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My name is Paula Hunt and I am the Inclusive Education Consultant at the UNICEF Central and Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States Regional Office. The CEE/CIS is comprised of 22 countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, FYR of Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. While these are countries not represented at this conference they are our close neighbours, many of which plan to become a part of the European Union.

Unfortunately, despite of the geographic proximity to the EU countries here gathered, the issues in our Region are very much still related to access to education. We know that we should have 2.5 million children with disabilities in the region but can only account for 1.5 million of which most do not receive education services at all and still remain excluded from education. Unfortunately, in the region, the issues around Inclusive Education remind us all that it is not possible to talk about Inclusion or Inclusive Teachers while many children in the region are still segregated in institutions and not allowed to go to school.

Working with 22 countries implies working and negotiating with, at least, 22 different ways of viewing the world. Each of our countries is at a different starting point and has different procedural frameworks. However, our ONLY goal is to provide them with the supports required to achieve educational systems that do, in fact, teach not only “all” children but “each and every” child. We know and try to emphasize in all countries and under all circumstances that teachers are the single-most important driver for change.

The main challenges regarding **teacher education for inclusion** in the CEE/CIS region are the same as everywhere else, although they present themselves in slightly different ways.

Integrity of the Profession

Teacher education is rarely the student’s first choice of study but it is often the only option due to low test scores. As a result, many students graduating from teacher preparation programs are low achievers who never intended to become teachers. Recruitment and retention becomes intrinsically associated with a poor image of the teaching profession. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, out of 100 students graduating from a teacher preparation program, only 17 take a teaching position, and only 11 teach for 3 years. Furthermore, the current salary structure in most CEE/CIS countries (stavka system) pays teachers by hour in the classroom and compensates them for all other tasks. In combination with the fact that most teaching loads are in between 18-22 hours/week, the teaching profession is viewed by many as a part-time job and encourages those in the teaching profession to either look for additional hours in the school or take on an additional job outside of the school. The stratification by gender and age, perpetuates the phenomena, by allowing males and older teachers the greatest teaching loads, leaving young female teachers as the worst paid in a school

Recruitment and retention

The official national statistics in our region report less than 5% teacher shortage. However, this number does not reflect many of the issues regarding teacher shortage and quality and gives a wrong impression of the problem. For example, in some countries in CEE/CIS where no teacher shortage is reported, school directors re-distribute the hours left by a school vacancy among the existing teaching staff, effectively filling the vacancy and/or increasing teacher salaries. In many other countries there is a high percentage of teachers



at or above retirement age. In most countries teachers are **un** qualified (because they have an incomplete higher education degree or teach without any training) or **under** qualified (because they teach subjects they are not qualified for)

Development of the profession

In many of the countries in our region, teacher preparation is non-existent and for the most part, teachers work under appalling conditions, or are rewarded for hours “in the job” but not their actual teaching. There is also a lack of capacity in Higher Education Institutions to respond to this crisis – we cannot teach what we don’t know and, in our region, teacher educators who have had little to no exposure to Inclusive processes and practices are not able, or confident in their abilities, to teach future teachers about IE. Furthermore, professional development opportunities are patchy and usually provided ad-hoc and many erroneously assume that in-service teachers have the knowledge-base regarding IE than will allow for higher-order thinking.

The opportunities provide themselves in the form of being able to take advantage of “standing on the shoulders of giants”. We have a long way to go, but we have the advantage of being able to reflect upon the mistakes and triumphs of others. Speaking of, understanding, advocating and promoting inclusion is, for many of our partners in the 22 countries, an overwhelming and defeating task. UNICEF is trying to come up with ways that will provide measures of visible success that incentivize move positive and long-lasting moves along the process of inclusion. In our region, IE has vastly been understood as a set of access measures targeting those children who are a visible part of society, and Children with Disabilities have continued to remain at the fringes of the discussion. Therefore, a great part of UNICEF’s work is to remind everyone that to be truly inclusive we need to ensure that measures for teacher education highlight also the vast work that still needs to be done to ensure that ALL children are in schools and not removed from society and hidden away in institutions or at home.

The project Profile of Inclusive Teachers is extremely timely and useful not only for our region and the EU in general but also as a means to open up discussions at a global level. We have known for a long time that are teachers are not always equipped to deal with the diversity of students they are presented with and Higher Education Institutions have not been, as a whole, capable of addressing this issue. The Profile gives us a way of initiating or furthering discussions not only about teachers but about the larger goal of Inclusive Education. In the CEECIS Region in particular, where many Higher Education Institutions are grappling with the issue of teacher preparation that is reflective of an evolving and mobile society this is particularly important.

One issue that the Profile implies but does not directly address is that of **commitment**. For many years we have assumed that every teacher entering a pre-service program is committed to teaching “all” students. What we have found in research in our region (and I suspect is true in all parts of the globe) is that this is not necessarily true. Therefore, in our region, the greatest challenge is two-fold: to make the teaching profession attractive to those who see teaching as an opportunity to engage in social change; and, to set up gate-entry and gate-keeping mechanisms that ensure that all pre-service teachers have the commitment to stay in the profession, as actors of change.

Commitment can be defined as being “willing to give your time and energy to something that you believe in, or a promise or firm decision to do something”. While we can ensure that teacher preparation programs can (and many do) provide future teachers with the values, competences, attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to be an Inclusive Educator this is not enough. The Profile gives a way to start discussing not only what Inclusive Education is and how it should be planned and taught, but also the ways in which



we can ensure that we are entrusting the process of Inclusive Education to life-long, reflective, actors of change. For this, we need to be clear that every future teacher is: 1) committed to ensuring that EVERY child is worth teaching; and that 2) they, themselves, are willing and capable to teach EACH and EVERY child.