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Higher education for people with disabilities - Romanian education experience

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Abstract

Implementation of a project which aimed was having access to a quality higher education to prospective students with disabilities has been a successful complex situations, obstacles, fears, future projections etc. Among the obstacles that hamper their access to higher education are: high costs, almost prohibitive for universities to provide suitable means for assimilation of the curriculum for these people with disabilities, physical barriers (inability to move at the college in order to pursue these courses or to access course materials in print format standard), material and financial matters such as, lack of qualified staff for educational mentoring people with disabilities, lack of guidelines/ proper supervision with mentors help for a smooth learning and motivation processes. The need to implement the project comes from the identification of target groups. Like all others citizens, people with disabilities are entitled to the same rights under the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that all human beings are free and equal as dignity and rights. To achieve this goal, we should take into account the diversity of each community, and people with a disability to be sure that they can enjoy all human rights: civil, political, social, economic, cultural, all recognized the national and international institutions. This project is important to understand in what way universities are prepared in terms of cultural, scientific and organizational to receive students with disabilities, in what way the content of university courses take into account the internal reality, made up of people with disabilities or not.

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1. The context of the project

The inclusion of disabled people requires a range of measures designed to provide the foundation of human culture and civilization, so that all people benefit from them and develop them further in their own individual manner.

Inclusive education is an ongoing process for improvement of educational institutions with the aim to develop existing resources, especially human resources, in order to support integration in the education of all students in a community (***, 1999).

Moreover, the inclusive education aims at improving the education learning activity. The education and training is intrinsically linked to each person's life and learning context, and hence the need for appropriate partnership between teachers and students, between students themselves, between teachers, but also between the family and the local community. The strategies for teaching and learning at all levels must be adapted in order to meet the diversity and countless styles of learning and development of students.

Pedagogical and social assistance to people with SEN aims at psychological, pedagogical and social interventions for the diagnosis, recovery, education, training, professionalism, adaptation and social integration of persons who have a number of weaknesses, as well as in situations of persons that are found in a delicate position arising from various causes (Gherguț, 2001).

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that to achieve equality for people with disabilities, the right to non -discrimination should be supplemented with the right to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, integration and participation in community's life. Activities in education and training should be constantly supported by socioeconomic complementary measures, and by policies which support the improvement of general living conditions of European citizens, the integration of immigrants and minorities (especially gypsies) and the inclusion of groups with special needs (mainly people disabled and elderly people) at all levels and in all areas of education.

According to statistical studies of the National Authority for Disabled Persons in 2009, there were about 100,000 non-institutionalized disabled people with average age between 18-34 years. In the general population of people with disabilities, approximately 62 % suffer from the range of physical disabilities, somatic, auditory, visual, HIV/ AIDS (Linu, 2010).

The aim of the project sought access to students with disabilities in high quality education. Among the obstacles that hamper their access to higher education are: high cost, almost prohibitive, for universities to provide adequate means of assimilating the curriculum for these people with disabilities, physical barriers (inability to physically go to the faculty in order to participate to these courses or to access course materials in printed format standard), problems regarding finances, lack of qualified staff for educational mentoring of people with disabilities, lack of guidelines/ proper supervision with mentors' help for a smooth learning and motivation processes (Linu, 2010).

In Romania employed people with disabilities are very few in comparison to the other countries (Romania 4%, Bulgaria 13 %, Turkey 22.29 % and the UK 29%). Having no information about the problems faced by people with disabilities and their situation as a group, the policy founders cannot take effective measures to help them integrate into society.

The target groups of the project were composed of 300 students with disabilities, 100 teachers of the three partner universities and 50 private social partners in education. The needs of the target group were identified as a result of the feed -back received from the applicant of the higher education system and as a result of prospecting studies at community/ national level, presented above. The project, through the activities it proposes, has contributed to the following objectives set out in the National Reform Programme: insertion of young people into the labour market, increasing employment and activity rates through skills, education and improved labour market (Linu, 2010).

2. The need for the implementation of the project

The need for the implementation of the project resulted from the identification of target groups. Like all other citizens, people with disabilities are entitled to have the same rights as stated in the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which says that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

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