**ADDRESSING REGIONAL DISPARITIES IN THE CZECH EDUCATION SYSTEM**

**Supporting the implementation of measures to promote more inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all learners in Karlovarský and Ústecký regions**

**Peer Learning Activity 28th June 2021**

**Engaging stakeholders in policy implementation work in Poland**

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1. Background and focus

1.1 Stimulus/rationale for the legislative change

Data

In Poland, the number of children covered by early development support is growing every year. In the school year 2020/2021 this form of support covered 58.6 thousand children. For comparison, the number of children covered by the WWR in 2008 was about 14 thousand.

In an increasing number of children and pupils in Poland, needs for additional support in the educational process or special organization of learning and working methods are recognized. In the school year 2019/2020, as many as 34% of children and learners were covered by various forms of psychological and pedagogical assistance, and in almost 4% the need for special education was identified. For many years there has been an upward trend in this regard. At the same time, most parents of children with disabilities recognize the need for their children to participate in group activities with peers. Over the two school years, the number of learners taught individually has almost quadrupled from 45,800 in the 2016/2017 school year to 11,400 in the 2018/2019 school year.

In the 2018/2019 school year, about 62% of learners in special education were educated in mainstream schools. This rate is 10% higher than three years earlier (56.2% in the 2016/2017 school year). The diversity of needs of children and learners is also determined by their health status. The number of diagnoses of mental and affective disorders in children and adolescents is increasing, which indicates a progressive decline in the mental condition of Polish learners[[1]](#footnote-2).

There is still a small percentage of learners with disabilities pursuing vocational education in mainstream schools: in lower-secondary vocational schools (30%) and in post-secondary schools (1%).

With the increasing number of learners covered by support, despite the decreasing number of learners overall, expenditures on providing special education are increasing. Expenditures for this purpose increased from 5.6 billion PLN in 2015 (6.4 million of all learners) to almost 9 billion PLN in 2020 (4.6 million of all learners).

In light of the above data, it is worrying that the pass rate of vocational exams and matriculation exams by learners covered by special education is lower compared to their peers not covered by this education. Despite high expenditures on their education, these graduates often do not continue their education at the university level or obtain sufficient vocational training, and without certified qualifications they have difficulty entering the job market[[2]](#footnote-3). The participation rate of people with disabilities is below 30%, while for people without disabilities it is over 80%[[3]](#footnote-4).

**Legislation**

Every learner in Poland has the right to education in accordance with individual predispositions and abilities, carried out together with their peers as close to home as possible. The provisions guarantee the right to social inclusion and the right to express one's views on matters relating to one's own education and to treat them with due care, according to age and level of maturity. These rights are set out in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Educational Laws of 14 December 2016.

Article 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997 states that ‘everyone has the right to education, and public authorities shall ensure universal and equal access to education’. In the preamble of the Act of 14 December 2016. - The Educational Law indicates that ‘the school should provide every learner with the conditions necessary for his or her development, prepare him or her to fulfil family and civic duties based on the principles of solidarity, democracy, tolerance, justice and freedom’. Article 1 of this Act states that the educational system in Poland ensures, among others, the adaptation of the content, methods and organisation of teaching to the psychophysical abilities of learners, as well as the possibility to benefit from psychological and pedagogical assistance and special forms of teaching work. Children and young people with disabilities, socially maladjusted and at risk of social maladjustment may study in all types of schools, in accordance with individual development and educational needs and predispositions. The provisions of the educational law oblige schools, schools and facilities to individualize the process of education of each pupil, recognize developmental and educational needs of pupils and provide them with psychological and pedagogical assistance. Various regulations specify a number of instruments of support, which in the vast majority of cases refer to the effects directed directly to the learner and often require recognition of a specific type of disability or disorder confirmed by a formal document, which allows to launch support on the part of the school (based on an opinion or decision). The legislation does not define the term ‘inclusive education’, nor does it indicate the standards whose implementation would be aimed at providing high quality inclusive education in the daily practice of schools, schools and facilities and the indicators for monitoring activities in this area.

The amount of funding provided in the educational part of the general subsidy on the basis of an evaluation of the need for special education depends on the type of disability, the identification of social maladjustment or risk of social maladjustment, and not on the extent of support needed based on the functioning of children/learners, which often results in inefficient allocation and spending of funds.

More about the Polish education system: *The System of Education in Poland 2020* <https://eurydice.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-system-of-education-in-poland_online_new.pdf>

Barriers

Despite the existing legislative and organisational framework allowing for the implementation of inclusive education at each stage of education and the right of parents to choose the educational path for their child, as indicated by audits conducted by the Supreme Chamber of Control, information received by the Ministry of National Education from the Children's Rights Ombudsman and the regional educational authorities, there are still difficulties in ensuring high quality education for SEN pupils and their actual inclusion in the social life of the school.

The lack of a legal definition of inclusive education causes many people to equate inclusive education with the presence of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. Unfortunately, a fairly common scenario is that these learners are taught on an individual basis.

As many as 45% of the educational system units attended by children and young people do not employ any specialist[[4]](#footnote-5). The teaching staff does not feel sufficiently prepared to work with learners with special educational needs. Methodological support for staff in schools and mainstream schools in working with groups/classes with different educational needs is not sufficiently available.

Barriers to access to high quality education and recommendations on how to overcome them were formulated in the course of work of expert commissions, research[[5]](#footnote-6) and inspections[[6]](#footnote-7). They were also reported by various groups during public consultations, educational debates, congresses of people with disabilities[[7]](#footnote-8), conferences, workshops and information and consultation meetings[[8]](#footnote-9). The identified barriers relate to attitudes, architectural constraints and deficiencies in equipment, communication and information flow, staff preparation, teaching content and methods, and the way funds are allocated and used effectively to carry out educational tasks.

There is lack of coordination of activities undertaken in various ministries for the benefit of the child and family, what affects low efficiency of activities, overlapping of areas covered by support in different ministries with gaps in other areas.

**Scientific context**

In 2015, education of learners with diverse educational needs in mainstream schools was formally and practically implemented in Poland. However, despite the actions taken (since 2008) in this regard, no coherent and comprehensive solution was prepared to improve the quality of inclusive education. This was a time when Poland was still searching for answers to the question of how to organise education for learners with disabilities and other educational needs today. Analysis of theoretical concepts indicated that it might be interesting to consider the idea of inclusive education in conjunction with the areas of the child's ecosystem in light of T. Knoster's concept of positive change. This author noted that in order for positive change to occur in human developmental situations, in their ecosystems, several conditions must be met, affecting each ecosystem. Both the immediate one, associated with the development and functioning of the child - its relationship with parents, peers and teachers. The further ecosystem is based on relationships between environmental groups, and also includes cultural and social aspects, as well as social and legal conditions, which also determine the success of inclusive education.

Figure 1: Conditions necessary for positive change to occur.

Source: own elaboration based on T. Knoster <http://gathernodust.blogspot.com/2008/05/how-to-manage-stress-of-change.html> (download 12.06.2012)

Knoster believes that for positive change to occur, the following factors must be present in the environment: vision, knowledge, skills, incentives, support, action plan, and resources. However, he emphasizes that it is necessary for all of the above factors to occur at the same time. He also points out what will happen in a situation when one of these factors is missing - will we then be able to talk about the success of the concept we want to introduce and implement.

In 2015, Poland still did not meet all the conditions for increasing the quality of inclusive education and we could talk about the threats arising from this fact.

Tab.1 Disturbances to positive change.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| lack of a factor of positive change | **the consequences of failing to appear and ‘secure’ the factor in question** |
| lack of a vision | **confusion** |
| lack of knowledge and skills | **ignorance and anxiety** |
| lack of incentives | **opposition** |
| lack of support | **alienation** |
| lack of action plan | **monotony** |
| lack of measures | **frustration** |

Source: own elaboration

Because of the lack of vision, we have had to deal with confusion, chaos, which adversely affects human functioning and development. In the educational system in Poland, we have constantly had to deal with the lack of a single, coherent vision of inclusive education. For over twenty years, we have been seeking solutions related to the education of people with disabilities and other individual developmental and educational needs. We have moved from segregated education through integrative education[[9]](#footnote-10) to inclusive education, which is now under discussion. At the same time, it should be emphasized that other forms of special education were and are still provided - in other words, Poland belongs to the group of countries with a multi-track educational pathway for learners with disabilities.

A major problem faced by Polish education was the lack of knowledge about the different educational needs of learners with disabilities, which often resulted in ignorance. For example, teachers-educators were not adequately equipped with specialist knowledge concerning the abilities and needs of children with disabilities. The regulations on standards of teacher education in Poland created opportunities for specialist training in assisting learners with special educational needs - but still, this training was not obligatory and there were no clear standards for equipping every teacher with specialist knowledge. An unprepared teacher could not be ready to recognize the different needs of learners and design activities to support the development of a child whose time spent in an unfavourable educational situation would be time wasted irretrievably.

Another factor cited by Knoster is the lack of skills to deal with anxiety-provoking situations. Lack of skills in dealing with a child with a particular type of disability or with a child with developmental disorders most often caused anxiety and avoidance of difficult situations by the teacher. This in turn did not foster the emergence of incentives for the development of professional competence in the context of working in a developmentally heterogeneous group. The consequence of this was frequent opposition to the appearance of a learner with disabilities in a mainstream school. Surveys conducted in 2007/2008[[10]](#footnote-11) show that about 60 per cent of teachers declared that they would be reluctant to have a child with disability in their school and another several per cent of teachers agreed to include, but not every learner, depending on the type of disability.

Given the low competence of general educators in working with learners with special educational needs, it became necessary to design and implement a system of support. It was understood that its absence could result in alienation and leaving the teacher alone with the problem. The implemented regulations of the Ministry of National Education on psychological and pedagogical assistance emphasized the need to move from a one-sided model of child support, focused only on the teacher and the child, to a team model, which has been in place for many years in countries implementing the idea of inclusive education. In this model, the whole team of specialists including parents is responsible for the assessment and establishes a support program. A support plan is created for children with special educational needs and an individual educational and therapeutic program (IPET) for learners with disabilities. It is at this point that we have a reference to ecosystems. Systemic solutions show a shift of emphasis from individual responsibility for the child's functioning in education to team responsibility. A team of several specialists using individual competencies supports the teacher, the child himself and the family.

In 2017, despite the above-described changes in the education system, it was still possible to talk about the lack of a comprehensive action plan, which leads to monotony and discouragement caused by the lack of faith in the possibility of introducing effective practical solutions in the area in question. The formal and legal actions taken still lacked cooperation between ecosystems. Between the macrosystem - that is, the social-legal responsibility for preparing educational institutions for the arrival of children with various educational needs, including those resulting from disabilities, and their families - their closest environment. Hence the need to prepare comprehensive solutions for the education of diverse groups in mainstream schools, while preserving the achievements and experience of special education.

Policy development work

In 2009, the Minister of National Education appointed a team of experts to prepare recommendations for systemic changes concerning the education of learners with special educational needs (SEN). Some of these recommendations were used to prepare legislative changes concerning the organization of psychological and pedagogical assistance and special education, which were introduced in 2010. Individual educational-therapeutic programs for learners with disabilities, social maladjustment and at risk of social maladjustment were introduced for implementation in schools and mainstream schools. There were also changes based on teamwork of teachers and specialists, and development of a plan for supporting activities for each learner covered by psychological and pedagogical assistance. The legislative changes were supported by an implementation project carried out in cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the university. After three years, the Ministry of Education withdrew some of the regulations, deeming them - under pressure from teachers - as too administratively and legislatively burdensome. Subsequent changes introduced in the system of education for learners with SEN were clarifying changes, e.g. the indication of deadlines for the development of individual educational-therapeutic programs, the need to ensure the participation of parents and provide them with a copy of the program, etc.

In 2015, the Ministry of National Education held a public consultation titled Concept of organization of education for learners with disabilities. The consultations were conducted in the form of an online survey, workshops (workshop sessions), focus studies and a conference summarizing the collected information, opinions and developed solutions. In order to enable the widest possible group of interested people and entities to participate in the public consultations, workshops and focus groups were held outside of Warsaw in different regions of Poland. It was supplemented with social research conducted through an online platform. Public consultations were carried out in accordance with the standard of openness and universal accessibility. During the meetings, it was possible to use the services of a sign language interpreter. Opinions, proposals or comments could be submitted by participants of the public consultations by filling out an online questionnaire or by participating in workshops, focus groups or a final conference.

The invitation to participate in public consultations on the concept of organization of education for learners with disabilities was made available through publication on the websites (of the Ministry of National Education and addressed to NGOs www.konsultacje.ngo.pl), distribution to recipients of the Ministry of National Education's newsletter and publication on the Ministry of National Education's profile at www.facebook.com.

The public consultations were attended by 1,557 people. The largest group of participants in the public consultations were teachers and directors of schools, schools and institutions (especially special schools and centers). Also participating in the public consultations were parents of learners with disabilities, regional educational authorities, representatives of local government units, representatives of psychological and pedagogical counselling centres, representatives of teacher training centres, representatives of institutions and non-governmental organisations working for the benefit of children and young people with disabilities, and representatives of teacher training colleges.

In 2016, educational debates were held with a total of about 15,000 participants. 17 debates were organized by the Ministry of Education in different regions of the country, and 162 debates were organized by regional educational authorities at the provincial level. One of the topics of the debates was inclusive education.

The Team for Special Educational Needs, established by the Minister of National Education and consisting of representatives of various entities, including parents, principals, teachers and specialists, as well as representatives of local government units, worked on the conclusions collected during the consultations and debates in 2016. The work of the team resulted in a report that indicated recommended directions for further work. One of these directions was the implementation of solutions based on functional assessment, the use of the International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health (ICF) and enabling schools and special institutions to act as a resource center for inclusive education.

In October 2017. The Minister of National Education appointed a Team for the development of a model for the education of learners with special educational needs[[11]](#footnote-12), consisting of experts in the field of special educational needs and the application of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, including representatives of universities and non-governmental organizations, directors of schools and special centres, teachers and specialists.

The Team's task was to develop proposals for new systemic solutions or modifications to existing solutions in the area of education of children and young people with special educational needs based on functional assessment, as well as organizational and legal solutions and activities implementing systemic changes. It was assumed that the systemic solutions would be enshrined in the new Act on Support for the Child and the Pupil.

During the two-year work, the team analysed the collected recommendations and conclusions. The work of the team ended in 2019 with the development of a document entitled Model of Education for All.

Parallel to the work undertaken by the team, in order to use international experience in the work on the new model, the Polish Minister of Education applied to the European Commission for support under the Structural Reform Programme. The application was granted and since July 2018, in cooperation with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, the project entitled ‘Supporting the improvement of the quality of inclusive education in Poland’ has been implemented (hereinafter the ‘SRSP project’). Completion is scheduled for August 2021. The result of the first stage of the project was the development of recommendations concerning areas of legislative changes and priority actions in Poland[[12]](#footnote-13).

The recommendations were the basis for preparing draft assumptions for legislative changes in the second stage of the project. The product of the second stage of the project will also be to develop a strategy for the implementation of changes aimed at improving the quality of education for all learners. All activities carried out in the project assumed the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders.

Model of Education for All

The Model of Education for All defines a projected vision for the future organization of education and upbringing, which requires appropriate legal, organizational and social steps (in the area of attitudes) to become a real experience of learners, ensuring real inclusion and social integration. This document is the starting point for the preparation of changes that ultimately aim to improve the quality of education in the everyday practice of Polish schools and schools, taking into account the existing diversity of developmental and educational needs of learners. These needs may be conditioned by various reasons - they may result both from the diversity of families from which they come (economic, world-view, religious, ethnic, parents' education, etc.) and the personal development potential of the learner, including individual learning styles and characteristics, sensory capacities, physical or mental abilities, or health status.

The material is not intended as a legal proposal. The solutions proposed in the model are an invitation to a broad discussion, involving all stakeholders, on how to effectively provide favourable conditions for learning and development for all learners, respecting their individuality, taking into account the richness resulting from the diversity of their developmental and educational needs and using existing resources and examples of innovative practices, both at the level of institutional, organizational and methodological solutions.

The basis for formulation of the model assumptions was the analysis of experience gathered by the Ministry of Education over nearly ten years, recommendations, conclusions included in reports, publications and scientific studies and results of inspections, consultation meetings and pilot activities, which confirmed the expectations of representatives of various groups, including parents and learners, teachers, school head teachers, representatives of pedagogical supervision and local governments, to prepare changes that will improve the quality of education in everyday practice of Polish preschools and schools. The model also takes into account recommendations and priority activities developed in the SRSP project.

First legislation

Based on the recommendations proposed by the team and developed in the SRSP project, the first legislative changes were introduced in 2019:

* in the algorithm for the distribution of the educational part of the general subvention for 2020, an additional weight per pupil was introduced, the purpose of which was to provide the school with resources to provide assistance on the basis of the assessment made at school by teachers and specialists, without the need for an additional document issued by an external institution (psychological-pedagogical counselling centre);
* in the new standard of higher education preparing for the teaching profession[[13]](#footnote-14).

Implementation of the idea of inclusive education introduces many changes in school reality. Consequently, also in the education (preparation) of future and current staff, it is important to introduce into the curricula of studies for teachers and pedagogues (including postgraduate qualification and improvement) mandatory content in the field of inclusive education. One of the necessary areas of specialization training of future teachers must therefore be the area of content relating to the functioning of learners with diverse educational needs, including the needs and the resulting scope of support for learners and effective methods of teaching together with peers. It is therefore important to include in the curricula of studies (of various types) preparing teachers for the new realities of inclusive education, content concerning its theoretical assumptions and methodology of working with diverse groups. Some of the changes in this area were successfully introduced in 2019. At the same time, work was undertaken on further analysis of the standards.

Pilot activities on a new role of special provision

In 2019, the development of a model for supporting mainstream schools using the base and experience of special schools was launched as part of a project aimed at developing a model for the functioning of Specialized Support Centers for Inclusive Education (SCWEW)[[14]](#footnote-15), followed by its piloting[[15]](#footnote-16). At the heart of these activities, developed in cooperation with the special school community, psychological-educational counselling centres, universities, school management and supervisory bodies, was the statement by one teacher ‘It's time for SCWEW - the children are waiting!’. These words realized the need to provide patterns of assessment and design of teaching and educational activities in mainstream schools as soon as possible. The Specialized Support Centre for Inclusive Education (SCWEW) is a specialized team operating in a special kindergarten/special school/special education institution to support mainstream schools/schools in working with children and learners with diverse developmental and educational needs and to enhance the quality of inclusive education. The establishment of SCWEW is one of the recommendations of the Team for the development of a model for the education of learners with special educational needs established by the Minister of National Education (now Ministry of Education and Science) in 2017. The concept of SCWEW was developed as a result of the work of the project team of the Centre for Education Development with the participation of the Ministry of Education and Science and representatives of all stakeholders who represented kindergartens, schools, mainstream and special institutions, psychological and pedagogical counselling centres, teacher training centres, regional educational authorities, leading bodies and universities. In September 2020, cooperation with the State Fund for Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities began as part of interdepartmental activities.

The objectives of the SCWEW are:

* to prepare special schools/special schools/special education institutions for their new role in implementing inclusive education;
* increasing the effectiveness of activities for children/learners with diverse educational needs by using the potential of staff in special schools/special schools/special education institutions;
* use of resources and potential of the staff of special preschools/schools/special education institutions;
* enhancing the knowledge and competences of staff in mainstream schools and schools and providing them with support in implementing inclusive education and working with diverse groups/classes.

Substantive, human resources and in-kind support provided by SCWEW will consist of: activities adequate to diagnosed needs of schools and mainstream schools:

* transfer of knowledge and skills of specialists from special schools/schools to mainstream schools/schools in relation to functioning of groups/classes with different educational needs;
* purchase of specialist materials, teaching aids, equipment necessary for working in a differentiated classroom;
* preparation of training and educational materials, organisation of support and self-study networks;
* exchange of knowledge and experience between teachers and specialists in applying various forms and methods of work, in accordance with the diagnosed needs of the kindergarten/school.

In the school year 2021/2022, 16 pilot SCWEWs will be launched, one in each voivodship. Thirty-five special education institutions applied for the competition, indicating interest on the part of special schools and institutions in the creation of Specialized Support Centers for Inclusive Education. Each SCWEW will include at least five mainstream institutions (kindergarten, elementary school, general secondary school, technical school and vocational school). Ultimately, after a two-year pilot programme, it is planned to create a network of Specialised Centres for Supporting Inclusive Education across Poland on the basis of finally developed guidelines and recommendations (one SCWEW in each district) - that is 380 in total.

<https://www.ore.edu.pl/2021/04/czas-na-scwew-dzieci-czekaja-2/>

1.2 Policy vision, aims and objectives

**Strategic documents and their implications for inclusive education**

Increasing the quality of inclusive education, improving the accessibility of public space and services and developing social integration and inclusive education are the strategic goals of the Polish government, as defined in strategic documents and government programmes: Strategy for Responsible Development[[16]](#footnote-17), Human Capital Development Strategy to 2020 (with a perspective to 2030)[[17]](#footnote-18), Social Capital Development Strategy with a perspective to 2030[[18]](#footnote-19), National Reform Programme for the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy [[19]](#footnote-20), Government Programme Accessibility Plus [[20]](#footnote-21), Integrated Skills Strategy [[21]](#footnote-22) and Strategy for People with Disabilities 2020-2030[[22]](#footnote-23).

The solutions included in the draft of assumptions and in the Model of Education for All are a response to the adopted strategic objectives formulated in the above mentioned strategic documents.

The goal of the work undertaken by the Ministry of Education (now the Ministry of Education and Science) was to improve the quality of education in everyday practice of Polish preschools and schools, taking into account the existing diversity of developmental and educational needs of children and learners determined by various reasons - both resulting from the diversity of families from which they come (economic, philosophical, religious, ethnic, parents' education, etc.), as well as personal development potential, individual learning styles and characteristics, sensory skills, physical or mental abilities or health.

The goal formulated in this way is indicative of the shift that has taken place in the consciousness of the change preparation team and policy makers - we began work on a model of education for learners with special educational needs and are now working on a model of quality education for all learners. This is a paradigm shift that has important consequences - it requires a change in terminology, solutions throughout the education system including needs assessment and allocation of support in a way that does not stigmatize individual learners, but at the same time allows for collection of information about their individual needs, also conditioned by health or disability, as well as reformulation of the core curriculum and rules of assessment. It is necessary to prepare staff to work in the new model and methodological resources.

The foundation for these changes is to change the awareness of the entire society - parents, learners, school employees, local government and ministry employees, and policy makers. This process takes time, but it must be supported.

2. Implementation

2.1 Dates/timescale of developments

The recommendations developed within the draft SRSP and the draft assumptions were subjected to public consultations conducted in the form of workshops, information and consultation meetings and an online survey. Two rounds of consultations of the draft SRSP assumptions were attended by a total of over 1,300 people.

A total of 450 people took part in the first stage of the project. The development of recommendations was preceded by workshops with representatives of the education system: parents, principals, teachers and specialists working in various units of the education system, both mainstream, inclusive and special, universities. This workshop took place in July 2018 and was attended by 62 people. The draft recommendations were discussed during workshops held in October 2018 for representatives of local governments (43 people) and in November 2018 for representatives of units of the educational system, parents, learners, representatives of government and local administration and representatives of central agencies (90 people). 65 people took part in the consultations via an online survey prepared by the Ministry of Education, and in the conference summarizing the project in March 2019. - 206 people.

The second stage of the project was devoted to the development of draft assumptions for legislative changes based on the recommendations prepared in the first stage. The preliminary version of the draft assumptions was subjected to extensive consultations. In February 2020, three "live" meetings were held in Lublin, Kraków and Katowice. In the period from October to December 2020, due to limitations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, 9 on-line meetings were organized for the following voivodships: Dolnośląskie, Pomorskie, Wielkopolskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Podlaskie, Łódzkie, Podkarpackie, Zachodniopomorskie and Mazowieckie. In addition, a meeting for school and kindergarten learners was organized in December 2020. Stationary meetings were attended by 112 people. More than 550 people participated in the online meetings and 120 people participated in the meeting with learners. In addition, the draft assumptions and MEW were consulted through an online survey, which was completed by a total of 1,315 people. MEW was also sent to over 400 NGOs for consultation.

Consultation meetings in the second stage of the project were planned in differentiated groups. The workshops were jointly attended by teachers, parents, principals, older learners (learners), and representatives of leading authorities. The open discussion on the assumptions of the Model of Education for All yielded many constructive conclusions that were used in the implementation of the theoretical concept in the documents of educational law being prepared.

The most important areas for reflection according to workshop participants are:

* limitation or lack of access to appropriate therapeutic activities and therapists,
* limited or no access to qualified teachers,
* marginalization of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools,
* removal of mechanisms from the system that support low quality,
* inappropriate use of legal solutions,
* ensuring an adequate level of funding.

The workshops for children and learners (from pre-school to secondary education) were very interesting. Younger learners pointed out important elements of necessary changes at school:

* need to build general acceptance of the proposed solutions,
* change in teachers' attitudes,
* preparation of the whole school community - social sensitivity, relationships,
* need to employ assistants and specialists in schools,
* need to adapt textbooks, assessment and a whole school organization to diverse groups.

The young people from secondary schools were positive about the assumptions of inclusive education, but they perceive certain threats:

* possible decrease in the quality of education,
* large costs of implementing changes,
* privileged way of assessing learners with special needs,
* difficulties in implementing inclusive education in all schools and fields of study,
* need to change the rules of assessment, development of teaching aids,
* low social awareness and preparation of the school community for the new reality.

Systematic meetings (at least one per month) for local governments running educational institutions and for parents of learners with special educational needs turned out to be very important partners in the discussion and development of implementation solutions for the model of education for all. These meetings are very valuable, but it should be pointed out that they are also very absorbing. Ministry staff and external experts prepare for each of them together. Then they conduct a meeting that lasts several hours, prepare the minutes and answer any questions that arise. These meetings, based on mutual listening and dialogue, help all interested parties to understand the implemented changes and care for their high quality.

In the case of meetings with local governments, the following were invited to cooperate:

* Commission for Education and Media of the Union of Polish Metropolises <https://www.metropolie.pl/pl/>
* Union of Polish Districts <https://www.zpp.pl/>

In the preparation of legal solutions, the Ministry of Education and Science cooperates with the Ministry of Family and Social Policy and the Ministry of Health. The cooperation takes place in the form of on-line meetings and giving opinions on working documents.

Important activities of the Ministry of Education aimed at increasing awareness of the assumptions of inclusive education, exchange of knowledge and experience in the implementation of these assumptions in practice, dissemination of effective practices and strengthening inter-ministerial cooperation were:

1. preparation of a tab on the Ministry's website dedicated to inclusive education and an animated advertising spot: <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/edukacja-wlaczajaca>
2. organizing national conferences with the participation of foreign guests:

* March 2019 - conference summarizing the first stage of the projects of the Prime Minister's Office, during which recommendations for legislative solutions and priority actions were presented; link to the conference: <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/edukacja-wlaczajaca-zapowiedz>
* October 2019 - Conference entitled Inclusive education - from assumptions to practice; link: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/frse_pl/albums/72157711681231068>
* March 2020 - international conference co-organized with ministries: Ministry of Family and Social Policy, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy titled Building a cross-sector coalition for early childhood development support and family support; link to conference information: <https://www.ore.edu.pl/2020/09/konferencjawwr/> ; links to lectures: <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/wczesne-wspomaganie-rozwoju-dziecka-pierwszy-dzien-konferencji> (first day) <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/konferencja-wczesne-wspomaganie-rozwoju> (second day).
* December 2020:
* international online conference co-organized with the Ministry of Higher Education and Science entitled ‘A school accessible for all learners. Preparing Staff for Inclusive Education - Challenges, Opportunities, Barriers’; link to the conference: <https://kwalifikacje.edu.pl/school-accessible/?lang=en>
* online conference ‘Indicators of inclusive education - old dilemmas, new experiences’; link: <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/konferencja-on-line-wskazniki-edukacji-wlaczajacej--dawne-dylematy-nowe-doswiadczenia--zapraszamy>

1. preparation of a scientific publication entitled Inclusive education in kindergarten and school; link to the publication: <http://czytelnia.frse.org.pl/media/Edukacja_online.pdf>
2. cooperation with universities - implementation of tasks in the field of teaching commissioned by the Minister of Education and Science:

* conducting research on inclusive practice in elementary school (project implemented by the University of Silesia in Katowice in 2020): <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/dobre-praktyki-w-edukacji-wlaczajacej>

The main aim of the research conducted within the project was to identify and consider:

* school practice, with particular emphasis on good practices of inclusive education,
* the opinions of headmasters, teachers, specialists, non-educational staff at schools, parents, students and representatives of local authorities on the conditions for high quality inclusive education, indicators of effectiveness and barriers to the implementation of practices in the field of inclusive education.

The research was carried out using the survey technique and focus discussions.

The data was collected based on:

* a preliminary questionnaire surveying the description of school practice in selected areas of inclusive education (2548 primary schools provided answers),
* an extended questionnaire on school practice (40 primary schools actively implementing selected activities to improve the quality of education for all learners, qualified on the basis of qualitative indicators),
* 20 focus discussions (representatives of 40 schools: headmasters, teachers, specialists, non-teaching staff, learners, representatives of local government units).
* development and piloting of standards concerning early childhood development support and family support (a project implemented by the Academy of Special Education in Warsaw in 2021);
* research on the practice of integrated schools and units (a project implemented by the University of Warsaw in 2021);

1. cooperation with non-governmental organizations:

* Development of educational and exercise materials in an easy-to-read and understand version, guidelines for the preparation of such materials by teachers, and recommendations for actions to improve access to information in the educational process (project implemented by the Polish Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in 2020-2021); <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/konferencja-czytam-i-wiem--tekst-latwy-do-czytania-i-zrozumienia-w-szkole>

At the same time, a number of activities are being carried out aimed at preparing staff, resources, developing standards for an accessible school.

In 2019-2023, within the framework of the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014 - 2020, ‘Accessible School’ projects are implemented, which are a pilot of the measure ‘School without barriers’ in the Accessibility Plus Programme (<https://www.dostepnaszkola.info/projekt/>; <https://rarr.rzeszow.pl/projekty/projekt-dostepna-szkola/#dostepna-szkola-o-projekcie>). The aim of the projects implemented by NGOs is to develop an Accessible School Model that will set standards in the areas of architectural, technical, educational and social accessibility, as well as school organization and procedures and test it in 150 schools across Poland. 40 million PLN has been earmarked for this purpose and will be provided in the form of grants.

Within the framework of a project commissioned by the Ministry of National Education by the University of Silesia, tools for self-evaluation of early inclusive education, school work and review of inclusive education financing policy were validated. The tools will be made available on the Integrated Educational Platform: <https://zpe.gov.pl/>.

The Ministry has commissioned the publication of a series of publications on inclusive education addressed primarily to headmasters of schools and schools, teachers, pedagogues and school psychologists, as well as other persons involved in educational activities. The brochures constitute a comprehensive source of up-to-date knowledge on the legal basis and methods of implementing inclusion in education, drawing attention to the need for cooperation between educational institutions and parents of learners with special educational needs (SEN) as well as psychological and pedagogical counselling centres. These materials comprehensively present the idea of inclusive education, the implementation of which should involve, inter alia, creating conditions for learners - including those with SEN - to develop in a comprehensive manner and achieve success in learning. In each of the notebooks the most important guidelines, examples of good practice and literature that is worth referring to are indicated: <https://www.ore.edu.pl/2019/09/edukacja-wlaczajaca-seria-publikacji/>

Currently, as part of the SCWEW pilot project, workshop scenarios are being prepared to prepare teachers for work in inclusive education.

In 2021, under the programme Knowledge, Education, Development, a competition was launched under the name: Improving access to educational services for learners with special educational needs, including disabilities.

The purpose of this competition is to increase the knowledge of education staff on the subject of inclusive education. The competition consists in the implementation of training and counselling on inclusive education, which will be conducted and/or substantively coordinated by trainers, i.e. persons prepared under the non-competition project of the Centre for Education Development ‘Learner with special educational needs - development of a training and counselling model’. Training will be conducted by the beneficiary in accordance with the training curricula and training materials developed in the framework of the above-mentioned project: <https://efs.mein.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Og%C3%B3lne-informacje-o-konkursie-i-kryteria-wyboru.pdf>

Activities carried out under this competition are addressed to teachers already working in schools and are intended to raise their competence in the field of inclusive education.

In cooperation with the schools REA's offices that perform content-related supervision functions, presentations were prepared to disseminate the existing good practices in mainstream schools. These were presented at provincial meetings as part of the dissemination of inclusive education. E.g.:<https://www.kuratorium.waw.pl/pl/nadzor-pedagogiczny/wspomaganie/wspomaganie-dobre-prak/6026,PRZYKLADY-DOBRYCH-PRAKTYK-Szkola-Podstawowa-nr-3-im-Kornela-Makuszynskiego-w-Plo.html>

2.2 Steps taken in implementation

A very important element is the implementation of theoretical concepts into educational practice. In Poland, formal provisions in educational law recognising the right to open education for every child appeared in the Act on the Education System of 7 September 1991, referring among other things to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by Poland. In the same year, the right of parents of children with disabilities to decide where their child is educated was guaranteed. Article 1, paragraph 5 of the Act clearly indicated that children and young people with disabilities and social maladjustment can be educated at all types of schools in accordance with their individual developmental and educational needs and predispositions. This recognition and equalization of the rights of all children has resulted in the emergence of new responsibilities in mainstream schools, for which they have not been prepared socially. The provisions introduced often had an organizational dimension that, for many years, in a sense limited education for all in a formal and legal dimension.

Current educational policy in the field of inclusive education tries to draw on proven educational models described on the basis of scientific research results. By organizing thematic meetings on the problems reported early, it also tries to respond to contemporary expectations of society and create regulations to meet the educational needs of all subjects. The educational policy should, therefore, focus on decisions concerning "generally applicable educational programs (basis of general education), introduction of educational standards to solve the problems of education and upbringing and to evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency, the shaping of the school system, its network and structures, issues of compulsory education and the number of hours for the realization of educational programs, standards of qualification, employment and working time of teachers, interest in international results of measurements of school achievements, financing education and its infrastructure". Citizens, on the other hand, should have the opportunity to create public opinion and lobby for necessary changes or reforms, or point out irregularities and necessary legislative actions - this is what all the consultative activities serve. Their assumption is the need to build public reflection including not only the educational context of the phenomenon of inclusion, aimed at permanent change of social attitudes based on equality, respect and tolerance for others, but also the inclusion of this process in the acts of educational law.

The next steps of stakeholder inclusion are aimed at building responsibility for the implementation of the idea of education open to the needs of each child/learner in all stakeholder groups in relation to the reflective design of the educational path.

2.3 Key participants/partnerships

* Directors of schools, schools and educational system institutions - mainstream, integrative and special
* Teachers and specialists
* Learners
* Representatives from universities
* National Development Council of the President of Poland
* Office of the Children's Rights Ombudsman
* Office of the Ombudsman for Civil Rights Protection
* Ministry of Health
* Ministry of the Family and Social Policy
* Ministry of Science and Higher Education (from 2020 is the one Ministry of Education and Science)
* Ministry of the Interior and Administration
* Ministry of Culture and National Heritage
* Ministry of Justice
* Education Superintendents
* Representatives of local government corporations: Association of Polish Cities, Union of Rural Communes, Union of Polish Metropolises
* Central Examination Commission
* Institute of Educational Research
* Center for Education Development

3. Development

3.1 Main outcomes – impact/added value for different stakeholder groups

Cooperation in the project with representatives of the Agency, the European Commission and other member states who have taken up similar challenges has enabled us to look at the conditions for inclusive education from a broader perspective. It has enriched our work with new areas and provided us with both inspiration and arguments for the need for change.

The participation of international experts undoubtedly raised the status of the project and encouraged a wider range of social partners in our country to participate in its activities.

The key factor seems to be the preparation of a coherent, comprehensive vision of change, but equally important is cooperation with various participants in the process, so as to build a coalition around this change. It is very important to convince key decision makers, but it is equally important to win over parents, learners and teachers to the change. The latter group seems to be the most difficult partner, as they fear that the burden of implementation of the reform at school and classroom level will fall on them. Therefore, care should be taken to provide supporting instruments that increase the resources of the school and ensure that the tasks of inclusive education are carried out by various actors, not only teachers. Structural and organisational changes - changes in tasks that entail changes in working conditions - are the most emotional. Some changes are not popular, as they involve a change of the current status quo, a need to leave the comfort zone (e.g. change of the model of providing support from the individual formula in the office to the community model, support during routine daily activities, during educational activities).  In our case, the most successful meetings were those attended by representatives of the Ministry and international and national experts, during which we explained the assumptions, answered questions and debunked misunderstandings. However, this requires effort and must be anticipated in the planning of activities.

The importance of inclusive education was emphasised at government level. The Minister acts as the Government Plenipotentiary for supporting the upbringing function of schools and institutions, inclusive education and vocational training. Our department has been renamed as the Department of Upbringing and Inclusive Education, and our budget for activities related to ensuring quality inclusive education has been increased. This has allowed us to initiate many valuable activities: research into inclusive practice, development and promoting self-reflection tools and guides. Objectives relating to inclusive education have been included in recent government documents - the Integrated Skills Strategy 2030 and the Strategy for People with Disabilities 2021-2030.

What seems to be a main outcome is that we have started a national discussion on what inclusive education is and what does it mean a quality in inclusive education. We have been confronted with different opinions, fears and concerns, also fuelled by problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with the support of the EC and the Agency, we have not wavered from the challenge and are currently working on drafting legislative changes. We are also taking consistent action to clarify concerns and convince the unconvinced. It helps us - as Ministry of Education and Science team working on the changes - to know that making changes everywhere has not been an easy process and has taken time.

3.2 Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned

The work in the SRSP project gave an opportunity to look on the educational system as well as other sectors involved in supporting learners and their families in the light of the quality education for all assumptions.

It was an opportunity for in-depth reflection on whether existing legislation and policies really take into account the diverse needs of learners, where there are the gaps. We realised as well how much work is already being done in this area in our country, however they are dispersed, there is no coordinating entity for all activities

Information was obtained from various sources, referring to various thematic areas related to the quality of education. The great support in this work was the SRSP project work aimed on the improvement of the quality of inclusive education in Poland. One of the deliverables was the analysis how in the Polish educational system the recommendations on inclusive education developed by the European Agency’s work are reflected in the legislation and policy.

However still the main challenge during the preparation of the Polish input is gathering the relevant data on inclusive education system - in some areas (e.g. participation, discrimination practices) there are no explicit data such as reviews, analysis, research.

This experience has shown that our current system of data collection needs to be reviewed and supplemented. The process of systematic work on collecting and analysing data on inclusive education has been initiated in Poland. However, we are aware that a lot of work and thought is still needed to make this system sustainable, effective and efficient.

The second most important lesson was that we have to work on the coordination of the interdepartmental works on supporting learners and their families during the learning process.

Still the challenge is the terminology to understand what we mean talking on quality in education, inclusion, educational needs. Still for some groups is a problem not using the term ‘special education needs’.

The experience gained during the consultation activities shows that a more effective form were the information and consultation meetings, both those that were organized in-live and on-line. This is because they allowed interaction, clarification of doubts and questions from the participants. Participants valued the opportunity to hear from international experts and dialogue with ministry representatives.

While the online surveys reached more people, some responses indicated that respondents did not always understand the model. When indicating that they did not agree with the model's assumptions, they justified their disagreement by saying that this is not how the education system works at present, and so they related this description to the current functioning of the system, not the planned one.

The experiences from the consultations show also a certain incoherence of expectations of the stakeholders who, on the one hand, expect that the planned changes should be consulted already at the stage of drafting the assumptions, while on the other hand, they express frustration during consultations that the assumptions are formulated on too high a level of generality and in order to give an opinion it is necessary to present in detail how the assumptions will be realized in the law, when they will be introduced, etc.

A big minus was the lack of a wide information campaign that would support public consultations of the draft assumptions and the model of education for all. This would have avoided many misunderstandings in understanding the intentions of the model, including those related to the new role of special institutions in the system.

3.3 Evaluation and plans to sustain/further develop the work.

We are currently finalizing the draft SRSP. Four workshop sessions will be held in July with representatives from the agency's member countries: Malta, Serbia and Greece, which will result in the development of an implementation strategy for the proposed legislative changes.

We have also undertaken work on developing a draft law on support for children, individuals and families.

1. In 2015, more than 143,000 people under the age of 18 used mental health services, source: the Children Count Report 2017, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. According to data from the Educational Information System. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Data from the Office of Persons with Disabilities (2019): <http://www.niepelnosprawni.gov.pl/index.php?c=page&id=80&print=1>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. According to date from the Education Information System on 30.09.2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Sochańska-Kawiecka, M., Makowska-Belta, E., Milczarek, D., Morysińska, A., Zielińska, D. A. (2015), [*Włączający system edukacji i rynku pracy – rekomendacje dla polityki publicznej*](http://eduentuzjasci.pl/images/stories/publikacje/ibe-raport-wlaczajcy-system-edukacji-i-rynku-pracy-rekomendacje-dla-polityki-publicznej.pdf), Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, Warszawa. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Among others Supreme Audit Office audits: [*Realizacja zadań narodowego programu ochrony zdrowia psychicznego*](https://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,12692,vp,15090.pdf), (2016), [*Kształcenie uczniów z niepełnosprawnościami*](https://www.nik.gov.pl/aktualnosci/nik-o-ksztalceniu-uczniow-z-niepelnosprawnosciami-2017.html) (2017), [*Przygotowanie do wykonywania zawodu nauczyciela. Informacja o wynikach kontroli*](https://www.nik.gov.pl/aktualnosci/nik-o-przygotowaniu-do-zawodu-nauczyciela.html) (2017), [*Wspieranie kształcenia specjalnego uczniów z niepełnosprawnościami w ogólnodostępnych szkołach i przedszkolach*](https://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,16353,vp,18878.pdf) (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Among other recommendations, the Congress of People with Disabilities ‘For Independent Life’ (2017), [Uchwała uczestniczek i uczestników IV Kongresu Osób z Niepełnosprawnościami](http://konwencja.org/uchwala-uczestniczek-i-uczestnikow-iv-kongresu-osob-z-niepelnosprawnosciami/) (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. E.g. workshops and meetings organised within the project entitled Supporting the improvement of quality of inclusive education in Poland. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. It is one, among mainstream and special, of the form of special education in Poland. See more: *The System of Education in Poland 2020* <https://eurydice.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-system-of-education-in-poland_online_new.pdf>, p.93. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. B. Jachimczak, Gotowość nauczycieli do pracy z uczniem o specjalnych potrzebach edukacyjnych. [w:] I. Chrzanowska, B. Jachimczak (red.), Miejsce Innego w naukach o wychowaniu. Wyzwania praktyki. Wyd. SATORI Druk, Łódź, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/powolanie-zespolu-do-spraw-opracowania-modelu-ksztalcenia-uczniow-ze-specjalnymi-potrzebami-edukacyjnymi> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/projekt-realizowany-w-ramach-program-wsparcia-reform-strukturalnych>. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20190001450/O/D20191450.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. <https://www.ore.edu.pl/2019/09/o-projekcie-scwew/> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. <https://www.ore.edu.pl/2020/01/pilotazowe-wdrozenie-modelu-specjalistycznych-centrow-wspierajacych-edukacje-wlaczajaca-scwew/> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. <https://www.gov.pl/web/fundusze-regiony/informacje-o-strategii-na-rzecz-odpowiedzialnego-rozwoju> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. <https://www.gov.pl/web/rozwoj-praca-technologia/strategia-rozwoju-kapitalu-ludzkiego-2030> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. <https://www.gov.pl/web/rozwoj-praca-technologia/strategia-rozwoju-kapitalu-ludzkiego-2030> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. <https://www.gov.pl/web/rozwoj-praca-technologia/krajowy-program-reform> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. <https://www.funduszeeuropejskie.gov.pl/strony/o-funduszach/fundusze-europejskie-bez-barier/dostepnosc-plus/o-programie/> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/zintegrowana-strategia-umiejetnosci-2030-czesc-szczegolowa--dokument-przyjety-przez-rade-ministrow> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. <http://niepelnosprawni.gov.pl/a,1173,pierwsza-polska-strategia-na-rzecz-osob-z-niepelnosprawnosciami> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)