

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

Financial Framework of the service	<p>There has to be a strong and clear legal framework in Bulgaria to ensure the individual right of every child to have a quality education following Art. 24 of the UN CRPD. Therefore, resources for assistance services, whether from national or regional budgets, have to be allocated so that every child who needs assistance can have access to it in every educational institution.</p> <p>The resources needed for every child should be set up by an independent institution in the form of administrative advices. In addition to the financial resources, assistants of individuals with special educational needs have to be allocated extra time for preparation, supervision, participation at conferences and other events organised at the educational institutions, etc. The overall resources for every educational institution should be comprised of the individual resources needed for all children (based on administrative advices) and should be used in an autonomous and flexible way, according to the needs of the community in general and the needs of every child in particular. This will guarantee that the character of the assistance service for children with special needs can develop analogue to the development of the child (e.g. from direct support at the beginning to enabling social interaction through working with all children in class). Furthermore, the allocation of the resources within an educational institution should be set up in a participative way involving all stakeholders (parents, children, teachers, assistants).</p>
Organization/Admin of the service	<p>The service of assistance should be organised so that it ensures, on one hand, that the position of assistants within the hierarchy of educational institutions enables the independence of the service and allows the assistants to participate in every aspect of the supported child's educational process. On the other hand, it is very important that the cooperation of teaching and non-teaching staff (especially assistants of children with disabilities regardless of their job contract) is well established. Assistants should come from an organisation outside of the educational setting (e.g. they could be employed by a social service provider) to maintain the independence of the service. At the same time, they should be allowed to participate in every aspect of the educational process of all children with special needs. A clearer setting of responsibilities between the employer/social service provider of assistants and the educational institution board is needed as well.</p>



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Cooperation of the assistant with other staff	<p>Assistants should be included in all relevant communication processes between individuals with special needs, parents, teachers, external and internal supporters, etc., and form part of their communities.</p> <p>Within the educational settings, they should be regarded as part of the learning environment and work with all teaching and non-teaching staff as a team because everyone, according to their role, is equally important.</p> <p>If there is any suspicion that the individual right of a child to fully participate in the educational process is threatened, independent monitoring boards (e.g. local arbitration committees following Art. 33 of the UN CRPD) should be installed, so that parents, teachers, assistants can ask for help and use them as a mediator between opposing parties. The members of such boards should represent the relevant stakeholders of an inclusive educational system, namely parents, teachers, assistants, persons with disabilities, etc.</p>
Target group of the assistants	<p>Assistants should work with children and young adults with disabilities from the age of 0 until they graduate from university.</p> <p>Furthermore, they should see themselves as responsible for all individuals in class according to their needs, not only for those with special educational needs.</p>
Legal status	<p>There is a need of a strong, clear legal framework at both EU and national levels, consistent with the UN CRPD and defining the role of assistance services (performance description) within an inclusive educational system as well as clearly articulating the necessity to establish and maintain assistance services throughout all levels of education, from pre-school to university.</p>
Qualification requirements	<p>Recommendations for qualification standards according to the EQF criteria analogue to defining the legal status should be set at a European level. As a result, Bulgaria should adopt these standards according to the EU recommendations and ensure that trainings for active and future assistants are available and affordable.</p>
Aims and tasks	<p>The aims and tasks of assistants should be in accordance with the relevant qualification standards as well as with the assistants' legal status.</p> <p>1) pedagogical/learning support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - educational support in class in accordance with the individual learning needs/plans - focus on learning support instead of tasks completion - support of the individual to perform the tasks set up by the teacher in the study plan - development of study materials in cooperation with teachers



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	<p>2) personal assistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - medical support - hygienic support - safety and orientation support - feeding support - emotional regulation - personal programmes in cooperation with therapists <p>3) social/emotional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - supporting independence - enabling/structuring social interaction to make and keep friends - implementing graduated approaches to facilitate playing interaction - supporting anti-bullying approaches - establishing a position of a valued member of the educational environment <p>4) advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being an ally - encouraging other pupils to act as allies - supporting children with special needs to advocate for themselves
<p>Access to information</p>	<p>Assistants should have access to all information relevant to any educational, personal and social matters about the children with special educational needs in class (under consideration of confidentiality). The educational institutions should proactively inform and sensitise the community about different forms of disabilities, inclusive approaches and the work of assistants.</p>
<p>Hierarchy and Status</p>	<p>Assistants should be part of the educational community and be involved in the decision-making process regarding matters of the educational development of individuals with special needs.</p>
<p>Responsibilities</p>	<p>The responsibilities of assistants should be legally regulated and in accordance with their qualification. Quality standards should be set. Assistants should support all education related activities, including leisure activities, offered and organised by the educational institutions. However, the responsibility for organising the teaching process should remain in the hands of the teachers and assistants should only be providing learning support to the individuals with special needs.</p>



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<p>Continuing professional development and career progression</p>	<p>Specialised training and further professional development of assistants are necessary, and therefore, career progression models should be developed. Assistants should have the chance to obtain a specialised qualification. The educational system needs to include and provide vocational education and training for assistants. The salary of assistants should correspond to their legal status, qualification profile, professional duties and responsibilities.</p>
<p>Support for assistants</p>	<p>Assistants should be supported by all parties involved, e.g. by educational institutions, social service providers, etc. Their career development needs are to be supported by a proper supervision, coaching, critical thinking, reflection, monitoring, exchange of experience, etc.</p>
<p>Job security and contractual situation</p>	<p>Assistants should be provided with stable and fair working conditions as well as with contracts of employment in accordance with the national employment law. Employers offering assistance services should have clear and predictable work ethics in order to establish long-term working relations with their employees and offer them professional development and career progression opportunities. In the best case, long-term relationships between the assistants and the educational communities they work in should be established.</p>
<p>Profile of workforce</p>	<p>Social service providers as well as institutions offering trainings for assistants need to strengthen their efforts in increasing the diversity within their staff/target group according to the local social profile. More persons with disabilities as well as other groups threatened by exclusion (e.g. roma people) should have the possibility to work as assistants. The gender and age ratio of assistants should also be balanced as much as possible.</p>

