

Assistive technologies and teacher training in mainstream schools

Open the Windows/Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation – Active Inclusion in Mainstream Schools in Macedonia and Serbia

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

The “Active Inclusion” project introduces assistive technologies, computer assisted communication, and learning possibilities into selected primary schools; carries out networking and lobbying activities; promotes know-how transfer; and offers trainings for teachers from participating schools as well as educational software programmes for children with disabilities.

“Using technical tools and educational software, developed together with people with disabilities, we support active inclusion in schools on a daily basis.”

—Mr. Vladimir Lazovski, Director, Open the Windows

FACTS & FIGURES

- Assistive technology has been introduced in 10% of Macedonian primary schools (31 schools countrywide) and in two secondary schools, as well as in six primary schools in and around Novi Sad, Serbia.
- A total of approximately 360 pupils now use assistive technology in schools in the two countries. Assistive devices and software adjustments “enabled or made computer use easier” for over 90% of the supported students with disabilities.
- About 1,300 teachers have been qualified to date in e-accessibility and Inclusive Education. Majority of the teachers apply new individualized teaching methods with students with disabilities following the trainings.

PROBLEMS TARGETED

In Serbia and Macedonia children with disabilities are often excluded from the mainstream education system, and there is a general lack of awareness about assistive technologies among schools, teachers, parents, and pupils. Even though the Macedonian government introduced the use of computers in schools, it did not provide them with assistive tools and fully accessible software and did not offer teacher training on fully including children with disabilities in classroom lessons.

SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

The assistive technology is adapted according to the particular needs of each child. For example, one 10-year-old boy who attends an inclusive class in Serbia received a notebook, a wireless mouse, a mini keyboard with protector, a five-button adapter, and alternative assistive communication software. Teachers from participating schools were invited to attend training sessions that were led by special educators. The project team also promotes networking activities and know-how transfer through exchange visits between educational institutes in the participating countries as well as through groups on social media, with e-mail dispatch, and through partnerships – for example, with the University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, the University of Novi Sad, the University of Athens, and LIFEtool Austria – to ensure that the latest and most cost-effective technology is available to clients who might not otherwise be able to afford it. Two educational software solutions have been developed to teach basic reading, writing, and math skills, and these are currently available in Macedonian and Albanian. The project has several funders, including USAID, Brot für die Welt, Diakonie (Austria), and the ERSTE Foundation, and services are free for all participants.

OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY

The project partners seek to introduce assistive technology in the province of Vojvodina, following the successful piloting in its capital, Novi Sad. Efforts will be made to increase the involvement of educational authorities, as well as to further support the exchange of experiences between relevant stakeholders from Macedonia and Serbia. In 2016, the project team also wants to translate the developed educational software into Serbian. There is also a potential to implement similar projects in the West Balkan countries using existing linguistic and cultural similarities. From 2016 to 2018, the two organizations offering the project will be participants in another initiative to facilitate knowledge transfer between the West Balkan and the Eastern European partner organizations concerning education and Roma. Through bilateral field visits and a multilateral regional meeting, examples of best practices on facilitating Inclusive Education will be identified and exchanged. The aim is to encourage the partners to examine different approaches to

include Roma and other marginalized groups in the mainstream state education system and to integrate the best ideas into their own programmes



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