Advocacay Paper

Children with Disabilities in Education

Challenges and Barriers to Access Education Services

Situation Analysis

In Turkey children with disabilities are involved in education system through different opportunities based on the need and capacity of the child. The Turkish Official Journal has published the regulations for Special Education in 2018 through Ministry of National Education (1). In this document, the opportunities for involvement in education is described for different types of capacities; individuals with more than one impairment, early childhood education, in house education, in hospital education preparation for group education, complementary education activities, individualized education programs and inclusive classrooms (part-full time) for children with special needs are described in detail.

However, the practical implementation of these regulations often falls short of the stated policy goals. The needs assessments (2) and reports (3) demonstrate that children with vulnerabilities, such as disability and a refugee status, can be barriers for children to access the education services. Sometimes, the services are not available in the area or there is a lack of information of parents-caregivers that they dont know how to be enrolled in these services. Sometimes on the other hand, even if the services are available, there are some barriers such as;

Accessibility

- The inaccessibility of transportation services to schools
- The physical inaccessibility of buildings
- Infrastructural challenges
- Lack of assistive device to mobilize the child (4)
- Lack of accessible education materials
- Lack of inclusive communication methodologies in schools

Attitudes of the community

- Discouragement of family members
- Lack of motivational support for children with disabilities
- Bullying in the schools and in the community for children with disabilities and refugees
- Overcrowd of classes in relation to bullying

Financial strains

- Inability to cover the expenses of school and transportation
- Inability to cover the needed assistive device
- Increase in child labor

Documentation – Registration

- Lack of documents or differences in registration – residency of the refugee children
- Challenges in registration due to the schools' managers

Health related issues

- Especially children with disabilities have high needs for access to health, regular visits to hospital and sometimes requires hospitalization which hinders their participation in schools
- MHPSS needs are not adequately addressed

The abovementioned barriers prevent children from participating in education services. The impact of these barriers is worsened by the EQ, unfortunately.

Recommendations

Improve Accessibility

- The municipalities should be informed about the challenges of infrastructural inaccessibility and transportation opportunities. This can cover repairing the damaged roads and ramps that don't allow people with disabilities to move independently by their assistive devices. Also, enhancing the accessible public transportation to some neighbors should be discussed.
- Communication with schools' managers to ensure that the building is accessible. This can cover activating the elevators if not working, ramps in the entrance, location of classrooms who host children with disabilities, e.g. number of floors.
- Awareness raising with teachers on producing accessible materials based on different needs of children with disabilities
- Inclusion of children with different types of disabilities should be integrated into the seminars that the teachers are enrolled in before the start of the semester.
- Accessible activities planning among students
- Raising awareness of families on how to access assistive devices and how it can support the child to move more independently in the school.

Change in the Attitude of Community

- Awareness raising with families regarding the ways of communication with their children, highlighting that children with disabilities are people with capacities.
- Awareness raising for teachers and school managers in supporting children with disabilities. This can include production of accessible materials, accessible activities planning that will encourage affection among children.
- Awareness of assistive devices: For children without disabilities, to make them understand that disability, assistive devices are not something to be afraid- ashamed of. Also, the authorities in the school should allow the assistive devices to be present in the classroom for the sake of the child's independent movement. This can create a need for an adjustment in the classroom design.

- Awareness raising on bullying: The dealing with bullying should be in different levels;
  - For teachers: awareness on how to deal with bullying and bullied students, what is the effective approach to these children

  - For children who are exposed to bullying: awareness on how to deal with bullying and what is the effective way to response to this action. This can include reporting, perception of bullying etc.
  - For families of child who is exposed to bullying: awareness on how to deal with the child, the correct approach to deal with it, how to report the action etc.
  - For children who perform bullying: awareness on the harm of bullying, why s/he should be avoiding it and what are the possible results that can be caused by bullying someone.
  - For families of bullies : awareness on how to deal with the child and let them fix this action and avoid for future harms
- A wider spectrum of Disability Inclusion training and awareness raising campaigns should be spread at national wide for all people with disabilities, from all age groups and different types of disabilities.

Opportunities for Financial Support

- Awareness raising – Information sharing with families to learn more about the support provided to children with disabilities by government institutes, I/NGOs and OPDs and how to access them, including financial support as well as assistive devices support.
- Information sharing with school managers and teachers to learn about organizations that provide support to children with disabilities for referrals.
- Awareness of child labor cases and how to approach them. These sessions can include both teachers and families.

Documentation-Registration

- Information sharing sessions with families regarding how to deal with missing documents, communication with migration management offices and provincial education directorates.

Improved Access to Health Services

- Information sharing on available health services for children with disabilities and how to access them as well as introducing I/NGOs support in this regard

- Awareness raising and information sharing with teachers and school managers for children who needs to spend long times in hospitals
- Awareness raising among children to support their friends during the hospital stays (sharing notes, supporting with Homeworks etc.)
- Dissemination and enhancing of available inclusive MHPSS services for children
- Awareness raising on the benefits of Assistive Devices and how they improve the quality of life for children with disabilities and their caregivers
- Awareness raising-information sharing on how to access the assistive devices through government institutes and I/NGOs' support

Useful Links

- Peer Bullying related resources on Ministry of National Education : Akran Zorbalığı (meb.gov.tr)
- Example of accessible stories for children : Audio book : TÜRKÇEM benim ses bayrağım | Özel Eğitim Çocuk Dergisi (meb.gov.tr)
- Example of accessible stories for children : Sign Language Interpreted book Orada Bir Köy Var Uzakta | Özel Eğitim Çocuk Dergisi (meb.gov.tr)
- Assistive Technologies in Special Education https://besniram.meb.k12.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/02/02/964947/dosyalar/2020_09/15133235_YARDI MCI_TEKNOLOJYLER_PDF.pdf
- Accessibility Guide by Family and Social Services Ministry https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/65613/erisilebilirlik_kilavuzu_2021.pdf

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2. Türkiye: Education Sector Needs Overview,May 2024 by Education Cluster, Save the Children and Unicef. Accessed on 16th September 2024 through the link : https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/turkiye-education-sector-needs-overview-may-2024-entr
3. Violence and Bullying in Educational Settings : The experience of children and young people with disabilities, UNESCO. Accessed on 16th September through the link : https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/library/documents/violence-and-bullying-educational-settings-experience-children-and-young-people
4. Relief International Needs Assesment on Health Needs in Adana,Istanbul and Mersin –Türkiye, January 2024