



Potential Abuse in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is the safeguarding for every child, including children in need of special conditions for education, of maximum participation in the educational process and an outcome prescribed by the state standard for general education, by means of ensuring the necessary conditions and an adapted environment, in line with the child's development peculiarities.¹

The need to transition to universal inclusion was endorsed by the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia through amendments to the Republic of Armenia Law on General Education on 1 December 2014,² which contemplated the implementation of a system of universal inclusive education in all general education institutions of Armenia by 1 August 2025.

The cornerstone of inclusive education is the correct and impartial assessment of the need to provide special conditions for a child's education, followed by the whole process of education organization, including financing.³

A person shall be deemed to need special conditions for education (NSCE) if such person has difficulties related to instruction, including physical and mental peculiarities of development, when such person needs special conditions for education in order to master the core curricula of general education.⁴

Corruption is a fundamental factor affecting the efficiency and quality of the education process organization for children receiving inclusive education. Hence, the existing opportunities for corruption ought to be eliminated.

Issues

Schools inflate the number of NSCE students, out of an expectation to receive additional funding.

The per-student funding to schools in the case of NSCE students is four-fold greater than in the case of non-NSCE students, as it includes food and transportation costs, the wages of the multidisciplinary team members, and other school expenditures.⁵ In the absence of proper oversight, the schools can obviously be interested in receiving extra financing.

The Law on the Education of Persons in Need of Special Education Conditions left room for artificially inflating the number of NSCE students in the school through various arrangements and listing non-NSCE children as NSCE students. According to this Law, inclusive education may apply, among others, to children with *behavioral and emotional* (also known as psychological) disorders, which, in the absence of clear criteria, has led to assessment abuse. Although the Law on the Education of Persons in Need of Special Education Conditions has been repealed, since the Law on General Education was amended, children assessed in the past have not been reviewed, and the assessment reports on those children remain in force, still leaving room for abuse.

A secondary school in the Shirak Region had 199 students in the inclusive program as of February 2016, of which 60 to 70 percent were children with behavioral and emotional disorders. There is currently no clear definition of such disorders.

The funding allocated to schools for the food of children studying through the inclusive education program is not spent properly.

Since 2016, the food supply tender for schools under the Yerevan City Administration has been organized in a centralized manner, by the Procurement Department of the City Administration, and the price proposed by the winning bidder is about two fifths lower than the actual price of food supplied to the various schools around the country. If it is possible to supply food at 480 drams per child, then it is unclear why some schools are currently paying 780 drams for the same. As a matter of fact, the food supplied at 480 drams does not differ from that supplied at 780 drams in terms of either quality or quantity.

The daily food funding per student in the inclusive program is on average 760 to 780 Armenian drams. However, the bidder that was awarded the centralized contract for food supply to schools under the Yerevan City Administration is currently supplying food to students in the inclusive program at a cost of only 484 Armenian drams per day.⁶

This supports the conclusion that there are corruption risks in the food supply tender organized by the schools. For example, a school principal can strike a deal with a company supplying food, whereby all or a part of the difference between the price paid for a food package and the real price of such package will be given to the school principal. Alternatively, the company supplying the food may be a business belonging to the principal or a person related to the principal, and the principal may have a private interest in awarding the contract to a particular company, for the prevention of which there are currently no tools.

The management of funding allocated for the transportation of NSCE children is uncontrollable.

The per-student funding provided for NSCE children includes transportation costs of 200 Armenian drams per day.⁷ The transportation costs are provided to the student (or parent) or guardian in cash.

However, the children's parents often refuse to take the transportation costs, but there is no formal procedure for such refusals. Some of the parents are not even aware that they are entitled to funding. Hence, it is unclear how many parents have refused to take the funding allocated for transportation, how much money was thus saved, and what purpose such savings were eventually used for. Under such circumstances, the principals can abuse their position and arbitrarily manage the transportation budget, over which there is no effective control mechanism.

Principals have discretion in the formation of multidisciplinary teams.

According to the legislation regulating inclusive education, a school must have a multidisciplinary team (comprising a general education teacher, a special education teacher, a psychologist, a speech therapist, and a team coordinator) to work with NSCE children. However, there is currently no definition of the duties of the team members, their job descriptions, or the minimum job requirements. Moreover, in some cases, the principal, exercising discretion, appoints an Armenian language teacher to the position of a special teacher. In some cases, a staff position in the team is divided between two specialists, the appropriateness of which is also questionable.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are aimed at reducing the identified corruption risks.

THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE SHOULD:

- Reassess, in accordance with the procedure stipulated by the extant Law, the children assessed and certified for NSCE prior to the 2014 amendments to the Law;
- Develop the job profiles of the members of the multidisciplinary team, which will clearly outline the minimum professional requirements, the duties of the team members, the job descriptions, and the main functions;
- Transfer the authority to select the members of the multidisciplinary team to the school governing body and restrict the principal's powers in this field;
- Develop clear mechanisms for the oversight of inclusive education provided by schools, which should include, as a minimum:
 - ✓ The quality of inclusive education provided in schools;
 - ✓ The efficient spending of state budget resources by the inclusive education schools (including the hiring of the necessary staff, budget and extra-budgetary funds for food and transportation, and the like); and
 - ✓ The lawful purposes of use of funds when parents refuse to take the transportation money for children receiving inclusive education;

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- Prescribe a written procedure for parent refusal of the transportation or food funding for children receiving inclusive education, as well as the relevant legal consequences, including a requirement to return such funding to the state budget or to allow the school to spend it for other purposes with the permission of the authorized government body;
 - Develop mechanisms for the public oversight of inclusive education with the engagement of non-governmental organizations having expertise in the education field; and
 - Require publication of the whole budget of general education institutions and the inclusive education expenditure items therein.

¹ Republic of Armenia Law on General Education, Article 3.

² Law HO-200 adopted by the Republic of Armenia National Assembly on 1 December 2014.

³ The process of transition to universal inclusive education is based on the Pilot Procedure of Financing Necessary for Organizing the Education of NSCE Children in General Schools of the Tavush Region (approved by Government Decree 46-N dated 27 January 2011), which was launched in 2011.

⁴ Republic of Armenia Law on General Education, Article 3.

⁵ Republic of Armenia Government Decree 1365-N dated 25 August 2005.

⁶ The information was provided in an interview with an employee of the Yerevan City Administration.

⁷ Republic of Armenia Government Decree 1365-N dated 25 August 2005.

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