

An illustration of a person with long dark hair in a ponytail, wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt, dark pants, and a yellow backpack. They are jumping over a stack of four books. The top book is open, and the person is reaching up with their right hand towards a large yellow star. Several other yellow stars of varying sizes are scattered in a dark blue sky with faint clouds and small white dots. The overall scene is set against a dark blue background with stylized hills and a dark blue ground area.

EDUCATIONAL AND PERSONAL ASSISTANTS
- NOW AND HERE - OPEN PERSPECTIVES
■ COMMUNITY WORKS PROGRAMME ■

AUTHOR: PAULA FREDERICA HUNT



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

NARINE SAHAKYAN, Resident Representative of UNDP in North Macedonia

SREERUPA MITRA, Programme Specialist, UNPRPD Technical Secretariat

SUZANA AHMETI JANJIK, Programme Officer in UNDP in North Macedonia

URIM KASAPI, Programme Analyst in UNDP in North Macedonia

SNEZANA MIRCEVSKA DAMJANOVSKA, National Technical Adviser in UNDP in North Macedonia

MARIJA TRIFUNOVSKA, Specialist for inclusion of people with disabilities in UNDP in North Macedonia

NAUMCHE TASHKOVSKI, Monitoring Officer in UNDP in North Macedonia

ANA DIMOVSKA KOTEVSKA, Communication Specialist in UNDP in North Macedonia



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5
GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS.....	6
UNDP (AND OTHER UN AGENCIES, AS APPLICABLE).....	8
BACKGROUND.....	9
PERSONAL ASSISTANTS (PA) FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.....	12
EUROPEAN STANDARD.....	12
NORTH MACEDONIA.....	13
Rationale for CWP (children’s) Personal Assistants job placement.....	13
Findings from the survey - PAs.....	14
CWP PAs in North Macedonia reaffirm systemic obstacles.....	17
EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS (EA)FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.....	19
GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN STANDARDS.....	19
NORTH MACEDONIA.....	21
Rationale for CWP Educational Assistants job placement.....	21
Findings from the survey - EAs.....	22





IDENTIFIED BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA	25
LACK OF LEGISLATIVE CLARITY AND IMPLEMENTATION POWER LEADS TO BARRIERS	27
The need for PAs and EAs in ensuring adequate support for children with disabilities in mainstream schools.	27
Multi-disciplinary teams for decision-making, capacity-building and monitoring.	29
Who is responsible for service provision (who, what, where, when, how)	30
LACK OF COOPERATION AMONG EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS AND PROFESSIONALS LEADS TO BARRIERS	32
RECOMMENDATIONS	33
GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS	36
Ministry of Education	36
UNDP (and other UN agencies, as applicable)	37
ANNEXES	39
PERSONAL ASSISTANTS SURVEY FINDINGS	39
EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS SURVEY FINDINGS	43
Education and previous employment.	44
TEACHER SURVEY FINDINGS	48
LIST OF VISITS AND INTERVIEWS	52



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNDP's Community Works Program (CWP) was developed as an innovative approach, aimed to support provision of social services at local level and to encourage gradual inclusion of the most vulnerable citizens in the labour market. Since the Programme began in 2012, over 2,500 unemployed persons have performed part-time jobs serving more than 48,000 residents in 64 municipalities. A model that envisaged the presence of highly professional staff in the classrooms, assisting all categories of children with low educational attainment, focusing on children with disabilities was introduced in 2016, in 2 municipalities-Kumanovo and Strumica. At the specific request of municipality officials, the CWP has provided 2 types of services aimed at supporting the enrolment of children with disabilities in general education schools. In both cases – provision of Personal Assistants (PA) and Educational Assistants (EA) - the service provision has been identified by municipal authorities and PAs and EAs have been provided to children with disabilities attending mainstream schools.

While neither type of professional is in full compliance with EU standards and practices, the two have been important in mitigating systemic obstacles to inclusive education, either by providing an environmental support or by acting as mediators in teaching and learning. However, their need and consequent placement illustrates the **need for a more synergetic effort to enforce the implementation of inclusive education – in alignment with EU standards and in accordance with North Macedonia's and the EU's commitments towards the CRPD.**

Despite efforts by many organizations to provide on-going professional capacity to the MES





and MLSP with regards to children with disabilities, inclusive education, and the International Classification of Functioning (ICF), some of which have been taking place for over a decade, there is a lack of effective implementation on the ground. Policy is still inadequate, implementation is patchy, and the rights of children with disabilities continue to be denied. The need for PAs and EAs as part of the education system, and as tacit or explicit conditions for the integration of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, is the first indication that there is a **lack of overall understanding as to what an inclusive education system entails, the responsibilities of its stakeholders, and what are the roles of the various support services needed within the system, and across government.**

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The MES should engage in policy development that is in compliance with EU standards and the CRPD, with the view to engage in long-lasting implementation;

- Map out and consolidate the considerable technical capacity already in place in North Macedonia, ensuring each school have the necessary human capacity to implement inclusive education policy as defined in CRPD Article 24/GC4 - focused on child-centred pedagogy and a collaborative school culture;
- Ensure all institutions providing pre-service and in-service teacher education are developing a cadre of professionals able to engage in child-centred pedagogy and create a collaborative school culture;
- Develop an accreditation and quality assurance mechanism, for pre- and in-service degrees and initiatives, that works according to international standards of inclusive education.
- Develop a merit system that rewards public school professionals who engage in the application of inclusive education principles and practices, as gained in accredited capacity building initiatives;
- In the short and medium term, provide all teachers and administrators in schools identified as requiring additional support services with specific capacity building focused on collaborative working methods and cooperative teaching/learning, before any placement.





UNDP (AND OTHER UN AGENCIES, AS APPLICABLE)

- Because addressing the lack of accessible environments in education facilities is a CRPD main priority, UN Agencies should make all financial support provided to central and municipal education authorities contingent upon the provision (building and/or retrofitting) of fully accessible environments;
- UNDP could consider developing procedural guidelines and a minimum set of standards for cooperation, aimed at ensuring the CWP guidelines are uniformly applied in all municipalities and with all stakeholders;
- Revise the monitoring and enforcement mechanisms of the CWP and revert all positions to a one school-year placement, without the possibility for renewal;
- Engage with ICF Board so that functional assessments can lead to the development of Individualized Educational Plans that can be specific in indicating the individualized need for Personal Assistants and/or Educational Assistants, their specific tasks and required competencies (fit-for-purpose);
- Phase-out the provision of funding to MES allocated to Personal Assistants. The provision of PAs should rest entirely upon MLSP and its regulations that, to be fully compliant with EU regulations and CRPD, should extend the same service to all persons with disabilities who require it, regardless of their age;
- Support professional development institutions, in collaboration with DPOs, in developing a *Personal Assistant for children with disabilities certificate*, in line with EU regulations. The MLSP should ensure the provision of Personal Assistants that can carry out this role on a full-time basis, to all persons with disabilities who require it, at no cost;
- Phase-out the provision of funding to MES allocated to Educational Assistants. Support tertiary education institutions, particularly those focused on teacher preparation, in developing a *Teacher Assistant certificate*, in line with current inclusive education research and recommendations from the [European Agency of Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#). The certificate should have a strong focus on pedagogy, cooperation and communication (not disability or special education needs) and prepare professionals in supporting teachers, rather than *shadowing* children with disabilities;
- Support municipal teams in implementing the recommendations of the ICF Board (i.e. initial training on ICF, setting up of multi-disciplinary teams of professionals, setting up school-based support teams, writing and implementation of Individualized Education Plans, etc.)



BACKGROUND

This report was completed by Paula Frederica Hunt, a senior international consultant on Inclusive Education and children with disabilities, at the request of UNDP Macedonia. The assignment - “assessment of current state of activities related to the educational/ personal assistants in the country”¹ aims to support the UNDP team in assessing the outcomes of one of the components of their Community Works Programme (CWP).

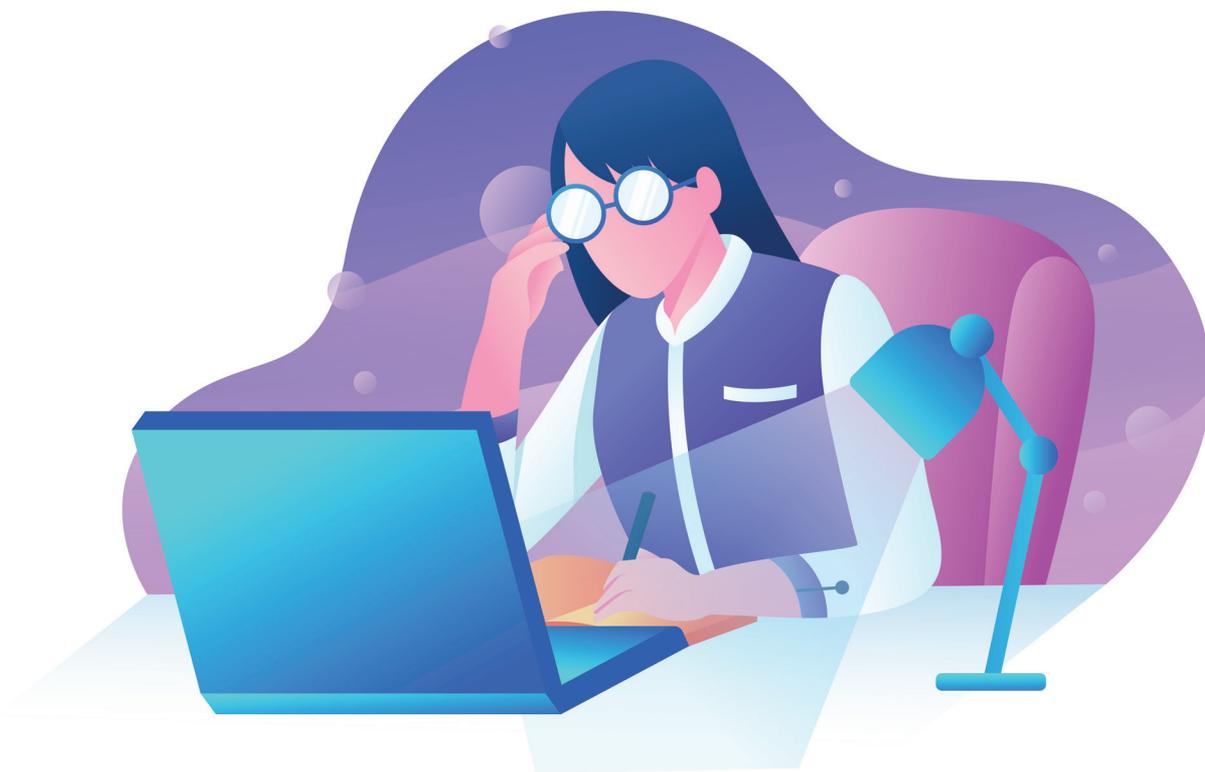
Namely, CWP was developed as an innovative approach, aimed to support provision of social services at local level and to encourage gradual inclusion of the most vulnerable citizens in the labour market. First introduced in 2012, the Community Works Programme was designed to tackle social exclusion on two fronts at once, offering unemployed people the opportunity to gain valuable work skills while providing services for those who are most at risk of social exclusion. Partner municipalities have used the programme to provide care services for previously under-served groups, including preschool children, the elderly people and children and adults with disabilities. Since the Programme began in 2012 till 2019, over 2,500 unemployed persons have performed part-time jobs serving more than 48,000 residents in 64 municipalities.

In addition, the joint project “Deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities in the Strumica region” aimed to develop models of education, employment, social and health services to facilitate independent living of persons with disabilities is supported by the global



1 ToR

UN Partnership for the rights of People with Disabilities, since the country has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) in 2011. The UNCPRD states that country must ensure an inclusive education system at all levels (Article 24, para.1). All children and young people rely on teachers and non-teaching staff to enable their learning and participation in school. Non-teaching staff (learning support assistants, teaching assistants or similar) play a vital role for successfully engagement in every aspect of compulsory and post compulsory education.



Moreover, a new four-year project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, implemented by UNDP, as one of its main objectives shall work to generate innovative policy and programming solutions to help Roma and persons with disabilities to access the labour market while promoting services for broader social inclusion.

Based on that, a model that envisaged presence of highly professional staff in the classrooms, assisting all categories of children with low educational attainment, focusing on children with disabilities was introduced as part of the 2016 Community Works Programme (CWP), where UNDP supported this kind of initiatives in 2 municipalities-Kumanovo and Strumica. Looking at possibilities for further upscaling and institutionalization of assistants' role in 2017 CWP cycle, 140 educational and personal assistants have been engaged in 18 municipalities, while in 2018 cycle of the programme 334 assistants were involved in 38 municipalities. In the current cycle of the program, in the 2019/2020 school year 321 assistants are provided (91 personal and 230 educated) in 35 municipalities.

Since 2016, and at the specific request of municipality officials, the CWP has provided some municipalities with 2 types of services aimed at supporting the enrolment of children with disabilities in general education schools. In both cases – provision of Personal Assistants (PA) and Educational Assistants (EA) - the service provision has been identified by municipal authorities and PAs and EAs have been provided to children with disabilities attending mainstream schools. However, a factor that might impact implementation of the programme on the ground, is the variability in the involvement of the municipalities (recipients of the grant), and their partnership with schools/NGOs, and the resulting engagement, mentoring and monitoring of the with CWP candidates. UNDP has no influence in establishment of this kind of relation.

The CWP requires that candidates to either position be unemployed and have a secondary (PA) or tertiary (ED) degree. The CWP is not meant to act as employment measure that place unemployed persons in full-time jobs. Rather, it is meant to provide part-time engagement to increase employability. CWP candidates are placed in part-time positions that last 4 hours/day, and are compensated for 4 hours/day, on a limited-length contract of (9 months i.e. in the course of one school year).

This report is based on a thematic and convenient desk review, the findings of a study visit to schools in Skopje (October 14-17, 2019), interviews with key-informants (parents of children with disabilities, education personnel, ministry representatives, etc.) and a survey of 56 PAs, 158 EAs and 210 teachers conducted in November of 2019.

PERSONAL ASSISTANTS (PA) FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



EUROPEAN STANDARD

The [European Network on Independent Living](#) (ENIL) published, in 2013, the *Fact-Sheet: Personal Assistance* that provides guidance to all members of the EU and can be used in North Macedonia when developing a job profile that is compliant with the CRPD and comparable across Europe. The short document defines the role of a PA as a support to persons with disabilities“ in everyday activities to enable them to overcome barriers and live with greater independence. This can range from occasional support up to support of 24 hours per day. The activities may include support with personal care, eating, dressing, household work, shopping, assistance at work and during leisure time, as well as in communicating, structuring the day, or similar cognitive or psycho-social support” (p. 1). PA support is to be provided based on an individual needs-assessment and will differ based on the particular life circumstances of each person. Persons with disabilities have the right to recruit, train and manage their own PA according to needs, preferences and degree of personal control.

“The job of a personal assistant does not always require any particular qualifications or previous experience and can be performed by people of different ages and backgrounds. The key requirement is that the prospective personal assistant is considered by the user him/herself as suitable for the job. The major difference between a personal assistant and a carer is that in the case of personal assistance, the service is designed and managed by the

service user directly. (...) Personal assistance is not the assistance of nurses, social workers, charities, the church or medical professionals. Personal assistance is controlled and managed by the disabled person, to facilitate their self-determination and independence on their own terms” (p.2).

“Many countries have no personal assistance schemes, or if they do, they are available to a small number of disabled people. In most Western European countries, where personal assistance is more widely available, personal assistants are generally employed by a service provider (i.e. an agency or a municipality). The user determines the work to be done and the hours, and he/she is required to submit timesheets to the service provider in order for the personal assistant to be paid. Another option is through direct payments or personal budgets, when the service user receives funding directly and becomes the employer. In this case, the user has complete control over the service, but also has responsibilities, including administrative, financial and legal. Direct payments and personal budgets are available in some countries, but not everywhere. Finally, some personal assistance users get organised in co-operatives, which allows them to centralise administrative and other tasks, and still keep full control over the service” (p.4).

NORTH MACEDONIA

RATIONALE FOR CWP (CHILDREN'S) PERSONAL ASSISTANTS JOB PLACEMENT

In the current format, PAs in North Macedonia have the same job title but a very different role than that which is described above. Conceptually, they are **adults who assist children with disabilities (with a physical impairment that prevents them from being self-sufficient) in moving independently through the school environment**. According to their CWP placement, PAs are meant to work only 4 school hours per day, although the school day may have 5 or more hours.

The position of *Personal Assistant for children with disabilities* was created by the CWP at the request of the families that have a child with disabilities, aiming to support those who face difficulties in accessing the school environment and until schools in most municipalities address issues related to accessibility. While the service is largely understood as critically needed by some families with children with disabilities, it was aimed at temporarily combat-

ing environmental obstacles that have prevented children with disabilities from enrolling in mainstream schools, which schools take the necessary steps to provide accessible environments. However, it is important to emphasize that if PAs were already being provided to children with disabilities as mandated by the CRPD (and described above by ENIL) this job posting within CWP as it exists at the time of the visits that support this report would cease to exist².

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY - PAS

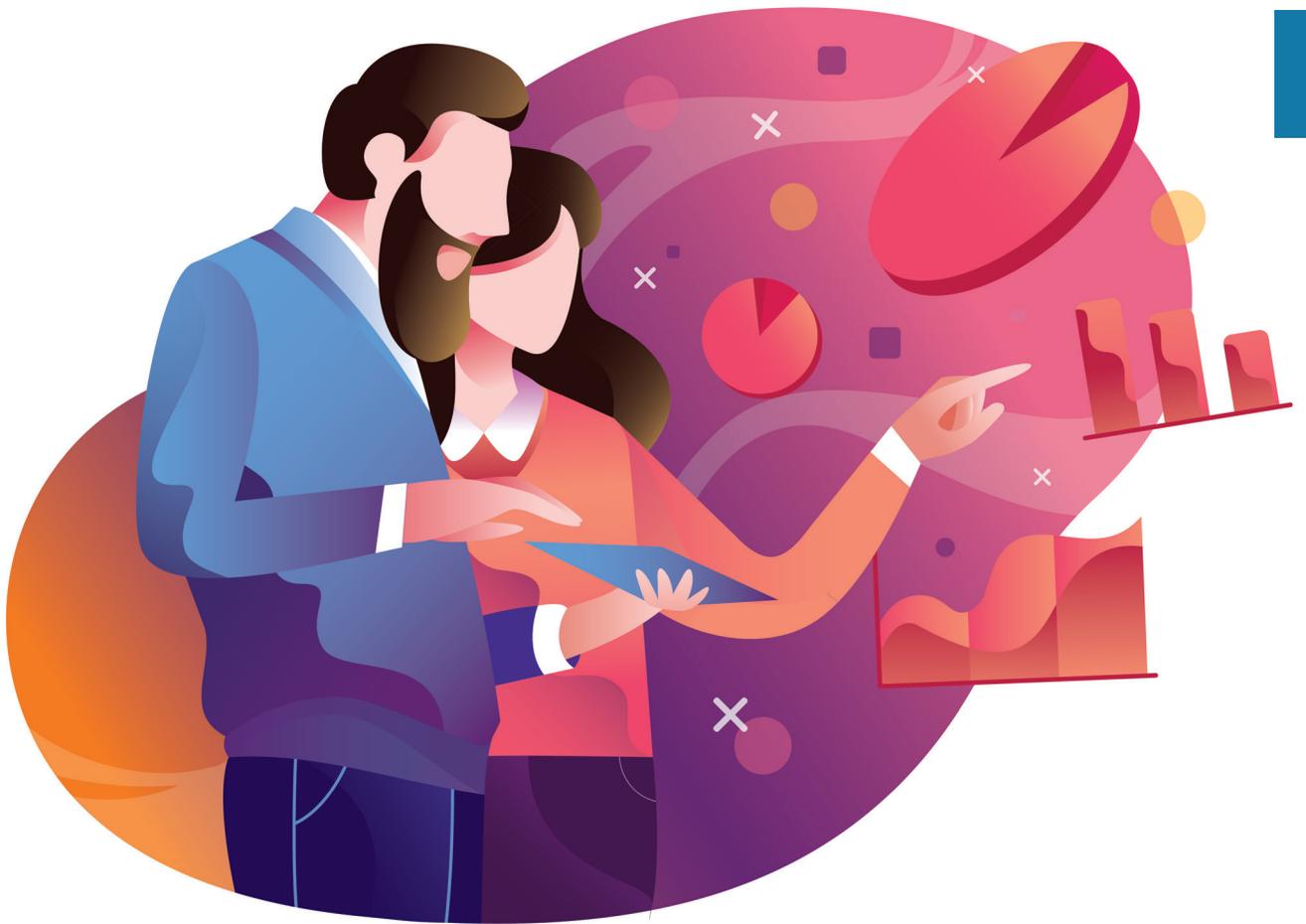
According to the findings from the PA survey (see annex 1), and despite the initial design of the CWP requirements, 33% of existing PAs are **over-qualified** for the job (have a University degree). One-third of them had no previous work experience, and almost two-thirds had no experience working with children with disabilities. Two-thirds of the PAs had **multiple engagements in the CWP**, the majority of those as PAs, and 91% of them hope to be employed full-time, in the same position, by the school or municipality, once their CWP engagement is over.

From the survey results it is clear that the **expectations of a PA** are not clear to those performing the work, although most responses included verbs such as “to help” or “assist”. However, there seems to be some **difficulty in clearly outlining their lines of responsibility** towards students and other professionals, as exemplified below:

- “I do not know exactly what is expected of me, but I am fully dedicated to the child assigned to me”;
- “I am doing my best to be 100% efficient and to do all the tasks assigned to me by the parents”;
- “In addition to all the duties expected from me as a Personal Assistant, I am also expected to overcome the existing gaps in the child’s education, show results in achieving the IEP objectives, help with child’s socialization and general progress and do the entire work of an Educational Assistant. This is expected from me by both parents and teachers”;

2 NOTE: at the time completion of this report, some 4 months after the visits in which it is based, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy announced that it was going to start providing Personal Assistants to all children with disabilities who required them, starting at age 6, effectively making the position of PA as provided by the CWP redundant.





- “in addition to escorting them, it is expected to help them with acquiring curricular content, since the teachers lack enough time to devote to children with special needs”;
- “As an Educational Assistant, I am expected to help the student in performing their tasks during class”.

Almost half of the PAs surveyed reported not having an **adjustment period** – a time when the assistant, child and parents familiarize themselves with each other - while those who had an adjustment period reported varying experiences, from 2 hours to an entire school term. In almost half the cases (48%) the PA was **introduced** to the student by their parents and, in 41% of cases, they report being **supervised** by the parents (although they work in a school environment) in addition to being supervised by others. Interestingly, although parents have a great deal of influence in the work of PAs, less than 2% spend more than 50% of their time communicating with parents, and 25% of them do not communicate with parents at all. Other supervisory lines are with municipal coordinators (46%), defectologists (37.5%) or classroom teacher (33%).

However, their **daily support** system is quite different from their supervision: 61% are supported by the classroom teacher, 32% by the defectologist and 30% by the parents. Only 2 respondents are supported by the entire inclusive education team and 2 others reported not receiving any support in their work. This is not surprising taking into consideration that 64% of all PAs have never been instructed to work in collaboration with others.

When asked about their work **responsibilities**, 50% of the PAs surveyed reported providing children with disabilities support with accessibility, 43% with social/behavioral integration and some with personal/physiological tasks (their intended job). However, an **overwhelming 78% also reported support with academic tasks**, a job role that is meant to be assigned to Educational Assistants. The vast majority of PAs (87.5%) spends all their time **with just one student, and 10% of them spend more than the required/payed 4 hours**. When asked who **spends more time** with the assigned student during a school day, 75% mentioned **themselves**, while 21% reported the classroom teacher. Only 2 PAs mentioned themselves and the teacher and no one else mentioned other professionals.

Almost all (98%) of those surveyed consider the job of a **PA as essential in inclusive education** but only 20% of them justified their answer with a reason that is related to a PA-specific job expectation, such as:



- “because this is about a student disabled in their movement, and they should have normal attendance of instruction at school”;
- “because they cannot satisfy their physiological needs independently”;
- “because of student’s easier socialization with other students, observance of school rules and protection from potential harm”.

Other answers varied, from broad statements about children with disabilities’ needs to supporting teachers in providing higher quality education.

As reported, **there is no possible comparison between the PA experience in North Macedonia and the description of a PA in the rest of Europe** (see page 3). While assistants to children with disabilities are clearly required to assist them with issues related with their transitions into mainstream schools, the position of a PA in North Macedonia, as currently practiced, should undergo scrutiny and modifications as recommended in sections below.

CWP PAS IN NORTH MACEDONIA REAFFIRM SYSTEMIC OBSTACLES

Responding to the identified need - *Personal Assistant for children with disabilities* - and creating the position of PAs as they currently operate (described above and contextualized as a service provided only in a school setting, during school hours, at the request of the municipalities which have been open enough to hear the needs of the families of children with disabilities) has **reaffirmed two previously highlighted systemic obstacles** faced by children with disabilities in North Macedonia, that are of urgent consideration:

- school environments are not accessible;
- there is a lack of overall provision of the means and/or services necessary to promote living independently and inclusive education.

First, although Article 11, paragraph 7 of the new *Decree on proclamation of the Law on Primary Education* (July 2019) provides a definition of “accessibility to infrastructure and services” that includes a broad concept of environmental accessibility (including physical, sensory and informational), at the school level, this concept is seldom understood or taken into consideration. Rather than understanding accessibility as a right of all persons with and without disabilities (a Universal Design principle), the new law emphasizes that accessibility is an issue specific to children with disabilities, and specific to access to education. Thus, “taking measures to ensure that students with disabilities have access”, is narrowly

understood as providing a means to bypass a physical obstacle, rather than addressing the root-cause of the obstacle.

Second, Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which North Macedonia signed in 2007 and ratified in 2011 (including its Optional Protocol), indicates that persons with disabilities shall have access to “personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community” (Article 19, paragraph b). As noted above, at the time of this report, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of North Macedonia only provides Personal Assistants to persons with disabilities who are 18 years of age or older, although a recent announcement has indicated that PAs will be provided to children with disabilities starting at age 6. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the selective provision (including by gender, age, race, ethnicity and any other personal characteristic other than documented need) of means or services by the MLSP constitutes a violation of Article 19 of the CRPD.

EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS (EA) FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN STANDARDS

The role, competencies, and benefits of academic/instructional/educational assistants has been researched and documented since the early 1990's. As early as 1997 (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland) a study revealed that while instructional assistants have an important role to play in inclusive education settings, their proximity to children with disabilities could result in **barriers to inclusion in a variety of ways**:

- creating interference with ownership and responsibility of teachers towards the education of children with disabilities in their classroom;
- creating a physical and temporal separation of children with disabilities from their classmates;
- creating a dependence of adult support and supervision by the child;
- creating a barrier related to interactions of children with disabilities with peers and classmates;
- being subjected to a lower educational standard and limited competent instruction; 6) loss of personal control and/or gender identity;
- interference with the instruction of other students in the classroom.

Most of the described barriers have been researched (independently and in combination) and **findings/recommendations** are often similar across the research.



- The need for an academic/instructional/educational assistant that works one-on-one with a student must be determined with the use of a functional assessment in a multi-disciplinary and child-centered environment;
- An academic/instructional/educational assistant that works one-on-one with a student should only be assigned when a student demonstrates a severe functional limitation related to learning that requires intense level of instructional support (1 above);
- The decision for the use of an academic/instructional/educational assistant that works one-on-one with a student can only be made by a school-based team, that is also responsible for the development on an individualized educational plan that includes the specific role of the academic/instructional/educational assistant.
- Academic/instructional/educational assistants require ongoing competency-based training and direct supervision by the classroom teacher.

In the EU (see [here](#)) and elsewhere (see below) the research on supports for inclusive education indicates that, as education systems change from more to less segregated, so must the roles of the system participants change, from a care/assistance model to a means of promoting self-determination and independence. It is widely acknowledged that many classrooms that include children with severe/complex disabilities or a high concentration of students that require more intensive interventions, might also require a smaller number of students or a model of collaborative teaching.

The alternative is to explore the transformation of the role of academic/instructional/educational assistant – persons who work with one single student, usually with disabilities - into a classroom/teacher assistants with a broader range of responsibilities. Some examples are:

In Australia

- <https://www.ici.net.au/blog/skills-needed-to-become-a-teachers-aide/>

In New Zealand

- <https://www.careers.govt.nz/jobs-database/education-and-social-sciences/education/teacher-aide/how-to-enter-the-job>

In the UK

- <http://www.skillsforschools.org.uk/roles-in-schools>



In the USA

- <https://www.teachercertificationdegrees.com/careers/teachers-assistant/>

In the USA, specific for children with disabilities

- <https://www.cec.sped.org/Standards/Paraeducator-Preparation-Guidelines>

As described, academic/instructional/educational assistants (both the traditional and the more recent concepts) **do not replace a classroom teacher but are rather expected to work with a classroom teacher to enhance the learning process** of a specific student. In addition, academic/instructional/educational assistants are **not disability-specific service** but rather a service to be **provided to any students** that needs this type of intense support.

NORTH MACEDONIA

RATIONALE FOR CWP EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS JOB PLACEMENT

As is the case with PAs above, Educational Assistants (EAs) were created as part of the CWP, and initially intended to **assist children with disabilities who are enrolling in mainstream schools and may be facing obstacles in accessing the existing curriculum, learning at pace with other classmates, or participating in school**. The Programme intention is to also provide open discussion among all relevant parties for creation of new social services in the society, in this case educational assistants, with an aim to identify the profile of the service provider and give a rough estimate of the need in terms of end-beneficiaries. On the other hand, this programme offers those who are unemployed an opportunity to gain skills required on a labour market, in this particular case short training modules that provide some limited knowledge on the basic principles to be followed in the classroom and interaction with children. While this is the understanding of the post of EA demonstrated by interviewed stakeholders, their job profile has remained unspecified, which has allowed for a wide degree of latitude and multiple interpretations of roles and responsibilities. Recognizing this, UNDP has engaged an international consultant to help with the identification of the profile and the overall weaknesses of the whole process, having in mind the situation when there is very little progress in the country regarding inclusive education for all children. In addition, answering to pressure from parents, municipal authorities and the MES, UNDP has facilitated for EAs job placements to evolve beyond the initial regulations of the CWP.

FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY - EAS

158 Educational Assistants (EAs) responded to the survey. As per the CWP requirements, 90% of them hold a university diploma (VII-1) and 7% have completed a Master's Programme. Almost half of them (42%) had no previous professional experience (although the average age of respondents is 34 years old), 32% had previous experience working with children (in various capacities) and 8% had experience working with children with disabilities. More than one third (39%) were a part of the CWP for the first time, and the others had been assistants' multiple times before, with the majority of them on their second and third engagement. In addition, one third of the respondents have only worked with one student, while the majority have worked with 2 or more. From those surveyed, 92% of EAs hope the CWP engagement will lead into full-time employment in the current position.

As with PAs above, almost half of the EAs surveyed (43%) reported not having an **adjustment period** (time to familiarize themselves) with the student they assist, while those who had an adjustment period reported varying experiences, from 2 days to one month. The student was **introduced** to the EAs by the classroom teacher, the parents, the defectologists of municipal coordinators in similar percentages (38%, 37%, 32% and 28% respectively) and, as was the case with PAs above, supervision and support lines varied greatly.

More than half the EAs surveyed (57%) reported being **supervised** by the municipal coordinators while 48% reported the classroom teacher and 41% the defectologist. However, 69% reported being **supported in their daily work** by the classroom teacher, and only 37% by the defectologist. Time spent **communicating with parents** is lower than reported by other stakeholders in interviews: 10% do not communicate with parents at all, and 75% spend less than 25% of their time communicating with parents.

The survey also indicated that 85% of all EAs spend **all their time with just one student**, and 11% spend more than the 4 hours allotted by the CWP. But, an additional 27% responded they spend all their time assisting the classroom teacher with all/most students in the classroom – some 25% spending 100% of their time preparing daily lessons – performing some of the tasks of a **Teacher Assistant** (not a student assistant). In addition, 57% of them collaborate with other professionals, either on a one-on-one basis or in a team format.

95% of all surveyed EAs reported that they are the professionals who **spend the majority of time with the student** assigned. Therefore, it is not surprising that 99% of them reported the

EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS (EAS)

EAs responded to the survey

158

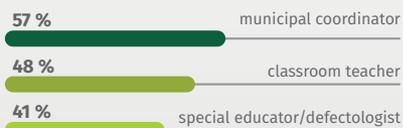
Adjustment period with the students

not having (43 %) having (57 %)

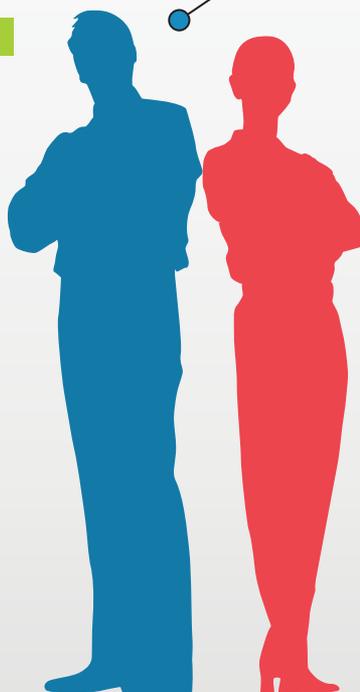
The student was introduced to the EA by



Who supervised the EAs?



WHO supported EAs in their daily work?



hold a university diploma (VII-1)

90 %

have completed a Master's Programme

7 %

had no previous experience

42 %

had previous experience working with children

32 %

8 %

had experience working with children with disabilities

Time spent communicating with parents

10 % do not communicate at all

75 % spend less time communicating

85 %

of all EAs spend all their time with just one student

position of EA as essential for inclusive education. Their justifications fell within two types: the respondents who believe EAs are important because teachers cannot do the job alone, lacking either time of adequate knowledge, exemplified by:

- "Because teachers have no knowledge at all, nor do other professionals";
- "...because teachers cannot pay the attention or the time these children require, and they do not have exact guidance on how to do it, either, so without an educa-

tional assistant, these children would be lost in the educational and social process at school”;

- “The teacher cannot pay enough attention to such student”;
- “Teachers are not trained for inclusion”.

The EAs that believe **children with disabilities require individualized instruction**, and one-on-one support, both academic and socially, such as:

- “It takes a special, individual approach because children are not independent to meet their needs”;
- “Because each child with a disability needs an individual approach, motivation, monitoring and correction”;
- “An individual approach is necessary”;
- “these children need extra help, further explanation of curricula content, support in socialization etc.”.

Introductory trainings are organized once the assistants are acquainted with their new roles. These trainings are obligatory, there is different content for the PA training and for the EA training and approximately 145 people (new to CWP) were trained in 2019. Despite this, none of the interviewed stakeholders provided a description of the training (content, length, final examination, etc.) and none could articulate the required process of preparation for an EA job post. While the general consensus gathered from interviews with stakeholders was that EAs are highly educated and many had been teachers/defectologists in the past, this is not the case, as found in the survey responses. Therefore, there is a **wide range of professionals** working as EAs for children with disabilities, most of which have **never been exposed to a person with a disability** in the past, and **few had experience in an educational/pedagogical setting**. Thus, while interviewees communicated a high level of confidence in the EAs **professional capacity** (both skills and knowledge) to fulfil the job, many of whom were described as *better prepared than the classroom teacher*, this is **not the case**.



IDENTIFIED BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA

As described below, the lack of a specific job profile (primarily competences and adequate training), undetermined lines or supervision, and an expanded length of permanence within the CWP job placement have resulted in unintended consequences that may have, in some cases, created barriers to inclusion rather than opportunities. However, it is important to take the identified PA- and EA-related barriers identified in this study as consequences of deeper and more sustained systemic barriers that require a more in-depth study into the education system in North Macedonia.

To have a truly inclusive education system, North Macedonia needs to attend to all nine pillars of inclusive education, with a focus on vulnerable students, including children with disabilities, namely:

- A **“whole systems”** approach: all resources are invested in advancing inclusive education;
- A **“whole educational environment”** embedding the culture, policies and practices;
- A **“whole person”** approach: recognition is given to the capacity of every person to learn, and high expectations are established for all learners. Inclusive education offers flexible curricula and teaching and learning methods adapted to different strengths, requirements and learning styles. The focus is on learners’ capacities and aspirations, rather than on content when planning teaching activities;
- **Supported teachers:** all teachers and other staff receive the education and training they need to give them the core values and competencies to accommodate inclusive learning environments;



- Respect for and value of **diversity**: all members of the learning community are equally welcome and must be shown respect for diversity;
- A **learning-friendly environment**: inclusive learning environments are accessible environments where everyone feels safe, supported, stimulated and able to express;
- **Effective transitions**: learners with disabilities receive support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education and, finally, to work (life-long focus);
- Recognition of **partnerships**: The relationship between the learning environment and the wider community must be recognized as a route towards inclusive societies;
- **Monitoring**: involve persons with disabilities;

The CWP support provided in the form of PAs is minimally related to a “whole person” (3 above) approach and learning-friendly environments (6 above). The separation between regular and special education, regular and special education teachers, and children with disabilities and children without disabilities, and lack of accessible environments observed in North Macedonia is not conducive to the development of a “whole person approach” or learning-friendly environments. In a truly inclusive education system, the role of the PAs would be minimally reduced – environments would not be restrictive, and all learners would be held to the same high expectations and given the same opportunities.

The CWP support provided in the form of EAs are minimally related to having supported teachers (4 above), but they are only a very small portion of the whole of teacher education for inclusion. EAs (as Teacher Assistants) are recognized to be a component of any school/classroom that tailors their instruction to each individual student, follows the principles of Universal Design for Learning and works in collaborative and cooperative ways. Teacher Assistants are utilized in a variety of ways, always with the supervision of a regular teacher, to enhance the learning process. They can facilitate group work, work with individual students on occasional skill reinforcement, help with classroom management and support teachers with non-academic tasks. However, the assumption is that teachers for inclusion have the [core values and competences \(attitudes, knowledge and skills\)](#) necessary to mentor, manage and supervise a TA in a school community that sees all its members as contributing elements.

Thus, rectifying some of the CWP criteria and providing PAs and EAs with competencies and a professional pathway will not be sufficient to address the inequities of the system. The PAs



and EAs professional roles and competencies should be revised in tandem with a broader education system reform effort.

LACK OF LEGISLATIVE CLARITY AND IMPLEMENTATION POWER LEADS TO BARRIERS

THE NEED FOR PAS AND EAS IN ENSURING ADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

Article 19 of the new *Decree on proclamation of the Law on Primary Education* (Types of support for students with disability) makes multiple mentions of educational/personal assistants “to support the learning of students with disabilities”, in addition to “adequate professional support from the centre for supported learning, inclusion team and assistive technology”. In this way, these two job types are legitimized as instrumental pieces in supporting children with disabilities in mainstream schools (despite findings from the research that indicate needs of inclusive systems are slightly different). However, the situation on the ground is quite different that intended.

TEACHERS' SURVEY

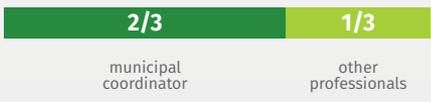
Aiming to be able to confirm and/or refute the findings from the PA and EA surveys and illustrate how PAs and EAs are currently used in the field, approximately 600 teachers were asked to answer a survey, 210 of which responded. The average age of respondents was 43 years old, and most teachers have a university degree. The reported average number of students **per class is 14 students**, which may be a misleading figure, taking into consideration the difference in the number of students in a school in the capital (Skopje), and the number of students in a school elsewhere in the country.

26% of teachers have no students with **learning difficulties** in their classes and 35% have only one student with learning difficulties. The others have more than one student with learning difficulties – from 2 to 19 students. However, the data related to teacher/student ratio (here and below) should be interpreted with caution; it is possible that those who reported having a large number of students with learning difficulties are subject teachers, who have multiple students for a short amount of time.

Do they have students with learning difficulties in their classes?

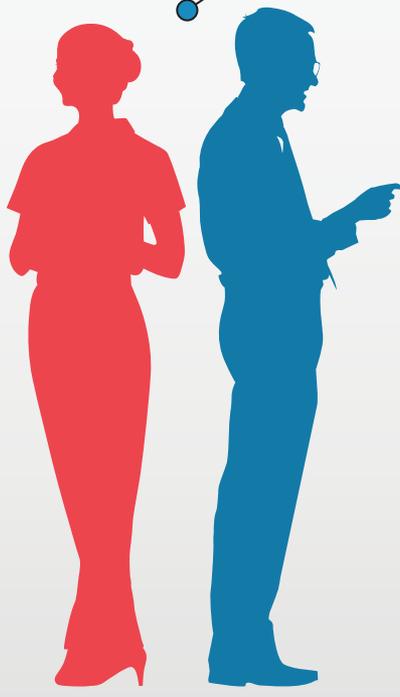
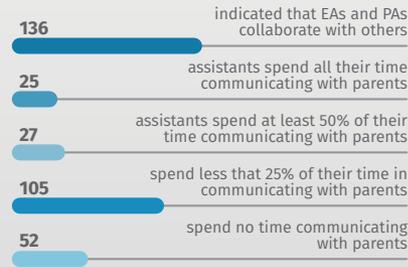


Who assigns the assistant to the student?



90% Of teachers reported the PAs and EAs in their classes work exclusively with one student

Collaboration with EAs and PAs



88%

Indicated that PAs are essential for inclusive education

From all teachers surveyed...

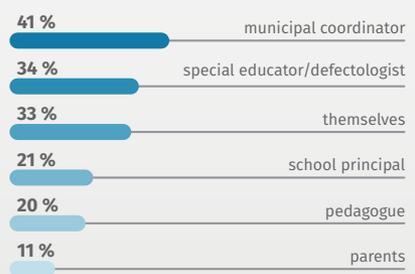
102

they delegate only some of their tasks to EAs and PA

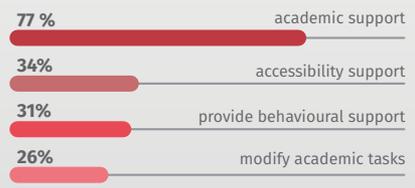
100

do not delegate any tasks to assistants

Supervision of PAs and EAs



The kind of assistants PAs and EAs provide



4 Respondents indicated support with physiological needs

Teachers reported working with **58 PAs and 81 EAs**, although the teachers with the heaviest caseloads of students with learning difficulties (64 combined) have only 1 PA and 3 EAs between them.

The same 210 teachers have 181 children with disabilities distributed among them: There are 28 Teachers with no children with disabilities in their classes; there are 153 Teachers with 1 child with disabilities in their classroom, there are 19 teachers with 2 children with disabilities in their classroom, 4 teachers with 3 children with disabilities, 2 teachers with 4 children

with disabilities, 1 teacher with 6 children with disabilities, 1 teacher with 7 children with disabilities, and 1 teacher with 19 children with disabilities. Even when taking into consideration that not all students with learning difficulties and/or children with disabilities need a PA or EA, both distributions (students with learning difficulties and children with disabilities) demonstrate some **disproportionality in the number of students with learning difficulties per teacher, and/or distribution of children with disabilities per teacher.**

Thus, while the legislation legitimizes PAs and EAs as essential instruments of inclusion, the existing PAs and EAs may not be adequately allocated to promote inclusive education. **All of the above-mentioned instances should be examined, and proper measures taken to ensure adequate support in being provided to the students who need it most, with the clear intent of facilitating inclusion.**

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAMS FOR DECISION-MAKING, CAPACITY-BUILDING AND MONITORING

According to the new *Decree on proclamation of the Law on Primary Education*, “selection and appointment of educational/personal assistant shall be carried out by a five-member commission comprised from among the staff in the school with a resource centre, which is established by the school director” (paragraph 5). In addition, “the Minister, on proposal by the Bureau, shall determine the norms for educational assistant and personal assistant, and the description of their competencies and assignments” (paragraph 6) and “schools with resource centre shall recruit educational and personal assistants for a limited period of time. Funding for educational and personal assistants shall be provided from the Budget of the Ministry” (paragraph 7).

However, as pointed out by most stakeholders interviewed, including MES representatives, schools with resource centres do not yet exist and there is no anticipated timeline for their development (due to a lack of roadmap for transformation of special schools into resource centres). Therefore, there is no established mechanism by which assistants (personal and/or educational) can be allocated.

TEACHERS' SURVEY

When asked “Who assigns the assistant to the student”, teachers indicated the municipal coordinator does so more than two-thirds of the time, while other PAs and EAs were assigned

by other professionals. Importantly, 46 respondents did not know who assigns a PA or EA to their class/student, demonstrating a lack of engagement in the process. Supervision of PAs and EAs varied more evenly: 41% indicated the municipal coordinator, 34% indicated the special educator/defectologist, 33% indicated themselves as supervisors, 21% indicated the school principal, 20% indicated the pedagogue, 11% indicated the parent (who is not present at school, is not an objective party, and may or may not be sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to supervise an assistant).

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SERVICE PROVISION (WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, HOW)

The same Article 19 of the new *Decree on proclamation of the Law on Primary Education* makes mention of personal/educational assistants, and it is unclear what the specific role of each – personal and/or educational – should be because job descriptions that include duties, responsibilities, competencies and compensation for each do not exist. By mentioning personal/educational assistants, the MES is effectively taking the responsibility for the provision of a service to children with disabilities, a service that is currently provided by the MLSP to adults with disabilities. While it is understood that children and adults with disabilities have very different strengths and needs, an effort should be made to plan for services and means for independence to be provided seamlessly throughout the life cycle, with different line ministries taking on complementary responsibilities. The ICF Commission, in collaboration with line ministries, could take the lead on this process.

TEACHERS' SURVEY

The vast majority of teachers (90%) reported the PAs and EAs in their classes work exclusively with one student, and 77% of them reported the assistants provide academic support. 34% provide accessibility support, 31% provide behavioural support, 26% modify academic tasks and only 4 respondents indicated support with physiological needs. 65% of the teachers indicated that EAs and PAs collaborate with others - various stakeholders, under various circumstances.

In contrast with perceptions from interviewees (who envision EAs as individual teachers to one child with disabilities) and findings from PA and EA surveys (75% of PAs are the person who spends more time with the student, and 27% of EAs reported spending all their time

helping the teacher) half of all teachers surveyed (102) indicated they delegate only some of their tasks to EAs and PAs; the other half (100 teachers) indicated they do not delegate any tasks to assistants. In addition, 97 teachers indicated PAs and EAs do not spend any time helping them to prepare daily lessons, but 64 teachers indicate EAs and PAs spend at least some time - but less than 1 hour - preparing daily lessons.

Interestingly, despite the findings above, the perception that teacher's hold of assistants is undefined beyond the responsibility of being entirely dedicated to children with disabilities. An overwhelming 185 respondents (88%) indicated that PAs are essential for inclusive education. However, when asked to justify their response, most made reference to the skills/ support provided by an EA, demonstrating difficulty in distinguishing between the two roles:

- "Students with special needs require educational assistants for smooth realization of the teaching process";
- "teachers are not properly trained to work with these children".

196 teachers (93%) indicated EAs are essential for inclusive education indicating that EAs should take on their own teacher's roles and responsibilities:

- "Because they know best and are trained to work with people with disabilities";
- "this leaves room for the teacher to be more creative and better organize the work";
- "the student needs 100% individualized attention, assistance, support, guidance";
- "I am not sufficiently trained to work with students with disabilities and on top of that, I do not have time to pay enough attention to these students";
- "To assist the student in acquiring the teaching content, in socialization, in the preparation of the IEP etc.";
- "To help me and guide me in the approach to the student and also to guide me in terms of other challenges";
- "To help in explaining the tasks to the student, to assist in the teaching process in terms of keeping student's focus on the subject";
- "The student requires assistance in learning, but not an educational assistant, because they will interfere with the teaching of other students".



LACK OF COOPERATION AMONG EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS AND PROFESSIONALS LEADS TO BARRIERS

The accumulated information gathered in observations/visits, interviews (see annex 4 for a list of stakeholders interviewed) and the 3 sets of survey data clearly highlight the lack of communication among the various professionals in the education sector, and a lack of planning, coordination and accountability between the levels (central to municipal to local). The obstacles in cooperation reflect systemic difficulties that are broader than the scope of this study. The two most directly related are:

- Interviewees correlate the need for PAs and EAs with parent demands due (or in addition) to teachers' lack of professional capacity to work with children with disabilities. Parental pressure, international pressure to comply with the CRPD by focusing on inclusive education, and de-institutionalizing processes, led UNDP to provide supports has described above. However, the **MES soon recognized this effort as a quick fix (PAs and EAs), one now included in legislation.** This is counter-productive because it gives a false sense of progress towards inclusive education while the provision of PAs and EAs is, at best, a small and controversial part of a larger education reform effort, that does not reflect the most urgent needs of the system;
- Many crucial stakeholders in the education system are removed from the dialogue, planning and implementation of education reforms. As reported by **teachers** surveyed, they were **not informed or consulted** in the process of PA and EA assignment, although they are expected to be welcoming, cooperate with and, in many cases, supervise PAs and EAs. Wide cooperation and a common vision and voice is crucial in the development of inclusive education.
- By choosing to take on the responsibility of providing PAs to children with disabilities in school, the MES has **taken on a responsibility that is exclusively of the MLSP.** This is not compatible with the CRPD (particularly Art. 24 and GC4) and has created an additional expense that is, in the short-term, not budgeted for and, in the long term, unsustainable;

RECOMMENDATIONS

The pressures from MES, municipal partners and parents to expand an existing programme - Community Works Programme - resulted in the creation of **two types of professionals** neither of which is in full compliance with EU standards and practices. However, as described above, the two types of professionals have been instrumental in supporting the integration of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, either by providing an environmental support or by acting as mediators in teaching and learning.

The Community Works Programme and the provision of PAs and EAs to work with children with disabilities in mainstream schools has **created new opportunities** for UNDP to lead in efforts towards inclusive education and supporting children with disabilities throughout the life cycle. These opportunities can continue to be met by engaging more strategically with the MES and MLSP and initiating a broader reform-related dialogue with the MES, MSLP, the ICF Commission and other governmental and non-governmental organizations.

As recommended below, the exercise described in this report provides a good starting point for government-wide discussions related to the need for cross-sectoral services to support inclusive education and social inclusion. In addition, it highlights the need for UNDP and other UN agencies to clearly delineate their lines of responsibility, engage in tighter coordination around specific issues, and focus on pressuring government agencies to fulfil their obligations under their CRC and CRPD commitments. It also illustrates the need for a more synergetic effort to enforce the implementation of inclusive education – **in alignment with EU standards** - in accordance with North Macedonia's and the EU's commitments towards





the CRPD. Despite efforts by many organizations to provide on-going professional capacity to the MES and MLSP with regards to children with disabilities, inclusive education, and the International Classification of Functioning (ICF), some of which have been taking place for over a decade, there is a lack of effective implementation on the ground. Policy is still inadequate, implementation is patchy, and the rights of children with disabilities continue to be denied. Therefore, the recommendations below start at the systemic level and go well beyond that which is the sole responsibility of UNDP.

The need for PAs and EAs as part of the education system, and as tacit or explicit conditions for the integration of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, is the first indication that there is a lack of overall understanding as to what an inclusive education system entails, the responsibilities of its stakeholders, and what are the roles of the various support services needed within the system, and across government. While the right to a PA is enshrined in Articles 19 and 20 of the CRPD, Article 24 of the CRPD and its General Comment 4 (cited below) do not justify the presence of an EA as conditional for integration or inclusion.

“Paragraph 2 (d) affirms that students with disabilities are entitled to the support they require to facilitate their effective education and enable them to fulfil their potential on an equal basis with others. Support in terms of general availability of services and facilities within the education system should ensure that students with disabilities are able to fulfil their potential to the maximum extent possible, including, for example, the provision of sufficient trained and supported teaching staff, school counsellors, psychologists, and other relevant health and social service professionals, as well as access to scholarships and financial resources.”

“Paragraph 2 (e) requires that adequate continuous personalised support is provided directly. The Committee emphasizes the necessity for the provision of individualised education plans, which can identify the reasonable accommodations and specific support required for an individual student, including the provision of assistive compensatory aids, specific learning materials in alternative/accessible formats, modes and means of communication, and communication aids and assistive and information technology. Support can also consist of a qualified learning support assistant, either shared or on a one-to-one basis, depending on the requirements of the student. Individualized education plans must address the transitions experienced by the learners from segregated settings and between levels of





education. Effectiveness of these plans should be regularly monitored and evaluated with the direct involvement of the learner concerned. The nature of provision must be determined in collaboration with the student, together, where appropriate, with the parents or caregivers/third parties. The learner must have access to re-course mechanisms if the support is unavailable or inadequate”.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

- The MES should engage in policy development that is in compliance with EU standards and CRPD, with the view to engage in long-lasting implementation;
- Map out and consolidate the considerable technical capacity already in place in North Macedonia, ensuring each school have the necessary human capacity to implement inclusive education policy as defined in CRPD Article 24/GC4 - focused on child-centred pedagogy and a collaborative school culture;
- Ensure all institutions providing pre-service and in-service teacher education are developing a cadre of professionals able to engage in child-centred pedagogy and create a collaborative school culture;
- Develop an accreditation mechanism, for pre- and in-service degrees and initiatives that works according to international standards of inclusive education. The same mechanism should be responsible for ensuring the quality of all capacity building provided to public school professionals;
- Develop a merit system that rewards public school professionals who engage in the application of inclusive education principles and practices, as gained in accredited capacity building initiatives;
- In the short and medium term, all teachers and administrators in schools identified as requiring additional support services (such as PAs, Teacher Assistants, therapists, special education teachers, psychologists, etc.) should undergo specific capacity building focused on collaborative working methods and cooperative teaching/learning, before any placement. This should be an interim measure until all teachers have had a chance to be educated/trained via pre- or in-service initiatives;



UNDP (AND OTHER UN AGENCIES, AS APPLICABLE)

- Because addressing the lack of accessible environments in education facilities is a CRPD main priority and currently used to justify the permanence of PAs in schools, UNDP (and other UN Agencies) should make all financial support provided to central and municipal education authorities contingent upon the provision (building and/or retrofitting) of fully accessible environments;
- UNDP could consider developing procedural guidelines and a minimum set of standards for cooperation, aimed at ensuring the CWP guidelines are uniformly applied in all municipalities and with all stakeholders, to minimize variability in the placement, mentoring, supervision and monitoring of PAs and EAs.
- Revise the monitoring and enforcement mechanisms of the CWP and revert all positions a one school-year placement, without the possibility for renewal;
- With MES, municipal authorities and municipal coordinators, investigate all instances of possible disproportionate allocation of PAs and EAs, making adjustments as needed;
- Engage with ICF Board so that functional assessments can lead to the development of Individualized Educational Plans that can be specific in indicating the individualized need for Personal Assistants and/or Educational Assistants, their specific tasks and required competencies (fit-for-purpose);

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO CWP PERSONAL ASSISTANTS

- Phase-out the provision of funding to MES allocated to Personal Assistants. The provision of PAs should rest entirely upon MLSP and its regulations. The service has been previously established for persons with disabilities age 18 and above, including the licensed training and some budget allocations (for approximately 100 PAs for adults). The new Law on social welfare recognizes this as a service. Thus, to be fully compliant with EU regulations and CRPD, the MLSP should extend the same service to all persons with disabilities who require it, regardless of their age.
- Support professional development institutions, in collaboration with DPOs, in developing a *Personal Assistant for children with disabilities certificate*, in line with EU regulations;
- Support the MLSP in developing a municipal cadre of Personal Assistants that can carry out this role on a full-time basis, similarly to those who provide services to adults with disabilities;

- Support municipalities and MLSP local representatives in creating a system by which children with disabilities who are identified by the ICF Commission as requiring a Personal Assistant, are provided with one, at no cost to the family;

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO CWP EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS

- Phase-out the provision of funding to MES allocated to Educational Assistants. Support tertiary education institutions, particularly those focused on teacher preparation, in developing a *Teacher Assistant certificate*, in line with current inclusive education research and recommendations from the [European Agency of Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#). The certificate should have a strong focus on pedagogy, cooperation and communication (not disability or special education needs) and prepare professionals in supporting teachers, rather than *shadowing* children with disabilities;
- Support municipal teams in implementing the recommendations of the ICF Board (i.e. initial training on ICF, setting up of multi-disciplinary teams of professionals, setting up school-based support teams, writing and implementation of Individualized Education Plans, etc.)



ANNEXES

PERSONAL ASSISTANTS SURVEY FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Out of 70 possible responders, 56 Personal Assistants (PAs) responded to the survey, resulting in a 80% response rate. The average age of respondents is **37 years old**, with ages ranging from 19 to 56 years old. The greatest majority (52 out of 56) are **females** (93%), and about half (26 out of 56) are **married** (46%). On average, respondents are in families with **3 family members**, where only **1 is regularly employed** and another is employed part-time. On average, there are **2 children in the household**.

EDUCATION AND PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT

55% of respondents (31 out of 56) have **completed secondary education**, and **33%** (19 out of 56) have **completed University** (VII-1). 33% (19 out of 56) had no professional experience prior to CWP, while the others experience ranged from sales to child-care. **35 out of 56** respondents (62.5%) had **no previous experience** working with children with disabilities but 3 respondents (0.5%) had been personal assistants in the past.

PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT WITH CWP

33% of respondents (19 out of 56) were engaged with CWP for the first time. The remaining 66% of respondents (37 out of 56) had been engaged multiple times: 3 respondents were en-



PERSONAL ASSISTANTS (PA)

37 Is the average age of respondents

The greatest majority (52 out of 56) are females



About half (26 out of 56) are married

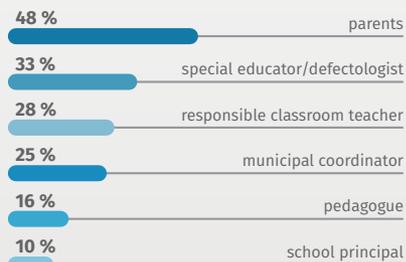


33% Had no professional experience prior to CWP

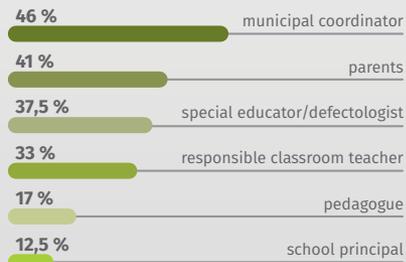
Adjustment period with the students



The student was introduced to the PA by



Who supervised the PAs?



Response rate

80%

Have completed secondary education,



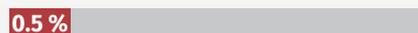
Have completed University (VII-1)



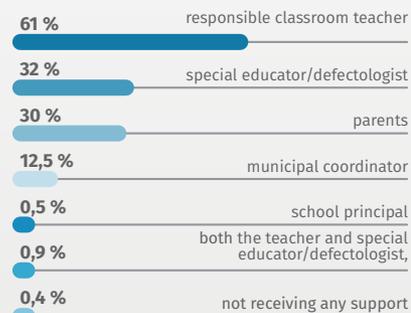
had no previous experience working with children with disabilities



had been personal assistants in the past



Who supports their daily tasks?



What were their work responsibilities?



78% of respondents mentioned providing support with academic tasks

How much time they spent with students?



gaged once; 18 respondents were engaged twice; 11 respondents were engaged three times; and, 5 respondents were engaged 4 times. Out of the 37 respondents that had been previously engaged in the CWP, an **overwhelming majority (32 out of 37 or 86%) was as a Personal Assistant**, and 3 others (0.8%) as an Educational Assistant.

WORK PLACEMENT

46% of respondents (26 out of 56) reported not having an adjustment period with the students they PA for. The adjustment period reported by the others (54%) varied from 2 hours to an entire school term. The student was introduced to the PA by parents (48%), special educator/defectologist (33%), responsible classroom teacher (28%), municipal coordinator (25%), pedagogue (16%) or school principal (10%).

46% of respondents (26 out of 56) reported being **supervised** by the municipal coordinator, and 41% by the parents. 37.5% of respondents reported being supervised by the special educator/defectologist, 33% by the responsible classroom teacher, 17% by the pedagogue and 12.5% by the school principal.

DAILY SUPPORT, TEAM-WORK & RESPONSIBILITIES

Interestingly, when asked **who supports their daily tasks**, the answers were quite different. 34 out of 56 respondents (61%) reported being supported by the responsible classroom teacher, 32% by the special educator/defectologist, and 30% by the parents. 7 out of 56 respondents (12.5%) mentioned being supported by the municipal coordinator, 0.7% by the pedagogues and 0.5% by the school principal. Only 5 respondents (0.9%) mentioned **both** the teacher and special educator/defectologist, and only 2 (0.4%) mentioned **all team members**. **2 respondents mentioned not receiving any support.**

When asked about their **work responsibilities**, 28 respondents (50%) mentioned support with accessibility, 43% mentioned behaviour support, 0.5% assistance with personal tasks and 1 respondent reported assistance with transportation. However, despite being outside of their job description/expectations, 78% of respondents also mentioned providing support with academic tasks.

49 out of 56 respondents (87.5%) spend **100% of their time with only one student**. 5 out of 56 (0.8%) respondents spend more than 100% of their time with only one student: 3 respondents spend 5 hours (instead of 4), 1 respondent spends 6 hours, and 1 respondent spends 8 hours.

More than half of the respondents (33 out of 56, or 59%) spend less than 25% of their time **communicating with parents**, while 14 respondents (25%) do not communicate with parents at all. 0.9% communicate with parents 50% of their time, and (0.7%) spend all their time communicating with parents. 64% of all respondents (36 out of 56) were never instructed to **work in collaboration with others**; but 23% were instructed to work with the special educator/defectologist.

PA - STUDENT INTERACTIONS

When asked who spends more time with the student, 75% of respondents (42 out of 56) reported themselves, while 21% (12 out of 56) reported the classroom teacher. Only 2 respondents (3.6%) mentioned both themselves and the classroom teacher. There were no mentions of educational assistant and/or special educator/defectologist.

An overwhelming 55 out of 56 respondents (98%) consider the job of a PA essential for inclusive education. However, only 20 out of 55 (36%) justified their answer with a PA-specific reply, such as:

- “because this is about a student disabled in their movement, and they should have normal attendance of instruction at school”;
- “because they cannot satisfy their physiological needs independently”;
- “because of student’s easier socialization with other students, observance of school rules and protection from potential harm”.

Other answers varied, from broad statements about children with disabilities’ needs to supporting teachers in providing higher quality education.

When asked for a short description of expectations as a PA, answers varied widely and no noticeable pattern was found in the responses other than the use of the words that describe help, support, assistance and similar, in multiple responses. Some interesting responses that illustrate the need for a clear and concise job description included:

- “I do not know exactly what is expected of me, but I am fully dedicated to the child assigned to me”;
- “I am doing my best to be 100% efficient and to do all the tasks assigned to me by the parents”;
- “In addition to all the duties expected from me as a Personal Assistant, I am also

expected to overcome the existing gaps in the child's education, show results in achieving the IEP objectives, help with child's socialization and general progress and do the entire work of an Educational Assistant. This is expected from me by both parents and teachers”;

- “in addition to escorting them, it is expected to help them with acquiring curricular content, since the teachers lack enough time to devote to children with special needs”;
- “As an Educational Assistant, I am expect to help the student in performing their tasks during class”.

CWP PA PLACEMENT AS PATHWAY TO FUTURE EMPLOYMENT

47 out of 56 PAs (84%) reported not working as a PA with the same student more than the assigned 4/ hours per day. The other 9 respondents (16%) work 1 to 2 hours longer. In addition, 51 out of 56 respondents (91%) hope to be employed full-time, by the school or municipality, once their CWP engagement is over.

17 out of 56 respondents (30%) indicated they spend 100% of their wages from being a PA on items needed to perform their jobs. 15 respondents (27%) spend 50% and another 15 respondents (27%) spend 25% of their earnings. The remaining 14% (8 respondents) spend 75% of their earnings. 48% of the expenditures (27 out of 56) are on transportation, 21% (12 out of 56 respondents) on transportation and something else, 27% (15 out of 56) on food, and 14% (8 out of 56) on school supplies.

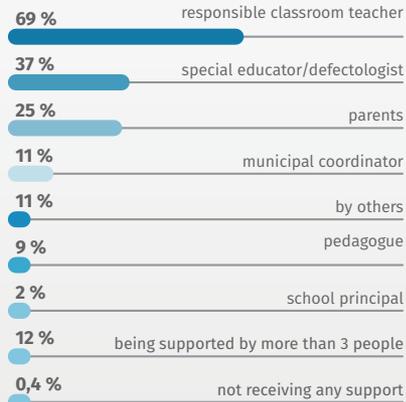
EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS SURVEY FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS

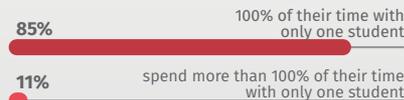
Out of 193 possible responders, 158 Educational Assistants (EAs) responded to the survey, resulting in 82% response rate. The average age of respondents is **34 years old**, with ages ranging from 23 to 59 years old. The greatest majority (146 out of 158) are **females** (92,5%), and about 67% (106 out of 158) are **married**. On average, respondents are in families with **4 family members**, where only **1 is regularly employed** and another is employed part-time, half of the time. On average, there is **1 child in the household**.

EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS (EA)

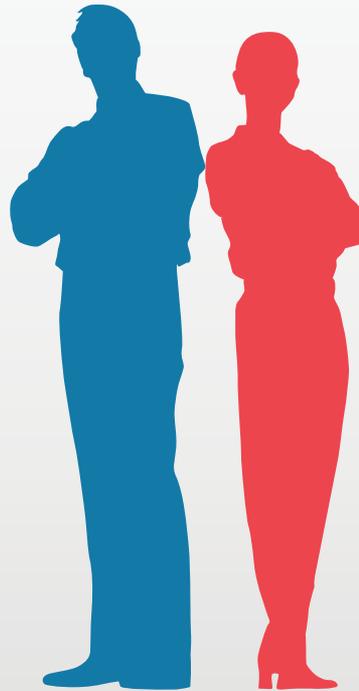
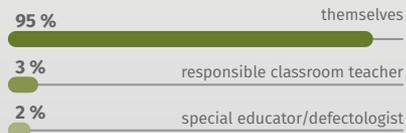
Who supports their daily tasks?



How much time they spend with students?



Who spends more time with the student?



99% respondents think that Educational Assistants are essential for inclusive education

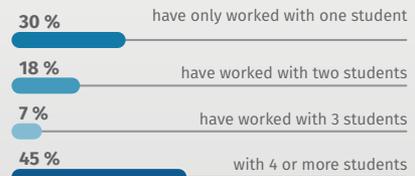
43 EA **100 %**
spend 100% of their time in school helping the teacher with most/all students in the classroom, effectively functioning as Teacher Assistants

14 EA **50 %**
spend 50% of their time in the school

22 EA **25 %**
of their time supporting most/all student

30% of EAs actually perform the duties intended by the post of EA within the CWP project.

Number of students ESs work with (out of 47 responded EAs)?



EDUCATION AND PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT

The vast majority (**90%**) of respondents (142 out of 158) have **completed University** (VII-1) and 11 respondents (7%) have completed a Masters. Only 1 respondent had completed only secondary education and 4 had completed college education. **42%** (66 out of 158) had no professional experience prior to CWP, while 51 out of 158 respondents (32%) had previous experience working with children and an additional 12 (8%) had experience working with children with disabilities.

PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT WITH CWP

39% of respondents (62 out of 158) were engaged with CWP for the first time. The remaining 61% of respondents (96 out of 158) had been engaged multiple times: 7 respondents were engaged once; 46 respondents were engaged twice; 36 respondents were engaged three times; and, 4 respondents were engaged 4 times. Out of the 96 respondents that had been previously engaged in the CWP, 77% had been engaged as **an Assistant**, 69% of which as Educational Assistant.

WORK PLACEMENT

47 respondents (30%) have only worked with one student. 28 respondents (18%) have worked with two students, 11 respondents (7%) have worked with 3 students and the remaining respondents with 4 or more students.

43% of respondents (68 out of 158) reported not having an adjustment period with the students they work with. The adjustment period reported by the others varied from 2 days to one month. The student was introduced to the EA by responsible classroom teacher (38%), parents (37%), special educator/defectologist (32%), municipal coordinator (28%), school principal (19%), pedagogue (11%) or psychologist (4%) and, in 3 instances, by the previous educational assistant.

57% of respondents (90 out of 158) reported being **supervised** by the municipal coordinator, 48% by the responsible classroom teacher, 41% by the special educator/defectologist, 20% by the parent, 13% by the school principal, 13% by the pedagogue, and 8% by others.

DAILY SUPPORT. TEAM-WORK & RESPONSIBILITIES

When asked **who supports their daily tasks**, 109 out of 158 respondents (69%) reported being supported by the responsible classroom teacher, 37% by the special educator/defectologist, 25% by the parents, 11% by the municipal coordinator, 11% by others, 9% by the pedagogues, and 2% by the school principal. Only 19 respondents (12%) mentioned **being supported by more than 3 people**, and 6 respondents **mentioned not receiving any support**.

135 out of 158 respondents (85%) spend **100% of their time with only one student**. 18 out of 158 (11%) respondents spend more than 100% of their time with only one student: 11 respondents spend 5 hours (instead of 4), 6 respondent spends 6 hours, and 1 respondent spends 7 hours.

In addition, 43 out of 158 respondents (27%) spend 100% of their time in school helping the teacher with most/all students in the classroom, effectively functioning as Teacher Assistants. Another 8% (14 respondents) spend 50% of their time, and 34% spend 25% of their time supporting most/all students. Only 30% of EAs actually perform the duties intended by the post of EA within the CWP project.

16% of respondents (25 out of 158) spend 100% of their time helping the teacher prepare daily lessons, while 8% spend 50% of their time. 35% spend less than 25% of their time on lesson preparation and 39% spend no time on lesson preparation.

16 respondents (10%) do not spend any of their time communicating with parents, and 75% of them spend 25% or less. 8% of respondents spend approximately 50% of their time communicating with parents and 7% spend all their time communicating with parents. 68 respondents (43%) were never instructed to collaborate with others, while the remaining 90 (57%) collaborate with various professionals: 48% of them with defectologists, 35% with psychologists, 30% with pedagogues, and 9% with the school teams.

EA - STUDENT INTERACTIONS

When asked who spends more time with the student, 95% of respondents (150 out of 158) reported themselves, while 3% (5 out of 158) reported the classroom teacher and 2% (3 out of 158) mentioned the special educator/defectologist.

An overwhelming 156 out of 158 (99%) respondents think that Educational Assistants are essential for inclusive education. The given answers can be categorized under two types:

the respondents who believe EAs are important because teachers cannot do the job alone, lacking either time or adequate knowledge, such as:

- “Because teachers have no knowledge at all, nor do other professionals”;
- “...because teachers cannot pay the attention or the time these children require, and they do not have exact guidance on how to do it, either, so without an educational assistant, these children would be lost in the educational and social process at school”;
- “The teacher cannot pay enough attention to such student”;
- “Teachers are not trained for inclusion”.



In addition, some EAs believe that children with disabilities require individualized instruction, and one-on-one support, both academic and socially.

- “It takes a special, individual approach because children are not independent to meet their needs”;
- “Because each child with a disability needs an individual approach, motivation, monitoring and correction”;
- “An individual approach is necessary”;
- “these children need extra help, further explanation of curricula content, support in socialization etc.”.

The two respondents who do not believe educational assistants are essential for inclusive education, justify their choice by saying that not all children can be in regular school and some should be in institutions.

When asked to describe their expectations of the job, answers were varied but focused on “helping” students, and supporting academic, social, behavioural and accessibility conditions in school.

CWP EA PLACEMENT AS PATHWAY TO FUTURE EMPLOYMENT

128 out of 158 PAs (81%) reported not working as an EA with the same student more than the assigned 4/hours per day. The other 31 respondents (19%) work longer: 19 respondents work 1 hour more, 7 respondents work 2 hours more, 3 respondents work 3 hours more, and 2 respondent works 4 hours more.

In addition, 145 out of 158 respondents (92%) hope to be employed full-time, by the school or municipality, once their CWP engagement is over.

26 out of 158 respondents (16%) indicated they spend 100% of their wages from being an EA on items needed to perform their jobs. Another 26 spend approximately 75% of their income, 39 out of 158 (25%) spend approximately 50% of their income and only 10 respondents reported not spending any income on work-related expenses. 48% of the expenditures (76 out of 158) are on transportation, 18% (29 out of 158) respondents spend on transportation and something else, 21.5% (34 out of 158) spend on school supplies.

TEACHER SURVEY FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS

In total, 210 teachers responded to the CWP Survey, focused on Personal and Educational Assistants. The average age of respondents is 43 years old, 177 are married, and the majority are females: 37 males and 121 females respondents. 87% (183 respondents) have a university degree, 8% (17 respondents) have a Masters' degree, and 3% (8 respondents) have only a college degree. There are also 2 other respondents at the end of the spectrum, 1 with only secondary education and 1 with a Ph. D.

CLASS COMPOSITION

The reported average number of students **per class** and data related to **teacher/student ratio** should be interpreted with caution. First, there might be a marked difference between the number of students in a school in the capital (Skopje), and the number of students in a school elsewhere in the country. Second, it is possible that teachers who reported having a large number of students with learning difficulties are subject teachers, who have multiple students, in multiple classes throughout the day/week, but for a short amount of time.

The respondents have an average of 14 students per class. 54 teachers (26%) reported not having any students with **learning difficulties** (LD) in their classes, and 73 teachers (35%) reported having only 1 student with a learning difficulty in their classes. The others, reported having more than 1 student: 38 teachers with 2 students with LD, 31 teachers with 3 students with LD, 5 teachers with 4 students with LD, 2 teachers with 5 students with LD, 1 teacher with 6 students with LD, 1 teacher with 8 students with LD, 1 teacher with 11 students with LD, 1 teacher with 15 students with LD and 2 teachers with 19 students with LD.

The same 210 respondents indicated having 58 students with a Personal Assistant and 81 students with an Educational Assistant. Interestingly, the teachers who reported having the greatest number of students with LD (combined 64 students) only have 1 PA and 3 EAs, which demonstrates a **highly disproportionate rate of PA/EA to student/class**.

With regards to children with disabilities, 181 children with disabilities are distributed throughout the 210 respondents. There are 28 Teachers with no children with disabilities, there are 153 Teachers with 1 children with disabilities, there are 19 Teachers with 2 Children



TEACHERS

43 Is the average age of respondents

121 females **37 males**

Married (177 out of 210)

84 %

have a university degree

87 %

have a Masters' degree

8 %

have a college degree

3 %

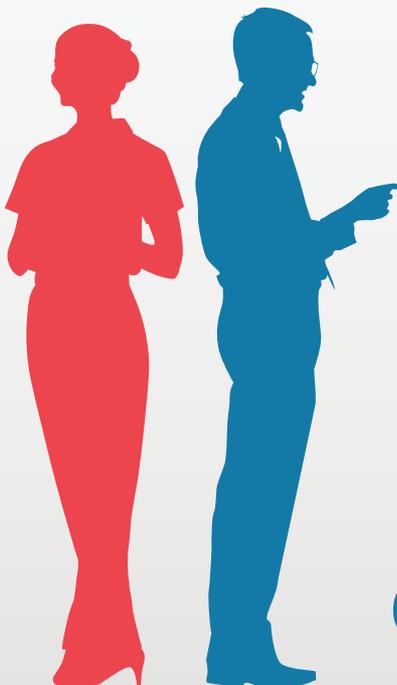
secondary education



a Ph. D

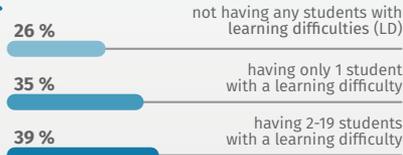
99%

When asked if EA are essential for inclusive education, indicated "yes".



14 An average of students per class

How many students with learning difficulties (LD) are in their classes?



The portion rate of PA/EA to student/class

58 students with PAs

81 students with EAs

64 students combined only have 1 PA and 3 EAs

ЛА минуваат повеќе време со ученикот

75 %

ОА сето време му помагаат на наставникот

27 %

with disabilities, 4 Teachers with 3 children with disabilities, 2 Teachers with 4 children with disabilities, 1 Teacher with 6 children with disabilities, 1 teacher with 7 children with disabilities, and 1 teacher with 19 children with disabilities.

DAILY SUPPORT

When asked "Who assigns the assistant to the student", teachers indicated the municipal coordinator does so in 141 instances (67%). The school principal does so in 25 responses (12%), and the defectologist in 24 responses (11%). Teachers responded that 18 parents (8.5%)

assigns the assistant, the pedagogue was indicated by 7 teachers, and the classroom teacher her/himself in 4 instances. Importantly, 46 respondents did not know who assigns a PA or EA to their class.

Supervision of the assistants varies more evenly among respondents. 41% indicated the municipal coordinator, 34% indicated the special educator/defectologist, 33% indicated themselves as supervisors, 21% indicated the school principal, 20% indicated the pedagogue, 11% indicated the parent (who is not present at school, is not an objective party, and may or may not be sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to supervise an assistant).

TEAM-WORK & RESPONSIBILITIES

As reported by 188 respondents (90%), the assistant in their classroom works with only one student. 5 respondents indicated the assistant works with multiple students in the same classroom, and 3 respondents indicated the assistant works with multiple students in multiple classes. 14 respondents do not know.

77% of respondents (162) indicated that assistants provide support to students to perform academic tasks. 34% (71 respondents) provide accessibility support, 31% (65 respondents) provide behavioural support, 26% (55 respondents) modify academic tasks and only 4 respondents indicated support with physiological needs.

102 teachers indicated they delegate some of their tasks to EAs and PAs and 100 teachers indicated they do not delegate any tasks to assistants. 8 teachers (4%) delegate all they tasks to EAs and PAs. In addition, 97 teachers indicated PAs and EAs do not spend any time helping them to prepare daily lessons, but 30% (64 respondents) indicate EAs and PAs spend at least some time, but less than 25% preparing daily lessons. 12% of respondents (25) indicated PAs and EAs spend about half their time preparing daily lessons and 11% (24) of respondents say assistants spend all their time preparing daily lessons.

65% of respondents (136) indicated that EAs and PAs collaborate with others, various stakeholders and under various circumstances. 25 assistants spend all their time communicating with parents. And additional 27 assistants spend at least 50% of their time communicating with parents. About half of assistants (105) spend less that 25% of their time and 52 spend no time communicating with parents.



THE ROLE OF EAS AND PAS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

An overwhelming 185 respondents (88%) indicated that PAs are essential in inclusive education. However, when asked to justify their response, most made reference to the skills/support provided by an EA:

- “Students with special needs require educational assistants for smooth realization of the teaching process”;
- “Yes, because teachers are not properly trained to work with these children”.

When asked if EA are essential for inclusive education, 196 respondents (93%) indicated yes. However, when asked to justify their response, most teachers indicated that EAs should take on the teacher’s roles and responsibilities:

- “Because they know best and are trained to work with people with disabilities”;
- “Yes. This leaves room for the teacher to be more creative and better organize the work”;
- “Yes, because the student needs 100% individualized attention, assistance, support, guidance”;
- “Yes, because I am not sufficiently trained to work with students with disabilities and on top of that, I do not have time to pay enough attention to these students”.

207 respondents gave various responses when asked about their expectations of assistants:

- “To assist the student in acquiring the teaching content, in socialization, in the preparation of the IEP etc.”;
- “To help me and guide me in the approach to the student and also to guide me in terms of other challenges”;
- “To help in explaining the tasks to the student, to assist in the teaching process in terms of keeping student’s focus on the subject”;
- “The student requires assistance in learning, but not an educational assistant, because they will interfere with the teaching of other students”.



LIST OF VISITS AND INTERVIEWS



UNDP

- Ms. Narine Sahakyan, UNDP Resident Representative
- Ms. Suzana Ahmeti Janjiki, UNDP Programme Officer
- Ms. Snezana Mircevska-Damjanovska, UNDP National Technical Advisor
- Mr. Naumche Tashkovski, UNDP Monitoring Coordinator
- Ms. Marija Trifunovska, UNDP Speciality on Disability

MES

- Ms. Natasha Jankovska, Advisor, Ministry of Education and Science
- Ms. Biljana Trajkovska, Advisor, Ministry of Education and Science
- Ms. Elena Ivanova, Head of the Sector for Primary education, MES

PRIMARY SCHOOL "KIRIL PEJCHINOVIKJ, KISELA VODA. SKOPJE

- Ms. Elizabetha Janevska, Coordinator in the Municipality of Kiselea Voda
- Assistants, mentor of Assistants, parents of supported children

PRIMARY SCHOOL IN KUMANOVO

- Ms. Tatjana Stefanovska, Coordinator in the Municipality of Kumanovo
- Assistants, mentor of Assistants, parents of supported children

GOVERNMENT BUILDING

- Mr. Goran Petrushev, Head of the Professional body for ICF
- Ms. Lidija Krstevska Dojcinovska, State Adviser at the Office of the Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

UNICEF

- Ms. Vera Kondikj Mitkovska, Education Specialist, UNICEF

ESA

- Ms. Menka Gugulevska, Head of the sector for ALMMs, ESA

MLSP

- Ms. Valentina Petrovska, Advisor on Social Protection, MLSP

BDE

- Ms. Snezana Trpevska, Advisor from BDE

ACADEMIA

- Prof. Olivera Rashikj Canevska, Institute of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Faculty of Philosophy
- Prof. Aleksandra Karovska Ristovska, Institute of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Faculty of Philosophy,
- Prof. Jasmina Delčeva Dizdarevic, Institute of Pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy
- Prof. Orhideja Surbanovska, Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy
- Prof. Dr. Biljana Klimcevska, Faculty of Pedagogy





Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



UNPRPD

Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

