

Recommendations for the role of learning and support assistants in inclusive education in Slovakia

<p>Financial Framework of the service</p>	<p>There is no clear legal framework in Slovakia school or educational legislation to ensure the individual right of every child to have a good education. Funds for Teacher Assistants are allocated for schools till the end of 30rd September and schools receive the support at the beginning of January next calendar year. There are strong need to change dates of funds` allocation more convenient for school year (not calendar). Funds (till now only from Ministry of Education, Sports, Sciences and Research of Slovak Republic) cover only 48% of overall requests from schools.</p>
<p>Organization/Admin of the service</p>	<p>School assistance is now organised mostly by schools or, in few cases, by private initiatives (NGOs or parents). If NGOs provide school assistance there is a problem within the within the hierarchy of educational institutions. There are two kind of problems, need to be discuss - finance and funding of this service and how to include School assistance into schools` hierarchy in such a way, in order to maintain the independence of the service and to allow the assistant to advocate the individual right to participate in every aspect of school life of every child (those with special needs included).</p>
<p>Cooperation of the assistant with other staff</p>	<p>In Slovakia, we miss the methodological support for schools, especially focused on educational process, social skills and intermediation of communication processes between children, parents, teachers, external and internal supporters etc. and should be part of the school community. Responsible authorities (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of Slovak Republic, dept. of Education of higher territorial units, dept. of Education of municipalities as the most usual founder of schools).</p> <p>There is a need for creation of circle of friends in the class and also in-between the teacher, teacher assistant and parents of a child in need.</p> <p>There is a commission of UN CRPD in Slovakia there, who are responsible for covering and independent monitoring of that the individual right of a child to fully participate in school life is threatened, and all parents, teachers, assistants can ask for help and she has the power to mediate between opposing parties.</p>

Improving Assistance in Inclusive Educational Settings

Target group of the assistants	There are a lot of children with special needs, mostly with diagnosis of ADHD, Down syndrome, Spina Bifida/Hydrocephalus, autism, learning and behavioural disorders. The help of school assistants should be provided along the all life-span, from early childhood to University. Support should be given to all of the children in the classroom, not only to those, who need help because of their disabilities, in order to strengthen the health power of a class-solidarity.
Legal status	There is a need of international law documents with clear definitions and complex legal framework at EU and UN level in accordance with UN CRPD, which will be bounding for Slovakia to adopt inclusive education as a standard for equal opportunities for education and next inclusive living of each child with special need. Next, local legislation should be discussed with public and local policy makers about the most convenient application of inclusive education into the regional education developmental plans.
Qualification requirements	University courses of pedagogical sciences should be extended by inclusive education standards. Qualification criteria at national level should be in accordance with EU recommendation level regarding inclusive education (now is still missing). There is a need for higher education and more specific courses for practice of inclusive education for school assistants in the practice now. The theory and the practice (especially educational problem, cooperation in the school hierarchy, identification with the role of teacher assistant and cooperation with a teacher, removing the rigid view of teachers on the presence of a teacher assistant in the classroom as a control and obstacle etc.) should be interlinks in order to create the best specialisation courses of inclusive education.
Aims and tasks	There are more criteria need to be taken into account in order to create complex system of aims and tasks of school assistancy. First of all, is legal status and adoption of national policy with inclusive education included. Then needed methodological support and system of higher education for school assistants is focused on pedagogical and learning tasks, socialisation of children and development of their social skills, personal development of each child, its ability for self-advocation should be learned and also assistance for all basic physical and mental needs.
Access to information	Teacher assistants, directors of schools and parents should have sufficient info about inclusive education including introduction of teachers and teacher assistants to children and parents.



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Hierarchy and Status	School assistants through their representative should participate not only in the learning process, but should be included into board of school also with special pedagogue and teachers, students, parents and friends of school.
Responsibilities	School assistants are like co-teachers, but teacher has the main responsibility over the educational process all the time. The school law should precise define the responsibilities and qualification criteria for school assistants during learning process, but also in the activities after lessons, organised inside the school (hobbies, sports, competitions etc.). The main mission of school assistants should be to help directly in the learning process based on the individual approach to the pupils.
Continuing professional development and career progressive	Requirement a change in the overall paradigm in education with two attributes: -every child can develop its individual potential and together with the others - to create a system of implementation of innovative approaches to the training for teachers and their practise According to these remarks school assistance should have standardised qualification and training program of higher education and in accordance with it also stable wages.
Support for assistants	There should be a better support of external and internal colleagues and professionals of schools, such as school psychologists, special pedagogues, social service providers, social and educational public authorities, supervisors from Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of Slovak Republic, the same as from dept. of education of Higher territorial units as well as from municipalities and of course, also from public.
Job security and contractual situation	Assistants should have more stable contracts as nowadays in order to become school assistance as permanent employment for a school assistant, because only by this way she/he is motivated to work on his/her professional and career development. Also the teacher's assistant's funding from non-normative to normative funding should be changed.



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profile of workforce	<p>There are more needs in order to improve inclusive education in Slovakia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- to unify the role of teacher assistant, school assistant and personal assistant- to employ trained teachers who can work in inclusive classroom- to ensure the individual needs of pupils with disability, but also another group of children with special educational needs as children from socially disadvantaged families (poor, dysfunctional, Romas, immigrants etc.) and also talented and gifted children- to reduce number of pupils in classes- to increase number of teachers in schools/classes.
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