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# EU 4 Inclusive Education project strives for sustainable policy impact – Finnish expertise on special education supports developing national resource centers in Albania.

27.3.2024 — Anna-Maria Balk



For the past two years, the Tampere University of Applied Sciences has collaborated closely with the Albanian public sector, schools and third sector within the framework of the ‘EU 4 Inclusive Teaching’ project. A joint Training-of-the-Trainer -programme, designed and delivered together with TAMK and Tampere University (Faculty of Education and Culture), has provided pedagogical support so far to almost 300 Albanian teachers.

Besides the ToT programme, TAMK has established cooperation with the Finnish Valteri Learning and Consulting Center to support the transformation of the two Albanian special schools towards national resource centers. The path towards transformation requires new knowledge and skills, such as raising staff capacity in methods suited for inclusive education (e.g. sign language) and establishing of two-way dialogue between the special schools’ working groups and the Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports, which is finally responsible for the endorsement and resourcing of the developed action plan.

Valteri schools operate under the Finnish National Agency for Education, and they are resource centres with a very similar focus and structure than the future resource centers envisioned for Albania. Valteri offers high quality expert support to neighborhood schools nationwide by offering a wide range of services for their needs with learners of special needs. Valteri school’s engagement and cooperation through TAMK has been highly valued

throughout the ‘EU 4 Inclusive Education’ project. The first discussion on the national resource centers started already in September 2022, when Development Manager Kimmo Hurtig from Valteri School Tervaväylä visited Albanian special schools in Tirana. The on-site visit was followed by a study tour to Valteri Schools with high representatives from the Ministry of Education and Sports and special schools’ directors, which took place April 2023. The Albanian delegation visited two Valteri schools, Ruskis in Helsinki and Onerva in Jyväskylä. The key themes of the visit covered national and local level solutions of special education with Ms Pirjo Koivula, leading expert of inclusive education and emerita from the Finnish National Agency for Education, collaboration with schools, families and other stakeholders, development of learning environment, personnel management and teachers’ professional development, school paths of children with special needs, different levels and practises of support, special features and pedagogy of different disability groups – all these are crucial elements of the transition plan towards Albanian resource centers. The delegation got firsthand experience on the way in which Valteri schools operates on daily basis and what kind of technological and other support can be offered to different kinds of learners.

Currently, Valteri is about to start a series to online trainings to Albanian teachers on selected key themes related to special education. Furthermore, the Mr Kimmo Hurtig has consulted the Albanian Ministry of Education and Sport in the change from special schools to national resource centers in regard to their legal status, which also requires an amendment to the law. This remarkable policy impact is a result of long-term collaboration with all actors within the framework of the ‘EU 4 Inclusive Teaching project’, which has managed to bring together a unique band of stakeholders from Albania and Finland.

**Text:** Maria Salomaa, Kimmo Hurtig, Jukka Kemppi and Elina Harju

**Picture:** Open Society Foundation Albania