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Status – quo Analysis Reports

Activity 1 of the



Project:

Equal Access through Service Learning for Persons with Disabilities

Skopje, 2012

Note: The texts herein, in general, are included as originally submitted by the authors, i.e. they were not subject to contextual changes.

Status – quo Analysis Reports

Activity 1 of the Project:

Equal Access through Service Learning for Persons with Disabilities

Report of the accessibility of the Higher Education institutions in Skopje, R. Macedonia

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1. Primary and secondary education of people with disabilities in Southeastern Europe

Possibilities and practical policies of education for people with disabilities in the region of Southeastern Europe reflect the political conditions and changes in the approach to human rights in the region during the last decades. Although certain steps have been made, primarily in creating a legal framework for inclusive education, it still is not available to young people with disabilities, while means and mechanisms of practical implementation, as well as the quantity and quality are far behind from the majority of developed countries.

In political systems present in countries of Southeastern Europe in the last century, people with disabilities were treated as non productive, due to that fact the inclusion of children with developmental disabilities into the educational system was considered irrelevant¹ and in many cases even impossible. The education of young people with disabilities was, and mainly still is, based on principals and practice of special education², a science that has been developed in the first half of the last century in the Soviet Union, and which existed in such form in Eastern European countries with communist or socialist political system.

The biggest obstacle in education of people with disabilities is the existence of two parallel educational systems - system of special schools and regular schools. Quite often special schools were the only option for children with developmental disabilities. Plans and programs of special schools are shortened and mainly created regarding a specific type of difficulty. Children were often taken away from families and local communities and put in boarding schools where they were not encouraged to interact with children their age that had no disabilities. Options for further education after attending a special primary school were drastically minimized.

After the primary education only 30% of young people with disabilities continue their education³, usually in special high schools, which are also organized considering the type of disability or medical diagnosis. These schools, often with shortened school programs, still educate children for professions that are rarely wanted in modern economies and contemporary labor markets.

Since several years, in Republic of Macedonia, the two special schools for primary and secondary education for students with visual impairments “Dimitar Vlahov”, and for

¹ Axellson, C, Granier, P, & Adams, L. (2004). Beyond de- institutionalization: *The unsteady transition towards an enabling in South East Europe*. Disability Monitor Initiative. <http://www.disabilitymonitor-see.org/>

² Ainscow, Mel and Memmenasha Haile- Giorgis (1998). *The Education of Children with Special Needs: Barriers and Opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe*. Innocenti Occasional Papers, Economic and Special Policy Series, no. 67. Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.

³ Data obtained from the World Bank from 2004.

students with impaired hearing “Partenie Zografski” finally introduced the fourth degree, which provides access to higher education.

Also, the Law of the use of sign language (Official Gazette of Republic of Macedonia no. 105 from August 21, 2009) according to the Article 4 provides:

“ Person with hearing imparement, deaf and partly deaf person has the right to use sign language as a party or participant in proceedings before state agencies,local governments, judistical authorities, public enterprices, institutions,agencies,funds and organistations ”.

“ Person with hearing imparement, deaf and partly deaf person a right under paragraph 1 of this Article shall have the right to use sign language for other vital needs of his choice if deafness is the barrier to satisfying the needs up to 30 hours per year. The right from paragraph 1 and 2 of this article is accomplished by exercising the right to an interpreter ”.

But, in R.M is still no suffficient number of autorized sign language interpreters and the Law implementation in many cases is not applied adequately.

Disability and higher education - situation in the region of Southeastern Europe and in Republic of Macedonia

Changes that appear in labor markets all around the world appoint to the importance and role of higher education in the development of professional careers – more and more professions require academic studies (some of them even further levels). For people with disabilities higher education increases concurrency on the labor market in comparison with non-disabled persons, preparing them for new, modern professions which appear and develop during the last years, as well as the use of new technologies which can equalize the opportunities for a job well done.

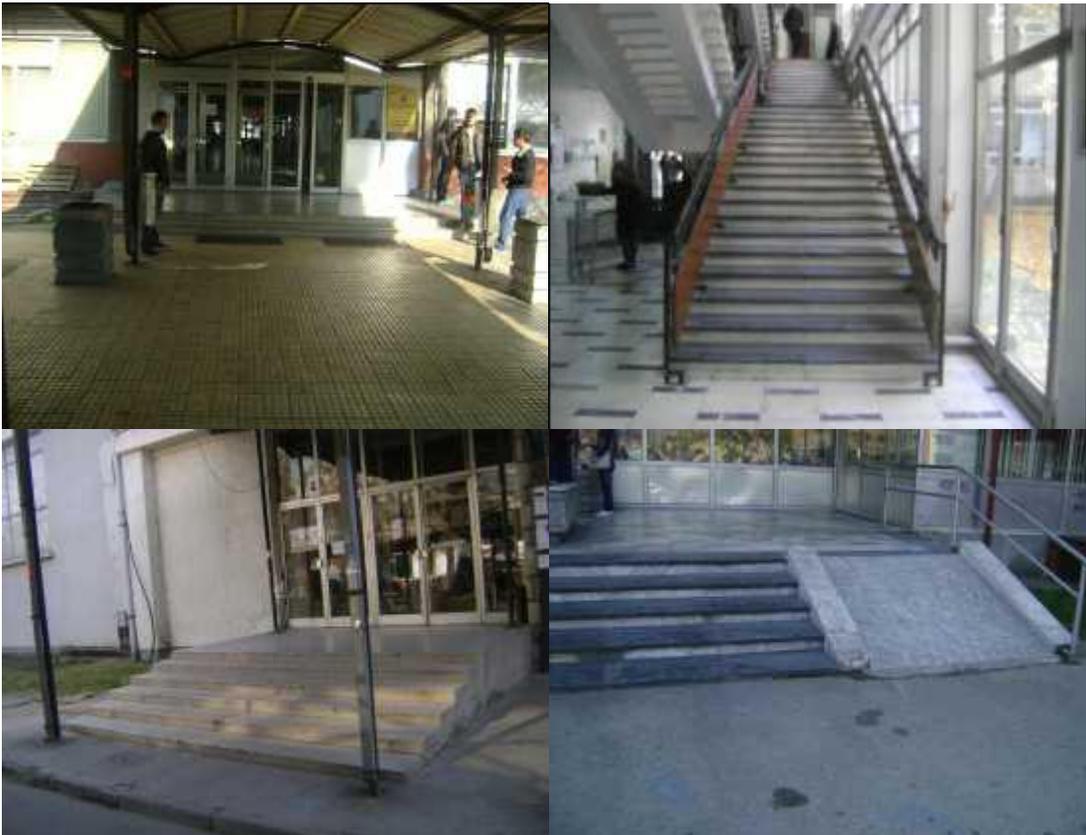
Students with disabilities in Southeastern Europe still face physical and attitude barriers which expedite their isolation and segregation: unavailable facilities and programs, lack of information and literature in available formats, lack of available transportation, personal assistance services and other support programs, as well as poor identification of certain types of disabilities, like some difficulties in the learning process. Due to these barriers, as well as the insufficient support and social interaction with colleagues, lack of support in the encirclement, occur negative effects related to possibilities of employment of people with disabilities which leads to their financial dependence to their families or the state, and increases social exclusion.

The issue of physical accessibility of certain faculties and universities will best understand if you look at the photos which ASYD made under the Status Quo analysis in the period 11-18 November 2011 in the frame of this project.

FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE AND FACULTY OF CIVIL ENGINEERING



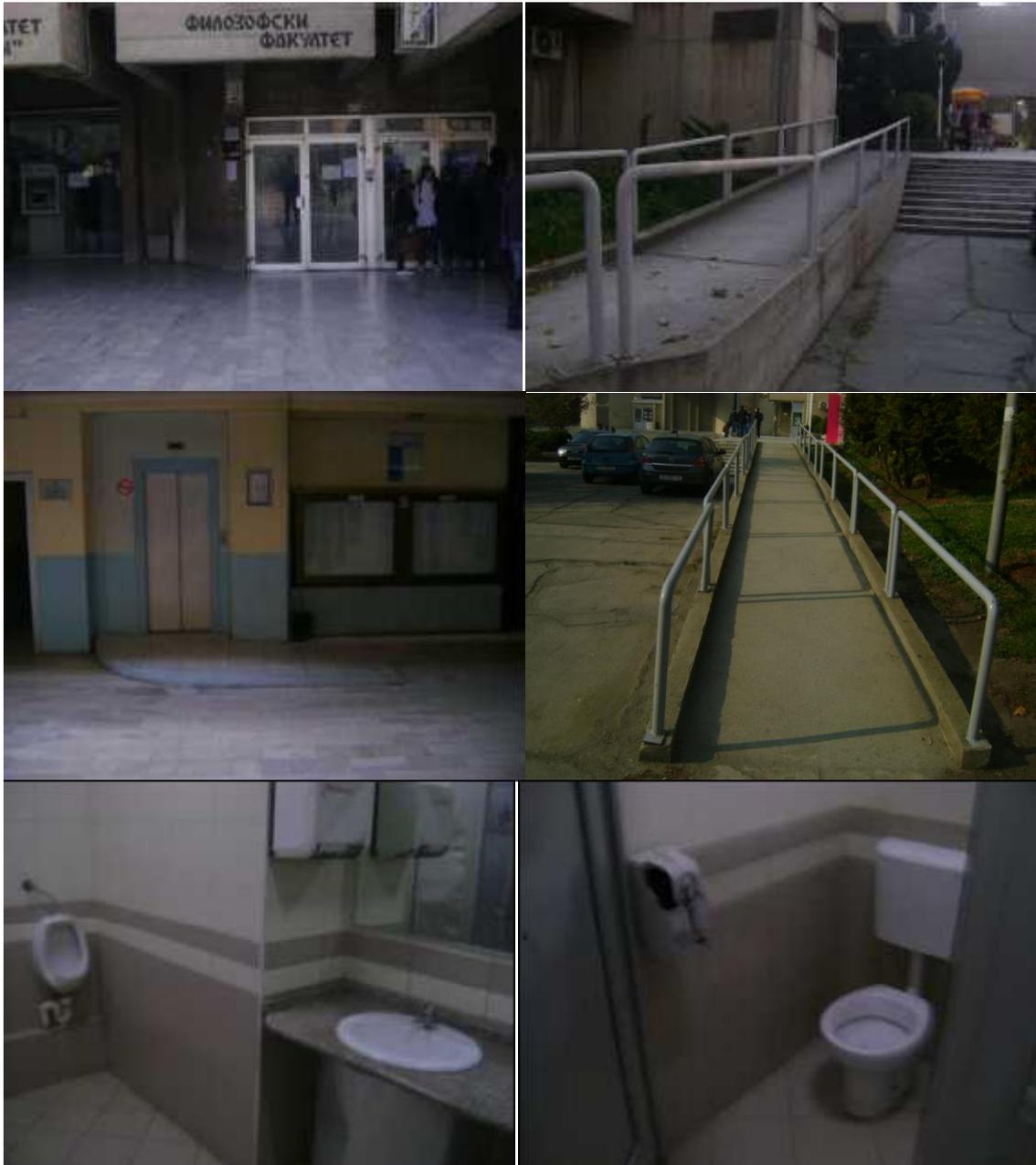
FACULTY OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING





COMPLETELY ACCECISIBLE COMPLEX OF THE FACULTIES IN BIT PAZAR –

- FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY “BLAZE KONESKI”
- FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
- FACULTY OF LAW “JUSTINIJAN THE FIRST”
- FACULTY OF ECONOMY



There is no adapted toilet on the faculties at the University Ss”Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje

Example of fully accessible complex for students with disabilities is a private University of Southeastern Europe in Tetovo



Another positive example is one regular secondary school in Skopje DETUC “Mihajlo Pupin” which is completely accessible for high school students with disability. This year one toilet in the same school will be completely accessible also.(you can see the pictures below)



But, the issue of the **availability of education** has to be perceived from multiple levels. Along with the most considered aspect of physical availability to the encirclement, it is necessary to consider the value systems on which higher education is based on as well as the standpoints of all interested parties.

Availability also includes aspects of school curriculums, programs and means (equipment and teaching aids). Despite certain progress, the physical aspect represents a key question (for example, limited access to the libraries, classrooms etc).

The curriculums and programs are unavailable because of the lack of appliance of assistive technologies, and students with disabilities can be denied access to several courses because of the statutory limitations which regulate the access to certain professions, for example medicine or pedagogy, as well as other professions which, due to prejudices towards people with disabilities, are considered as non recommendable to people with some form of disability.

Support services and assistance for students with disabilities

According to the researches of a network of partners SEEN YSD in the project `Promotion of higher inclusive education in Southeastern Europe` the barriers that students with disabilities face are:

- physically unavailable classrooms, bathrooms, canteens, gymnasiums and dorms
- lack of personal assistance services
- lack of educational materials in alternative formats, like books in electronic, audio or enlarged font formats, on Braille
- lack of computer programs for students with visual impairment
- lack of organized transportation for wheelchair users
- lack of sign language interpreters for students with hearing impairment
- lack of identification of some types of disabilities, like difficulties in the learning process
- segregation of students with disabilities in special student dorms

In many developed countries students with disabilities are actively involved in the social life of the community; they have better access to information and participate in different programs where they increase their potentials, values and creativity. The academic community supports their efforts and in that way this group feels less marginalized and more involved in all social currents. There are services for students with disabilities which procure academic and personal assistance, with the cause of equal opportunities for all students. These services help young people with disabilities to follow school curriculums with no constraints in their universities and in that way enables their equal participation in the educational process.

Due to the lack of system support, SEEN YSD partner organizations perform different services of support in their countries with a long-term aim to elevate university education, and make these services a part of university structure (financed and organized by the state).

ASYD SERVICE OFFICE AT THE FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY “BLAZE KONESKI WORKS EVERY ACADEMIC YEAR SINCE 2003 WITH FOREIGN DONORS SUPPORT. THIS YEAR WE HAVE NOT DONORS YET AND THE OFFICE IS TEMPORARY CLOSED.



Information and support in achieving different rights during studies- happens that students with disabilities are not familiar with their rights and modes of their achievement. Partner organizations provide support through informing and advising and find ways how these rights can be realized, often securing support in communication with the administration (faculty, university etc), obtaining the necessary documentation...

Information on the availability of faculties and possibilities for students with disabilities to study in such faculties- due to the interest of young people with disabilities, information are provided about the availability of faculties (often using previous experience of members), negotiations are made with faculty managements over the adjustments of some segments of the educational process- classes, practices, exams, schedules etc. Through their orderly publications (Internet presentations, mailing lists, bulletins, magazines) and via the media, partner organizations SEEN YSD inform the potentially interested young people over the possibilities for studies.

Assistance in the educational process- due to the lack of the professional service of personal assistance, partner organizations provide assistance in education (volunteers, young men in civil military service etc) which includes support while performing activities in the academic community.

At the beginning of April, 2006 - June 2007, in Republic of Macedonia, Association of students and youth with disability supported by the US Embassy and the chancellor of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, for the first time in our country we provided personal assistants for the students with a severe disability as a part of the Informative service and for the second time in Republic of Macedonia but this time with the support of the program CIVICA Mobilitas accomplished by the Center for institutional develop CIRa and financial support from the Swiss Agency for development and collaboration.



Support in acquiring student scholarships- information about the scholarships and rights how to obtain them, ensuring more favorable conditions of getting different scholarships (secured by relevant Ministries, City Administration, private sector) and aid while obtaining the necessary documentation.

Available literature- book, notes and script translations in electronic, audio or other formats, overtyping and text formatting and creating other available literature formats.

Transportation to faculties - some university centers in Southeastern Europe have special services of available public transportation for people with disabilities, while others do not have this kind of support. In almost every city in South East Europe, the public transportation is mainly unavailable, although efforts have been made, especially in the last couple of years, for this situation to meliorate. However, the capacities of these services can not satisfy all the existent needs because they have to cover a large number of users with insufficient number of vehicles. Partner organizations secure appropriate transportation for students with disabilities to classes, exams and other activities (depending on current human and technical resources and capacities).

Since 15th of March 2005, ASYD in cooperation with the City of Skopje and Public Transport Enterprise implements project for transport of students with disability from their homes to the faculties and vice versa, which helps to overcome one of their bi possibilities for regular follow up of the lectures and practical exercise.

For the first time in the city Skopje there are 3 vans functioning, that can be used by all persons with physical disability from Skopje, who have no chance because of the handicap to use the public transport) for all of those who are not in chance to use the public transport.

ASYD is providing a free year tickets for those who can use public transport by bus because from this year the new busies are completely accessible for persons who are wheelchair users.



Psycho-social support and fortifying of young people with disabilities throughout courses, trainings and workshops- include the organization of language courses and computer program courses, as well as trainings from the human rights area, models of disability approach, organizational skills (communication skills, team work, project cycle etc), psychological counseling and various others forms of work with young people with disabilities.

Support in ensuring other academic preconditions- places in student dorms, availability of student dorms, student clubs, canteens etc.

Data over the number of users of some of these support services, which the organizations of the Network carry out quite frequently, are used to determine an approximate number of students with disabilities in the universities in the region, especially in the process of planning and creating practical policies.

Legal Framework for Inclusive Higher Education in the Region of South East Europe

The analysis of legal framework for inclusive higher education in four countries in the region of South Europe: Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia include laws of higher education and anti-discriminatory laws of each country, and statutes of universities and faculties. Additionally, there were taken in consideration regulations and rights guaranteed in constitutions, other relevant laws, and different national strategies (in Serbia- The National Youth Strategy). With the commitments that the countries have taken by signing and ratifying the UN convention on rights of people with disabilities, which influence accelerated reforms in the legal framework, not only in the area of (higher) education, but also other issues concerning people with disabilities, the general impression is that significant progress has been made in comparison with existing legal solutions in the period before the start of the implementation of the project.

The analyzed documents were mostly laws of higher education of each country, with the exception of Moldova where was analyzed the Law of education. In Montenegro was analyzed the Constitution act and in Serbia the National Youth Strategy. The Statutes of universities and faculties were, in that moment, in the majority of cases fully compatible with laws of higher education, so their more detailed analysis was unnecessary. In Macedonia and Moldova, beside the existing laws, were taken in analysis the actual proposals for changes of relevant laws. The analysis included aspects of financing of higher education, the possibilities of teaching process adjustments, including the language of studies, exams and classes and the right of support. Besides that, special attention has been devoted to **antidiscrimination and equal opportunities**. In Serbia and Montenegro discrimination had been forbidden with principles pointed at the begging of the Law on higher education⁴, and for the first time, disability is explicitly incited as a foundation for discrimination (and not within general provisions which include other diversities). Discrimination is also forbidden in achieving rights to higher education (everyone has the right to enroll to a faculty after graduating from high- school) and high education institutions have an obligation to ensure conditions for students with disabilities. The statutes of the universities of these countries define that the University has the obligation to ensure the same conditions for students with disabilities with no discrimination. In Macedonia according to the New Law of Higher Education from 14.03.2008, as result of long years of successful cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Science and ASYD) in the Article 87 provides:

“High Educational institutions won’t charge participation from: Parentless children, Persons with first or second degree of disability, Invalids of war and Persons that have been brought up in a Poorhouse as a form of affirmative action not as a form of positive discrimination.

With the changes of the Law of university education and the statutes of faculties and universities, it has been defined that discrimination of students with disabilities is forbidden and that these students can enroll faculties under the same conditions. The

⁴ As well as constitution acts and anti- discriminatory laws

proposed changes explicitly forbid that professors, assistants and other faculty staff allow the marking, refusing or any other form of discrimination of students with disabilities. In Moldova, the Law on education should be adapted to the provisions of the UN Convention on rights of people with disabilities, so it is expected that principles of nondiscrimination, availability and equal opportunities will be included in the law. Various improvements in the regulation of issues of the accessibility and rights to education have been made in the last decade, especially in the sphere of higher education, but they are insufficient to ensure full participation and equality of young people with disabilities in the academic community. The appropriate institutions and authorities in mentioned South East European countries are changing the approach to people with disabilities` issues towards full respect of human rights and dignity. Until the full completion of rights of (higher) education it is necessary to make many more, mostly practical, steps, especially in the sphere of the implementation and improvement of the existing legal framework, the support in the process of creating conditions for equal education, information and the implementation of good practices from the world. One of the most important steps is the institutional support and the transformation of the existing support services which are carried out by partner organizations of the Network through their projects and programs into university services for students with disabilities, financed and strategically supported by the state, what can lead to equal opportunities and equality in education for everyone.

``In Serbia, the Association of students with disabilities participated in the making of the Law on prevention of discrimination of persons with disabilities, the Law against discrimination, the Law on textbooks and teaching aids, the Law on student standards, the Law on basic education, the Law on employment and professional rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, the bill of student organizing as well as the National youth strategy and the National strategy for the improvement of position of people with disabilities and the Action plan for this strategy.

.....

In the Next Episode

Progress regarding the position of students with disabilities within the academic community in Southeast Europe is visible in the last few years, particularly since the enactment of laws governing higher education and antidiscrimination laws. Institutions for higher education are showing more interest to resolve issues related to studying of persons with disabilities and inclusive solutions, which in addition to creation of equal opportunities to study for those young people, contribute to the overall improvement of teaching quality – all students, regardless of disability, can benefit from. The main obstacles are still insufficient information (which in some cases supports and strengthens prejudice and discrimination) and lack of resources for creating accessible environment. It is necessary to take into account the situation of many years of insufficient involvement of youth with disabilities in lower levels of regular education⁵. Discrimination is still visible and present on the level of acceptance and attitudes. Besides awareness rising, it is necessary to follow up on implementation of existing laws, as well as application of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities which Macedonian Parliament finally ratified on 5-th of December 2011), and with exchange of experience with persons from the region, to elaborate solutions that respect local and national specific issues and context of higher education in Southeast Europe region.

From that reason ASYD within the project **”Equal Access through Service Learning for Persons with Disabilities”** which main project goal is, though set of 6 workshops (WS), to present the Service Learning (SL) methodology to the lecturers and the students, primarily at the higher education institutions; to understand the SL concept and to initiate its implementation in the teaching process though giving assignments to the students in a form of seminar works, project assignments, diploma theses etc. that shall be related to improvement of the quality of life of the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), or shall help us understand better and closer the individual need of our friends and citizens with disabilities. The assignments shall draw topics from all fields in the social life.

ASYD within this project between 07.11 to 14.12.2011 once again made a detailed analysis of all laws, conventions, strategies etc for persons with disabilities and they are all available on the project website <http://www.equalaccess4pwwds.org/>.

They are also available on the web sites of

<http://www.edulaws.mk>

<http://www.mon.gov.mk/>

<http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/>

<http://www.sakamznammozam.gov.mk/>

<http://www.seen-ysd.org>

<http://www.zsmh.org.mk> (the site is under construction at the moment but it will be functioning very soon) .

By applying of this new methodology of SL in the regular educational process, in the curriculum and educational program we will working on raising awareness about the problems and needs of people with disabilities in all areas by involving all faculties and universities while the analysis of existing legislation will work to adapt the provisions of

⁵ Which in the Republic of Serbia should be improved in the future, especially with proper and timely implementation of the Law on Basic Education.

UN Convention and this will help to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities.

Efforts to reduce prejudice and increase visibility of youth with disabilities in the academic community and society, which is achieved through the creation and operation of the Network SEEN YSD, significantly contributed to the empowerment of a large number of youth with disabilities, some of which have taken leadership roles in their organizations and movement of persons with disabilities in their countries. The results and data obtained during the research represent a good basis for further work and development strategies and policies in the field of inclusive higher education. An example of good practice is inclusion of support services provided by organizations into institutional framework, and one of the most important results of the project is the University Centre for Students with Disabilities, established by the University of Belgrade, in cooperation with the Association of Students with Disabilities in Serbia. Next steps include more intense work with state institutions to further develop student services - the introduction of assistive technology, assistance in teaching and other support in official legal documents, procedures and regulations of higher education.

Although the official state policy in the region moves towards the creation of mechanisms for more precise statistics tracking relating to persons with disabilities (among other things, as one of the obligations arising from signing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, there are still no completely accurate, official data on the number of students with disabilities in higher education system in the region. The most accurate data usually have the partner organizations of the Network, obtained through research conducted within the project "Promotion of inclusive higher education in South East Europe" and similar activities and projects, and in some cases those are the only indicators of the situation and the position of youth with disabilities in higher education. These data represent an important contribution of partner organizations in processes of making national strategies and practical policies in higher education, the position of youth and persons with disabilities.