, teachers lack practical help on how to harmonize the expected teaching content with the time frame of implementation on an annual level, in what ways to motivate students to work, and they generally need help to get out of the elaborate system of traditional teaching that was dominant in the previous decades in our country and to adapt the work to the changes that lean towards ensuring active teaching and quality education for all. Due to this gap between the legal framework and practical work in teaching, the defined items do not ensure quality, which is why it is necessary to take more concrete measures: among other things, measures to encourage and reward schools and employees who act in accordance with the changes.

The Ministry of Education further states that currently, the only possibility for institutions that have an innovative practice of inclusive education, is to apply for the status of a model institution for inclusive education or to apply for the status of a resource centre for inclusive education.

Individuals who have experience with innovative practices can apply for a title, in accordance with the Rulebook on continuous professional development and promotion to the position of a teacher, educator and professional associate²⁸, or individuals who are recognized as employees who have a good experience with inclusive education can become advisors, external associates for inclusive education (currently, there are 37 of them in school administrations). Considering that the number of teachers with the mentioned title, as well as the number of institutions that provide such support, is extremely insufficient for the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia, the question arises as to how it would be possible to promote and make available this type of support: to what extent is it necessary and possible to involve more employees in such positions and in what way to approach the schools, regardless of whether the schools directly applied for help or not.

The Ministry of Education states that the labour and legal position of employees in schools for the education of students with developmental difficulties and disabilities during the provision of additional support in the regular education system is regulated on the basis of the Rulebook on the norm of hours of direct work with students of teachers, professional associates and educators in a primary school²⁹ and Rulebook on the pedagogical norm of all forms of educational work of teachers and professional associates in a secondary school³⁰. Within the structure of the 40-hour work week, for each employee, hours of work on providing additional support in another institution are recorded. However, the analysis of the mentioned documents did not reveal that there is a defined framework for such an employee – the document articles are general, they refer to teachers and a rigid and detailed schedule of how many hours per year are provided for various forms of curricular and extracurricular activities is prescribed. The only noted item is the definition of the time frame for additional and supplementary classes, which is not in accordance with the issue related to the regulation of the labour and legal position of employees.

4.5. Education and trainings on inclusive education

The Ministry of Education states that the education of employees for strengthening their competencies for inclusive education is carried out in accordance with the Rulebook on continuous professional development and promotion to the position of a teacher, educator and professional associate³¹. During the previous school year, 5,355 teachers from 206 schools attended training programs to strengthen the capacity of employees for inclusive education. In 2022/23, 360 candidates attended online training for pedagogical assistants to work with children and students with disabilities. Training is mandatory for all future pedagogical assistants for children and students with disabilities. During the analysis of the Rulebook on continuous professional development and promotion to the position of a teacher, educator and professional associate, an obligation of the employee regarding professional development, the possibility of obtaining higher titles, as well as the methods of starting a certain form of professional development were defined, while the topics that the teacher should process at the annual level were not defined.

Regarding the development of special programs aimed in the direction of inclusive education, the Ministry of Education emphasizes the program created within the project "Let's all learn

²⁸ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", number 109/2021.

²⁹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia - Educational Gazette", no. 2/92 and 2/2000.

³⁰ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia - Educational Gazette", no. 1/92, 23/97, 2/2000 and 15/2019.

³¹ "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", number 109/2021.

together". A capacity-building program for inclusive education was developed, which is implemented in 20 local self-government units that are included in the project. In 2019, the Ministry of Education implemented a Public Call for the selection of organizers, implementers and professional development programs for employees in preschool institutions and primary schools, and based on the Minister's Decision³², organizers, implementers and professional development programs of public interest for employees in preschool institutions and primary schools were selected, among which was the Association "Resource Centre for Lifelong Development and Social Inclusion" with a program called Inclusion as part of the skills of employees in preschool and primary school education, which received funds in the amount of 450,000.00 dinars for the implementation of training. The aim of the program was to improve the professional competences of educators and teachers for the inclusive implementation of school activities.

In order to strengthen the capacity for improving the inclusive approach in the work of preschool institutions, through the support of the project of inclusive preschool education and upbringing, the training "Teachers/educators as carriers of quality education for all children" was updated, which was jointly created by the Ministry of Education, the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Niš and UNICEF in 2016. A total of 58 training implementers (teachers and professional assistants from preschool institutions) were selected and trained. About 850 participants from 163 public preschool institutions attended this training in the period May-June and September 2023. The Stories about kindergartens with good inclusive practices are in preparation, which were developed in: preschool institution "Đurđevdan" Kragujevac, preschool institution "Nada Naumović" Kragujevac, preschool institution "Dečija radost" Čuprija, preschool institution "Bambi" Kula, preschool institution "Naše dete" Šabac and preschool institution "Radost" Novi Banovci. In 2024, it is planned to promote the examples of good practices of inclusive preschool education and upbringing at horizontal meetings with directors and representatives of teams of preschool institutions for inclusive education at the level of each school administration.

In the Catalogue of training programs for employees in education, within the thematic areas according to which training programs are grouped, there is an area "Children/students who need additional support in education". However, despite the availability of various trainings and programs, the results of this research indicate that almost half of the teachers who made up the research sample have not yet participated in any form of professional development related to inclusive education (including teachers with different years of service). The problem of insufficient training also lies in the culture of the system, in which the desire for continuous professional trainings and the need to further strengthen and develop existing knowledge have not been developed. We assume that the teaching staff would be more motivated to work in this area as well if some broader changes would be made that would significantly facilitate the position and work of teachers, so that teachers would recognize the space for possible improvement of their work in practice and accordingly act and improve their skills and competences.

³² Number 610-00-00463/2/2021-07 dated 28th June 2021.

4.6. Implementation of recommendations issued to competent authorities – conclusions

The legal documents and by-laws that regulate the work of educational institutions do not meet the needs of the practitioners who carry out that work. The documents set the frameworks for work and as such, they are obliged to provide certain guidelines and basis for work, which should be further adapted and developed in relation to the context of the individual school and the local community of which the school is a part. However, the autonomy given to schools is not adapted to the needs of employees, given that there is room for interpretation of the organization of work, which in practice leads to a lack of understanding of how and in what manner one should act. Also, legal documents could be more binding, not for teachers and professional associates, to whom most of the documents refer, but for the local public authorities and institutions that have the role of providing support to schools, which in practice comes down to exclusively exercising the control function and assessing what is being done well and in accordance with the legal framework, and what is not.

Competent authorities in charge of drafting regulations can specify what kind of services, and in relation to which criteria, the institutions in charge of implementing decisions are obliged to provide to teachers and schools in order to ensure the quality of work. This would significantly facilitate the work of teachers because local institutions would share the responsibility of organizing work for the benefit of children and students, and teachers would more often receive support in the form of funds and collaborators, which in practice is often absent. Laws and regulations were built on the basis of traditional teaching, dominated by a strict subject-class system focused on teacher activities, clearly defined teaching content and programs that assess and rank the knowledge of students. The aforementioned documents have been adapted, supplemented and expanded with new regulations over time, however they still lie on abandoned ideas, which is why more complex changes are needed in the direction of potentially changing the way in which the school, teaching and lessons function. The changes concern the issue of securing a greater number of associates in schools and allocating finances in the budget for this purpose; redefining the administrative role of teachers and putting administrative tasks in the function of self-reflection; redefining the goals of education; financing and investing in education; redefining the curriculum, mandatory subjects, content, the way classes are organized, replacing unnecessary content with educational one; organizing classes that connect subjects, differentiating the curriculum; changes concerning the functioning of the school in terms of time; changes that all teachers are appealing for: reducing the number of students in the class and providing spatial and staff capacities if we strive for inclusive practice in reality, and not only in the work of teachers.

In relation to the report of the Protector of Citizens from 2018, there is noticeable progress in the provision of various services by local self-government units, with the most developed being the provision of the work of the IMC and the personal companion services. Various additional support services have been developed in different local self-government units, however, progress is slow and small, given that six years have passed since the last report of the Protector of Citizens. A certain number of local self-government units have developed services within one area (for example, work with children of the Roma nationality), while other areas are less developed. Changes often concern specific actions and activities in the form of projects and programs, while changes that concern the constant provision of availability and functionality of a particular service are rarer.

In general, when giving answers, local self-government units often didn't leave a statement or the answers were too general without providing more detailed information, or were not related to the question posed. This piece of information makes us wonder whether additional support services are fully implemented in terms of not only providing the service, but also in terms of its functionality and monitoring the effects of its work, and whether services are potentially provided at the level of a case assessment, and not based on a defined rule of work. The lack of connection between the answers and the questions is an alarming fact, as the decision-makers, when it comes to the implementation of inclusive education, are obliged to understand all possibilities that exist, what they refer to and who the additional support services are intended for. Such a case is best seen in the example of the adaptation of facilities, where local self-government units often understood the concept of accessibility as the availability of all services to students who need additional support, and not as the need to provide conditions for the safe functioning of students outside and within the school. A very small percentage of local self-government units indicated at least in one response that something within the local self-government does not function or is not provided in a high-quality manner, while the majority thought that the "culprit" is another institution or a legislative body.

Based on all of the above, it is necessary for decision-making experts to agree on the direction in which the fundamentals of education and upbringing in formal institutions should be set, given that the implementation of inclusive education is a process that requires such change. On the other hand, local self-government units should ensure a greater volume of different types of services and monitoring of their effects, as well as a more detailed elaboration of the methods in which services are implemented and how to make these services more accessible in order to provide real support to students who need it.

5. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Although according to Article 19, paragraph 2 of the Law on the Protector of Citizens, the Protector of Citizens is not authorized to control the work of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Protector of Citizens believes that it would be useful for the mentioned body to consider its proposal.

1. It would be good if the **Government**, in redistributing the budget, would provide clear and transparent indicators of the allocation of financial resources intended for child services, especially for children who need additional support in the education system, as well as ensure systems for monitoring and evaluating the distribution and spending of funds;
2. **The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health and local self-government unit authorities** should provide adequate financial, human and other resources, in a manner that ensures that every child who needs an additional support service in education, gets one;
3. **The Ministry of Education** should take measures to strengthen the support mechanisms for inclusive education at the level of educational institutions themselves;
4. **The Ministry of Education** should undertake activities to ensure mandatory and continuous education of educators on the importance of inclusive education, ways of adapting the teaching process to inclusive education, models of providing additional support to children and students in education, examples of good practice, as well as the monitoring of the effects of education for the purpose of providing support to educators;
5. **The Ministry of Education** should provide mandatory and continuous educations so that all children and students, starting with preschool education, become familiar with the importance of inclusion and their role in inclusive education;
6. **The Ministry of Education** should provide the appropriate number of professional associates in educational institutions in accordance with the needs of students, especially in the implementation of inclusion and additional support in education;
7. **The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health** should provide comprehensive and continuous trainings for educators and workers in the social and health care systems, who are members of the IMC, on inclusive education and the methods and models of providing additional support for children and students, as well as on examples of good practice;
8. **The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government** should ensure that all IMCs have adequate space for work, as well as that IMC members have a uniform amount of compensation for being engaged in the work of the commission;
9. **The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government** should ensure that all IMCs act in a timely, efficient manner and within the deadlines prescribed by law;
10. **The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health and local self-government unit authorities** should ensure that additional support services are financed in a way that ensures the permanence, sustainability, durability and continuity of services and that they develop new services that are aimed at the educational and social inclusion of children;

11. **The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and local self-government unit authorities** should, in cooperation with other authorities, provide a long-term solution to the problem of inaccessibility and insufficient accessibility of educational institutions for children with developmental difficulties and disabilities;
12. **Competent republic and autonomous province authorities, as well as local self-government unit authorities**, which are competent and authorized to provide and finance additional support services for children and students, should establish and develop specific services for children of the Roma nationality, aimed at encouraging inclusion in education, preventing dropout from education, encouraging secondary school education of Roma children, the participation of children in curricular, extracurricular, sports, cultural, recreational and other activities in the community and peer group;
13. **Competent republic and autonomous province authorities, as well as local self-government unit authorities**, which are competent and authorized to provide and finance additional support services for children and students, should establish and develop services aimed at providing support to talented children, as well as educators, in order to improve their knowledge in working with talented children;
14. **The Ministry of Education** should provide the service of a pedagogical assistant for all children for whom this type of additional support has been established;
15. **Local self-government unit authorities** should provide the service of a personal companion for all children for whom this type of additional support has been established;
16. **Local self-government unit authorities** that do not have a sufficient number of personal companions should undertake activities, by providing adequate compensation for work, in order to train a sufficient number of persons to provide this service and thus ensure the service of a personal companion for all children for whom it is estimated that this type of additional support is necessary.