



NATIONAL GREEK POLICY FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE

A study in the context of the Intellectual Output O3
(Comparative Survey) of the Erasmus⁺ Project TRAIL
«Teenagers: The road with Autism to independent
living»



Regional Directorate for Education of Thessaly

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NATIONAL GREEK SOCIAL POLICY FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE

In 1999 autism made its appearance in the Greek legislation with Law 2716/1999 on mental health and in 2000 with Law 2817/2000 on special education. In this context, laws and regulations have been established in order to put an end to the exclusions, obstacles and difficulties in social integration of autistic people and provide them with social protection respectively. In accordance with the following Law, the essential current institutional framework has been established. The aim of this framework consists in the identification of the regulations of social policy in Greece, which mainly pertains to the following domains:

- **The education** of autistic people, which is provided free of charge in public schools, while the form of these schools is defined by the type and the extent of the special educational needs of these students.
- **Work and employment** which aim at autistic people's equal participation in society, production, consumption and the prevention of their exclusion and marginalization respectively.
- **Health, social care and security** which aim at the application of a minimum level of their social protection through the establishment of financial aid and the operation of social support and reintegration institutions.

According to the World Health Organization, people with diffuse development disorders belong to the ones with special needs or disabilities (autism spectrum disorders). The Greek legislation on people with special needs or disabilities includes the ones with diffuse development disorders as well (autism spectrum disorders). Based on Law 2817/2000, the category of people with special educational needs includes the ones who encounter complex cognitive, emotional and social difficulties and those who are diagnosed with autism and other development disorders.

1. Vocational Education and Training

Vocational education and training play a leading role in the system of values nowadays, as they constitute the threshold of market integration. As far as people with serious disabilities are concerned, vocational education signalizes the transition from a protected environment to working life, social integration and independent life.

Pursuant with Law 3699/2008, Article 1, the Greek State undertakes to preserve and invariably enhance the compulsory nature of special education for people with diffuse development disorders (autism spectrum disorders) as an integral part of a free and compulsory education system. It also undertakes to ensure their equal and full participation

in society, independent living, self-sufficiency and autonomy, by fully protecting their rights to education as well as to social and professional integration.

The same law states that special education services aim at diagnosing, assessing and identifying special educational needs as well as intervening with specialized and properly tailored educational tools and programs, which are run by Regional Diagnostic and Special Needs' Support Centers (KEDI), as well as public medical and education services. Special education consists of special schools with appropriate buildings, coeducation programs, teaching programs at home, as well as the essential diagnostic, assessment and support services. Moreover, the same Article provides that students with diffuse development disorders (autism spectrum disorders) are entitled to special education with the intention of developing their personality and enabling their independent participation in family, professional, social and cultural life.

Article 4 refers to diagnostic, assessment and support organizations. Students' special needs, who are diagnosed with diffuse development disorders (autism spectrum disorders), are subjected to research and consequently specified by KEDI, the Committee of Diagnostic Educational Assessment and Support, as well as by other Medical and Education Centers certified by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religion (IPETH). KEDI assesses students, until they reach the 22nd year of age. The assessment is conducted by a five-member interdisciplinary committee, which consists of a special needs teacher (pre-school, primary or secondary education respectively), a pediatrician specialized in pediatric neurology or a neurologist specialized in pediatric neurology, a social worker, a psychologist and a speech therapist.

Law 3699/2008, Article 7, states that modern Greek is established as the official linguistic means, which can be perceived and expressed either in its oral and written form or by means of symbols and images, when it comes to autistic students, regardless of whether they are able to speak or not. The appointment of teachers to special schools for autistic students presupposes the specialization and training of teachers in modified-assisted communication forms, as well as the acquisition of further qualifications.

Given that autism imposes specific social restrictions on students, their attendance at school can assume the following form:

- ✓ Students, diagnosed with high functioning autism, can attend a conventional school, provided that they are supported by the class teacher and, if need be, by a special needs teacher, preferably specialized in autism.
- ✓ Students who manifest middle and low functioning autism can attend special classes of conventional schools and stick to a common and specialized syllabus, while receiving support from special teachers at the same time.
- ✓ Due to their special educational needs students with diffuse development disorders (autism spectrum disorders) are likely to run up against difficulties, if they attend a conventional school or even an integration group. If this proves to be the case, their education is provided by the following institutions:

- a) Independent special schools
 - b) Schools or units which function either independently or are located at hospitals and rehabilitation centers.
 - c) By way of home teaching, if need be. Distance learning can also be employed as a supplementary method in that case (Law 3699/2008, Article 6, Point 4).
- ✓ With reference to Article 8 of Law 3699/2008 and regarding secondary education the following types of schools fall within the category of special ones:
- 1) Lower Secondary Schools (EAE) for students who have reached their 19th year of age. These schools are made up of a preliminary class and three main ones. Primary school leavers with diffuse development disorders (autism spectrum disorders) can enroll directly in the first class of EAE schools, after KEDI has conducted the necessary assessment.
 - 2) Upper Secondary Schools (EAE) comprise a preliminary class and three main ones. High School graduates with diffuse development disorders (autism spectrum disorders) can enroll directly in the first class of EAE schools, after KEDI has conducted the necessary assessment.
- ✓ Special vocational training in secondary education is divided into the following structures:
- 1) Special Vocational High Schools (EEG) to which primary school leavers are admitted and from which they graduate upon completion of a fifth-class education cycle. Attendance at these schools is compulsory and they are deemed equivalent to special High Schools. Upon completion of the fourth class students receive a High School certificate, while upon completion of the fifth class; they obtain a B2 degree which enables them to work as professionals from then onwards. In the fifth class the right to traineeships is established in association with school cooperatives, with a view to fostering students' skills and the gaining of work experience.
 - 2) Special Vocational High Schools (EEL) which address Vocational High School and Special or General Secondary School graduates. These schools consist of a four class education cycle, as in the case of Vocational High Schools which function in the afternoon, while their graduates obtain a school certificate and a degree which corresponds to Level 3 and allows them to work as full fledged professionals.
 - 3) Centers of special vocational education and training (E.E.E.E.K.) which students have to attend for 6 years. E.E.E.E.K. constitutes a school type which is classified in secondary education and where students can obtain a B2 Level degree. This degree enables them to work as professionals and enroll in special

vocational schools (SEK) on the recommendation of KEDI. While attending the last class at school, students are supposed to complete an at least six month traineeship as part of the training courses. The last class is technically and professionally oriented, with a view to fostering students' skills and familiarizing them with the work environment. This school type offers many professional outlets such as the following ones: green houses, (either as professionals or employees), gardening (gardeners in the public or private sector), small vegetable producers, carpentry, ceramics, pottery, sewing, plumbing, production of natural soap, perfume and many other handmade constructions.

The attendance of students with diffuse development disorders (autism spectrum disorders) at special schools (SMEAE) can be prolonged beyond the age of 23, depending on their special educational needs. With regard to postsecondary education and by joint order issued by the Ministries of Education, Finances and Administrative Reform, special schools under the name of IEK were founded and brought into operation in April 2014 both in Athens and Thessaloniki (Law 4186/2013).

A unit specialized in special education operates as part of the Institute of Education Policy and is responsible for scientific research and study as well for proposals concerning the planning and implementation of education policy in special schools.

Relating to the personnel and pursuant with Article 16 of the same law, teachers who work and belong to special schools (SMEAE), but do not have pursued postgraduate studies or do not hold any other qualifications are entitled to a prioritized participation in training seminars held by the teacher training organization which is called OEPEK. They can also participate in programs financed by the operational program of education and introductory vocational training (EPEAEK) or seminars which are held at regional training centers (PEK). Finally, in order for teachers to receive further training at a secondary education level, the State provides incentives to various universities for the launching and running of postgraduate programs (Article 25).

Special auxiliary staff is hired (Article 18) aiming at facilitating the daily life of students diagnosed with diffuse development disorders (autism spectrum disorders) and enabling them to tackle issues of social integration, self-sufficiency and involvement in creative activities. The staff is responsible for students and carries out auxiliary training tasks respectively.

- ✓ In 2008 and as part of its broader program EPEAEK II ran the following programs:
 - a) Improvement of the conditions of integration in the education system in the case of people with special needs.
 - b) Upgrading and extension of the scope of training in the case of people with disabilities.
 - c) Training of people with disabilities.

- ✓ As part of EPEAEK II, the following educational material and software for special education have been created:
 1. Curriculum for students with autism (EPEAEK)
 2. Software for autistic people's training (EPEAEK II: upgrading of autistic people's training by means of new technologies)
 3. Electronic presentations (EPEAEK II: upgrading of autistic people's training in primary and secondary education).
 4. Information material for students with autism (EPEAEK II) "Support of families whose members are diagnosed with autism"
 5. Training material on the education and social integration of students with autism ("development and running of pilot programs concerning the social integration and professional reintegration of students with autism").

2. Work and employment

Adolescents with disabilities much more than their peers face constraints related to negative social attitudes and stereotypes that hinder the vocational rehabilitation and their path to independence.

The rights of persons with disabilities in employment and occupation is recognized in various articles of the country's constitution, as amended by Decision 18/2001 of Z Revisionary Parliament on 23.04.2001. Article 21, paragraph 6 states that "people with disabilities have the rights to enjoy measures ensuring autonomy, occupational integration and participation in the social, economic and political life of the country. With the previous order the country's constitution in line with the most progressive constitutions of other countries, adopting the social model of disability. Both the right of disabled people at work and the protection of it are founded by article 22 par. 1 of the constitution. Alongside people with disabilities are protected from discrimination in employment conditions, payments, social security.

A positive action measure which the Greek State implemented in recent years for the integration of disabled people in work is the establishment (Law.2643/1998) of a preferential quota compulsory system which places the socially vulnerable groups to jobs in public (article 2) and in the private and wide public sector (article 3) and is a key piece of legislation that protects and promotes the rights of people with disabilities in work as equal members of society. With that individuals with disabilities are protected (direct protection) and a degree relatives of people with disabilities (indirect protection). The Law provides protection a) in those individuals with at least 50% disability rate (direct protection) and b) in those who have a child or sibling or husband with a 67% disability or more (indirect

protection). Especially with Article 31 of r. 2956/01 (R. Gazette 258 A'/06.11.2001) provides that those with child, sibling or husband with mentally disability or autism and unable to work, the minimum disability rate is reduced by 67% (required for all other diseases) in 50%.

The OAED is the competent body to issue the law notices, the points awarded and positioning, while the Directorate of social Protection Ministry of Labor Social Security and Welfare is responsible for the coordination of all processes. In an effort to rationalize the objectivity of the quota system and preserving with r.2643/1998, provision is made for the premium of skills associated with the knowledge and the introduction of points system of social criteria, such as family and economic situation, while for employers who do not obey the rules, the law fines.

A positive action measure applied by the Greek State with community funding (NSRF 2007-2013) through the OAED for the integration of disabled people in work was the “special 3 year old aid program for employers with subsidy for hiring unemployed people with disabilities. A condition for the participation of disabled people in the program was to be unemployed, the disability rate is 50 % or more and the decision of the Primary Health Committee of IKA need not be given the designation “unable for any gainful work”. The purpose of the program was to create new jobs to unemployed people with disabilities aged 18-64 to grant part of the wage costs. The duration of the grant is set at 36 months. After the end of the subsidy business businesses undertake to keep staff for 12 months even without subsidy. The Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Welfare implements with community co financing (NSRF 2007-2013) the program “Local Actions of Social Inclusion for Vulnerable Groups”. For the private sector, things are clearer. The employer subsidized employment of people with disabilities for 3 years and the 4th time he pays.

3. Health and Social Welfare

According to Law 2716/1999 for the development and modernization of mental health services “the state is responsible for providing mental health services, in order to prevent, diagnose, treat, care, rehabilitate and reintegrate adults, children and adolescents with mental disorders and autism spectrum disorders (Article 1, par. 1). Moreover, the greek legislation provides that among the conditions for which the period of disability of the insured, fixed indefinitely, according to the provisions of Article 16, par 1 of ther.3846/2010, are pervasive developmental disorders (autism, Rett Syndrome, Asperger Syndrome).

In the context of ongoing reform of mental health services in the country they created the first integrated centre for people with autism spectrum disorders-pervasive developmental disorders). With these centers, they make an attempt to create modern services which cover a wide range of needs of patients themselves and their families and therapists-scholars. The “organization guide and integrated operation system for people with disorders of the spectrum of autism-pervasive developmental disorders” developed by

the PSYCHARGOS-B Phase Monitoring Support Unit. It aims to be a tool that will enable operators and their executives in the early organization of the integrated centers and services.

An integrated center includes a small network of services that respond in the most appropriate way on many levels of the needs of people with pervasive developmental disorders and their families, as well as networking with mental health and child guidance centers, the welfare services, the KEDI with education within each grade, with the centers and pre-vocational training, with the sheltered workshops and their community institutions in which the beneficiaries of integrated center live.

However, autistic people have the right to ask for another three year subsidy period with the obligation to keep the employee for a total period of four years. The employer's subsidy amounts to the daily amount of 14,67 Euros, when it comes to part time employment and to 22,01 Euros, when it is related to full time employment. When someone is hired, they stop being entitled to the social benefit payment which amounts to 193,69 Euros and is paid every two months. In case they get fired or hand in their notice, they can return to their work.

In 1997 the nonprofit organization "Greek Company of Assisted Employment" (EL.ET.IP.R) was founded. Its aims consist in, among others, the participation of people with disabilities in the open labor market through the setting-up of personnel placement services, as well as the training of professionals responsible for the insertion of people with disabilities into working life. EL.ET.IP.E promotes social integration through employment.

Limited liability social cooperatives constitute a form of social entrepreneurship in our country. This type of cooperatives comprises private limited liability legal entities ratified by Law 2716/1999 "Development and Modernization of Mental Health Services and other Provisions" (FEK 96 A'/17.05.1999) of the Ministry of Health for the "Development and Modernization of Mental Health Services". Social economy enterprises are conducive to development and mainly address vulnerable population groups, which people with disabilities belong to as well. Social economy facilitates the access of people with disabilities to employment, while active employment policies are implemented through the provision of more cost-effective and qualitative services by social enterprises.

Finally, in the context of a European framework agreement teleworking was established in our country through the national general collective work agreement (Law 14/13.04.2006). Although teleworking can bring about the social exclusion of people with disabilities, when it is conducted at home, yet it could incontestably constitute a form of employment which could absorb a great number of people who are not able to come up to the expectations of any contractual employment owing to their disabilities.



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