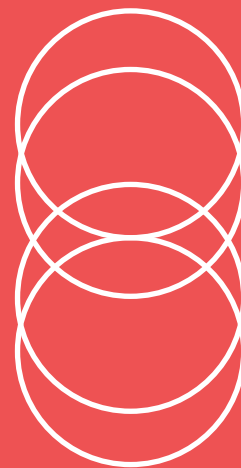




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# Belarusian education on the way of change

## Summary

### CREATING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS IN BELARUS: BENCHMARKS

The vector for the inclusion policy design in education lies in legislation and policies change in the field of education, in ensuring cultural changes and the social mindset transformation, in transforming the administration system and the way schools are organized, in creating a monitoring system for inclusion in education and society, in proper resource provision (of material and non-material objects), in the development of partnerships between teachers, parents and all the stakeholders.

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Providing inclusive education and training for children with mental and physical disabilities is one of the most relevant problems of the Belarusian educational policy. However, it remains marginalized in the current government activities; a systematic policy has not been designed, and the existing conceptual documents are declarative in nature. The research results indicate that Belarusian society as a whole is not fully prepared for the social inclusion development.



Therefore, Belarusian experts, politicians, the education and the healthcare system representatives, public organizations and initiatives, as well as all the stakeholders have a long way to go in seeking consensus on concrete steps in this area.

However, it is already obvious that the vector for the inclusion policy design in education lies in legislation and policies change in the field of education, in ensuring cultural changes and the social mindset transformation, in transforming the administration system and the way schools are organized, in creating a monitoring system for inclusion in education and society, in proper resource provision (material and intangible), in the development of partnerships between teachers, parents and all the stakeholders.

Despite the efforts of national and international organizations to ensure inclusive education in Belarus, disadvantaged students still study in special institutions. The few initiatives of the Ministry of Education regarding inclusive education are slow and ineffective. This directs us to search for specific solutions in the design of a national inclusive education strategy for children with special needs, taking into account both the Belarusian specific features and the basic principles and values of the inclusion policy. *The objective of the document is to present basic benchmarks for the inclusive agenda design in the educational policy.*

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The first section *“Fundamental principles and directions of the inclusive education development”* describes the main features of an effective and efficient system of inclusive education for children with special needs: legislation and policy in the field of education, cultural changes and transformation of social attitudes, proper administration and ways of organizing schools, inclusion monitoring system in education, resource provision (material and non-material), development of partnerships between teachers, parents and all the stakeholders. In the next two sections *“Social attitudes”* and *“Legal and regulatory framework and practice for the inclusive education development”*, the situation in Belarus is analyzed in all of the above aspects. The third section *“Challenges and responses”* offers possible solutions to the identified problems, which are based on the concept of the inclusive education development in Belarus elaborated by Alexey Konstantinov (Levania Center) and on the recommendations of international organizations (UNESCO, World Bank, etc.). The *“Conclusion”* summarizes recommendations on the main directions of the inclusive education reforming in Belarus. The *Annex I* outlines in detail the Education Development Concept elaborated by the Levania Center. The *Annex II* contains



the UNESCO's Recommendations for the inclusive education strategic planning. A detailed plan for the preparation and implementation of the inclusion in education policy, designed by the World Bank experts and based on the analysis of reforming results in various countries, is set out in *The Annex III*. The *Annex IV* provides a list of main treaties, conventions, declarations and guidelines for the inclusive education organization.

The document demonstrates the certain groups of barriers and the main challenges that should be addressed by the education system for the successful inclusive educational environment development in the context of inclusion development in Belarusian society.

Distinct recommendations have been formulated for the development of social inclusion mindset and readiness to inclusive education. Specific requests for legislative support of socio-cultural diversity, counteraction to any types of discrimination and support for all citizens' equal participation in education have been articulated. The basic requirements for the effective inclusive education practice development have been identified.

On the basis of the comprehensive inclusive education assessment in Belarus (analysis of the existing legislative framework, statistical data, scientific research on the attitude of subjects in the educational process to the "inclusion" concept, the results of satisfaction survey with the

existing situation of inclusion in education in Belarus, the ideas about the possibility of the inclusive education development from the standpoint of motivational and personal readiness, and material and methodological support), a number of recommendations have been proposed for the inclusive education development in schools in Belarus.

**1. Governments, school administrators and educators should play a leading role in the inclusive education practices development based on respect for human rights and the involvement of all the educational process participants in the development of inclusive education policies and practices.**

Complete understanding of inclusion, all its pros and cons, difficulties in implementation and the success achieved in the social adaptation of children with disabilities comes precisely in the process of building an inclusive society and inclusive education. And it is exactly the direct inclusion, filled with activities and deep feelings, that provides a more thorough understanding of the dynamics of the inclusion process.

When designing a concept for the inclusive education development, it is necessary to propose not only some "objectively justified steps", but also to consider the specifics



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of the social development situation, individual features of all the educational process subjects in Belarus, as well as the experience already gained by those involved in the inclusion development in education, even at the stage of integrated learning.

**2. It is necessary to ensure the conditions for active participation of civil society organizations and initiatives, as this increases social responsibility, promotes the creation of wider and inclusive networks, as well as political participation and empowerment of all the population groups.**

If we are moving towards inclusive society, it is necessary to constantly keep in mind the following axiom - each person is valuable, each person is an end, not a means. Whatever systems are designed, it is necessary to understand that everything conceived is implemented by concrete people, and the effectiveness of all planned changes depends on their motivation, interest, competency, desire to do the best they can to help each

other. Of course, it is necessary to design a sound program for the development of inclusion in society and in education, but it must be remembered that people are influenced by other people, not by programs. The quality of the relationship is crucial, the profound systemic change is possible with the trust that comes of cooperation. It is cooperation and mutual respect that give us confidence that we can change something for the better.

**3. The main benchmarks for the movement towards inclusive education and inclusive society are the following directions.**

*In the field of cultural change and transformation of social attitudes:*

- ∑ Ensuring public awareness of the articles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, and the articles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- ∑ Taking measures aimed at raising awareness, better understanding of the meaning and essence of inclusive education.
- ∑ Dissemination of reliable information about the principles, as well as the effective ways and forms of interaction with people with special needs and disabilities, which create a positive image of interaction between different people.

*In the field of policy and legal framework design:*

- ∑ Support for institutional implementation



and development of inclusion, based on a systematic approach to policy implementation, in which the inclusive approach is integrated in all the elements, mechanisms and instruments of the educational policy.

⌘ Design of comprehensive and coherent legislation for inclusive education that fully addresses issues of flexibility, diversity and equality in all educational institutions for all students (a legal and regulatory framework leading to coherence of inclusive education with other policy initiatives; a uniform legal framework encompassing inclusive education in all sectors and at all the education levels).

⌘ Changing approach to financing and creating financial incentives' mechanisms for inclusive measures.

*In the field of inclusive practice in education and social interaction:*

⌘ Formation of proper administration and organization of the educational process.

⌘ Revision of the content and methods of education, development of scientifically-based practices of inclusion.

⌘ Systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of planned transformations in the field of inclusive education.

⌘ Changing approach to financing and creating financial incentives' mechanisms for inclusive measures.

⌘ Conditions creation for the civil society active participation in the adoption and implementation of decisions in the field of inclusive education.

ALL THESE CHANGES WILL BECOME VIABLE UNDER ONE CONDITION — RESTORING THE COMPLIANCE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS, INCLUDING THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

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