

# POLICY MONITORING REPORT

## Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Pre-university Education

Municipality of Gjilan

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# **Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Pre-University Education**

Gjilan Municipality - Case Example



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## Introduction

The right to education is fundamental for every child, including children with disabilities. In Kosovo, the legal and policy framework aims to ensure inclusive education, including clear measures for the support and academic and social development of these children. The inclusion of children with disabilities in the education system requires a multi-faceted approach, taking into account legal, institutional, and practical aspects to guarantee an appropriate environment for learning and development. However, fulfilling this obligation is often jeopardized by various factors, such as lack of human resources in institutions, lack of dedicated spaces, insufficient infrastructure, and other factors.

To ensure effective monitoring of inclusion policies, this document analyzes the current situation of inclusive education in Gjilan, including the relevant legislation, responsible institutions, and the main challenges faced by children with disabilities. The document also aims to propose strategies for improving the implementation of existing policies and to provide recommendations for the future, including improvements in infrastructure, human resources, and institutional support and beyond.

Inclusive education is not only a legal obligation, but also an essential moral aspect for the equal development of children with disabilities.

## Methodology

The monitoring was carried out using a combined research approach, including findings from social networks and online media (municipal portals), interviews with key stakeholders, and document research. The methods used include:

Research of official documents (Desk Research): To understand the legal, policy, and strategic framework regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities. Key documents reviewed:

- Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-University Education in Kosovo: Defines the principles of inclusive education;
- Administrative Instruction 23/2013 on Resource Centers;
- Administrative Instruction No. 02/2024 (amending and supplementing Administrative Instruction (MASHT) No. 16/2027) on pedagogical assessment for children with special educational needs;

- Strategic Plan for Inclusive Education (2021–2026): Addresses measures for integrating children with disabilities;
- Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the guide for drafting the individual education plan for children with special educational needs: focuses on developing and supporting the education of children with disabilities;
- National Education Strategy (2022–2026): Sets objectives for accessible and quality education;
- Education Development Plan (2023–2026) for the municipality of Gjilan: Establishes municipal education goals aligned with the Ministry of Education.

Interviews with key stakeholders: Structured interviews were conducted to assess the actual state of institutions and processes related to inclusive education.

Analysis on social networks and online media: Research on internet sources such as interviews, public discussions, social media events, podcasts, and press conferences relevant to inclusive education in the municipality.

## **Analysis of Existing Policies and Implementation in Practice**

State institutions have established documents for managing cases of children with disabilities, but not in very specific ways. Laws and administrative instructions often conflict with practice, especially in cases concerning school infrastructure. Implementation of these policies is limited due to lack of necessary resources and lack of training for the parties involved.

The **Law No. 04/L-032 on Pre-University Education in Kosovo** addresses and regulates pre-university education from ISCED levels 0 to 4, including the education and training of children and adults, and it explicitly encompasses persons with disabilities.

Notably, the law specifies that municipalities must ensure free, safe, and appropriate transport for children with disabilities or learning difficulties attending municipal schools. In practice, this transport does not exist, which contributes to families' hesitation in sending persons with disabilities for further schooling.

Additionally, the aforementioned law stipulates that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) is obliged to provide assistance to ensure the suitability of school buildings and equipment according to international standards for health and safety and for environmental protection, in order to guarantee access for students with disabilities and provide assistive devices to support inclusive education. The municipality, however, does not sufficiently seek help from the Ministry for the installation of elevators and accessible toilets for use by persons with disabilities. This lack of support results in limited access to laboratories and special classrooms throughout school buildings.

**The Education Development Plan (2023–2026) for the municipality of Gjilan,** governs long- term planning by focusing on four main priority areas, in which there is no specific focus on persons with disabilities. The plan speaks only in general terms about addressing this area. It notes that efforts have been made to improve access and support for these students, such as hiring assistants and covering some needs in schools. However, several challenges remain unresolved. Many teachers do not have the proper preparation to work with children with disabilities, making it difficult to adapt teaching methods.

Even though the municipality has continued hiring support staff at a good pace, the number of such staff remains very low relative to the real needs. Given the small number of support personnel, the implementation of policies and guidelines for inclusion is slow and not very effective in practice.

### **Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Guide for drafting the individual education plan for children with special educational needs.**

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a document focused on the educational development and support of children with disabilities. This guide provides instructions for drafting a personalized education plan for these children, covering pedagogical, rehabilitative, and supportive aspects. IEP requires extensive collaboration among schools, parents, and other institutions, but in practice this coordination is lacking. Parents often do not have sufficient support to actively contribute to their children's education. Moreover, to be active participants in their child's education, parents need training or counseling on how they can assist in developing their child's skills. However, such programs are completely absent.

**The monitoring reveals that:**

- Psychologists and support staff are overworked and cannot provide continuous support to all students in need.
- In cases where there are students with disabilities in schools, students are not notified and do not receive any training on how to behave, to try to integrate them into society or help them with daily tasks.
- Despite the fact that current laws and documents do not address in detail essential issues such as slopes, most schools have access for students with disabilities (slopes). However, this access is limited only to classes on the first floor, making it impossible for them to participate in laboratories or classes on other floors, in the absence of an elevator that the school must have to meet the infrastructural conditions for children with disabilities.
- In almost no school, there are toilets suitable for people with disabilities.
- School staff does not specifically ensure that laboratory rooms are located on the first floors, to enable access by all.
- Lack of cooperation between schools and health services.

## **Progress, Improvements and Good Practices**

The Municipality of Gjilan, compared to other municipalities, is performing well in providing conditions for persons with disabilities. Good practices and initiatives identified through the monitoring of policies are recommended to be continued:

- In the Technical High School, a laboratory was relocated from the second floor to the first floor so that all students, without distinction, can attend lab sessions;
- The Municipality of Gjilan has been evaluated by UNICEF as a model for supporting children with special needs;
- The municipality organizes awareness campaigns in collaboration with schools, partner organizations, and institutions;
- Over the last 3 years, the Municipality of Gjilan has hired a total of 29 teaching assistants (up from only 3 initially). This has been achieved through the municipality's capacities and partnerships with other organizations;
- Students have established psychology clubs, where various issues directly related to students are learned about and addressed;
- The Municipality of Gjilan has created and made operational 6 resource rooms;
- The Municipality of Gjilan has digitalized a resource room, as a first-of-its-kind model in Kosovo.



## Recommendations for Improvement

Based on the key findings of the monitoring, the following steps are recommended to improve the implementation of inclusive education policies in schools:

### Policy Improvements

- Develop an action plan for Gjilan that sets out concrete measures to improve inclusive education at the local level;
- Strengthen monitoring mechanisms by including regular reporting from schools on the progress of children with disabilities;
- Develop detailed guidelines for Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and standardize their implementation in all schools in Gjilan.

### Capacity Building

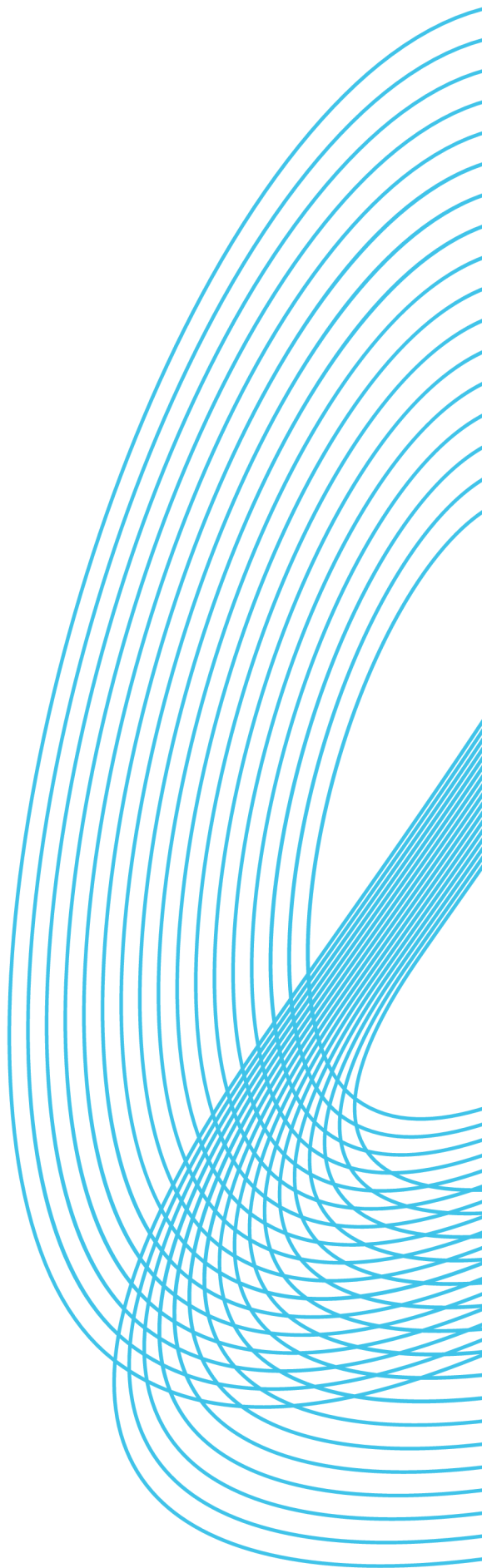
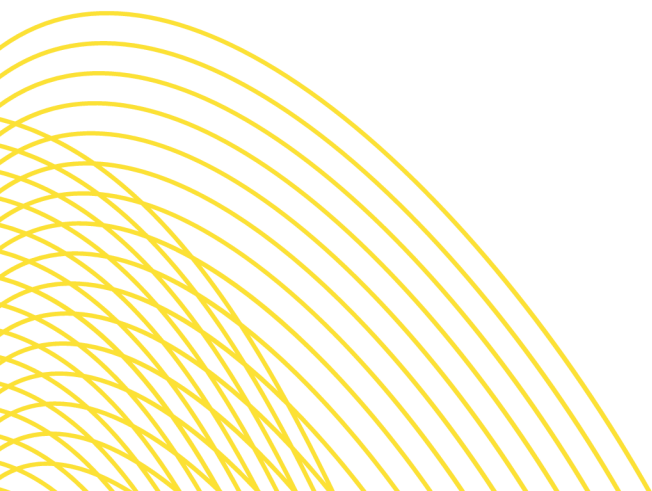
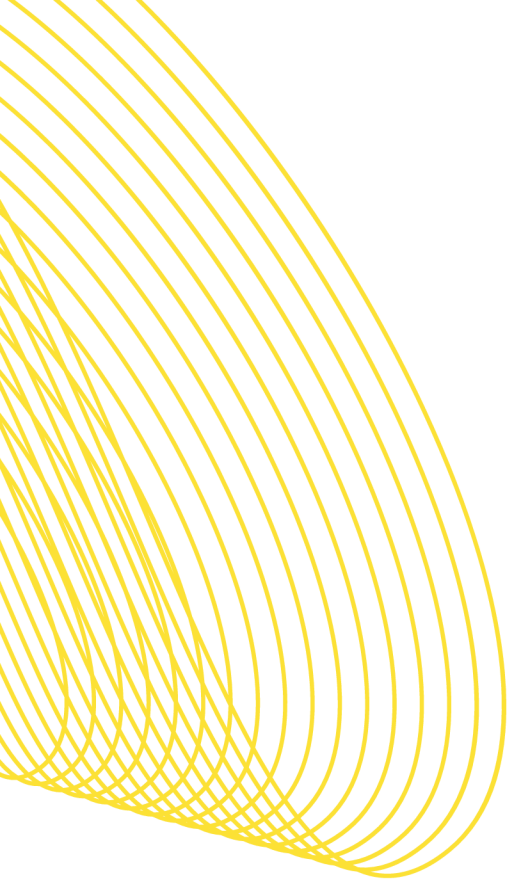
- Continue the increasing trend of hiring support staff. (Over the past 3 years, the number of assistants has risen from 3 to 29 to provide direct assistance to children with disabilities.);
- Provide continuous training for teachers and parents on inclusive education methods and on managing classrooms with diverse needs;
- Establish a center of expertise for inclusive education in Gjilan, which will support teachers and schools with resources, training, and counseling.

### Improvement of Infrastructure

- Modernize schools in Gjilan to ensure that all school facilities are accessible to children with disabilities;
- Install ramps and elevators in all schools that do not have appropriate access for children with mobility difficulties;
- If funding for elevators is lacking, continue relocating laboratories to ground floors to ensure all students have access, as was done in the technical high school;
- Improve adapted school transportation to ensure that children with disabilities can attend school without obstacles;
- Continue expanding laboratories, personalized learning spaces, and resource rooms (increasing from none to 6 currently) to help children with diverse needs develop practical skills.

## **Community Engagement and Cooperation**

- Establish psychology clubs in all municipal schools, led by students.
- Create parent support groups to help parents of children with disabilities share experiences and receive professional support;
- Maintain close cooperation with NGOs and health institutions to provide services for children with disabilities;
- Involve local businesses and the private sector to offer financial and technological support for schools and students with disabilities.



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