

Promoting an inclusive orientation in education: challenges and prospects from the implementation of a four-year sensitization program.

During the last decade the issue of promoting inclusive education, that is the modern educational approach which aims at creating the necessary conditions for equal access of all students to education, is repeatedly presented as one of the main priorities of the Greek educational system. Several factors have contributed to this prioritization, including: a) a number of International Declarations (UNESCO, 1994) and Conventions (UN, 1989) that stress the need to adopt educational policies that can contribute to the abolishment of discriminations in education, b) broader national policies which are bound to the above imperatives (N.C.S.S., 2022), c) extended research evidence which underlines the multiple benefits that inclusive education has for all students (EASNIE, 2018), d) the changes that are observed in the prominent attendance conditions of the student population (Vlachou, 2017) and e) statistical data which indicates the range of existing educational inequalities (ELSTAT, 2021). However, although the Greek educational policy has supported the necessity of promoting an inclusive orientation to education, important discrepancies are still observed between the stated policy and the educational practice, while at the same time systemic weaknesses still exist as they are indicated by: (a) a series of research evidence and critical analyses (Nteropoulou & Slee, 2019; Karagianni & Koutsoklenis, 2023) and (b) the reports of national bodies and international UN Committees (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2022). Having taken the above into consideration and in an attempt to start a broader dialogue and provide feedback on the current policies and practices, the Ministry of Education has implemented a four-year program for sensitization and promotion of the inclusive goal, which has been financed by the European Commission and has been technically supported by the expertise of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. The project involved educational stakeholders, members of staff of all kinds of schools, representatives of bodies and parents' organizations as well as foreign experts and academic personnel. The description of the content, methodology and initial findings of the deliverables of the project, which has been implemented with the collaboration of all the Ministry of Education's Directorates of Primary, Secondary, Vocational and Special Education as well as the Unit for the Coordination and Monitoring of Refugees' Education will be the focus of this presentation and the springboard for a review of the existing condition and the potential for promotion of the inclusive goal in the Greek educational policy and in pedagogical practice.