

Master Plan for Inclusive Education is being developed by Sri Lanka Ministry of Education



Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka reports that many children with disabilities are learning in regular classrooms and special education units in schools¹. However, UNICEF's country profile² on Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Sri Lanka reveals that children with disabilities continue to face barriers to access, participation and achievement in education. It explains that these barriers include many interrelated factors, particularly limited skills of teachers on inclusive education, lack of appropriate and accessible infrastructure in schools and limited scope in curricula, among others.

Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka is implementing a Project for Strengthening Education for Children with Special Needs through Inclusive Education Approach (REACH-SS) with the Technical Cooperation of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

A Task Force has been setup to develop a medium- (3 year) to long-term (5-10 year) plan to promote common understanding among stakeholders to steadily realize the 37/2020 Circular of the Ministry of Education, issued in year 2020, while incorporating the results of pilot activities by REACH-SS and other development partners.

The Task Force started meeting on April 6, 2022 and after revisiting *Inclusive Education Plan (2019-2030)* developed a roadmap for updating the said Plan to conform to the Inclusive Education Circular of the Ministry of Education. Accordingly, a process of drafting a Master Plan for Inclusive Education was started mobilizing expert support for the process.

¹ Number of children with disabilities enrolled in regular and special education units in schools, 2012, Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) 2013–2017, Ministry of Education Policy and Planning Branch, Battaramulla, 2012 (Figure 1 -

<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/17016/file/Country%20Profile%20-%20Sri%20Lanka.pdf>).

² Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Sri Lanka, UNICEF, 2021 -

<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/17016/file/Country%20Profile%20-%20Sri%20Lanka.pdf>



The aim of the Masterplan is to ensure that all children in Sri Lanka have access to high-quality educational opportunities without prejudice based on their differences. A workshop was held on 12 and 13 September 2023 for drafting an Inclusive Education (IE) Masterplan with the objective to share prepared action plans from parties concerned; and to develop the IE Masterplan based on the four pillars in sub-groups.

The four pillars identified are as follows:

1. Access and participation in education
2. Opportunities for Quality Education for all students
3. Strengthening Inclusive Practice at the schools: Capacity development of education system
4. Creating an inclusive culture in the education system

The Inclusive Education cannot be fulfilled without the participation of all the stakeholders. A Task Force has been established to develop an Inclusive Education Masterplan with strategies for sharing the project experiences at the national level. The organizers of the workshop tried to invite a wide range of stakeholders in inclusive education from within and outside the Ministry of Education.

The participants of the workshop included representatives of the Ministry of Education's Non-Formal & Special Education Branch, HRD Branch, Monitoring & Performance Reviews Branch, Research & Development Branch, Primary Education Branch, Education for All (EFA) Branch, School Works Branch, School Activities Branch, National Colleges of Education Branch, Co-Curricular, Guidance and Counselling (CGC) Branch, Physical Education and Sports Branch, representatives from the Department of Examination, National Institute of Special and Inclusive Education, National Institute of Education (IE Department, and Primary Education Department), Department of Social Services, Family Health Bureau of the Ministry of Health, National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development and National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities. JICA, UNICEF, Save the Children and Prof. Leena, University of Peradeniya participated as observers.



Opening the workshop, Prof. Prasad Sethunga, Director General of National Institute of Education, pointed out that the education faculties of the universities of Sri Lanka have focused on Inclusive Education in their Bachelor of Education degree courses and the Post-graduate Diplomas with the aim of creating groups of educators practicing Inclusive Education in the classrooms. “Inclusive Educations starts with maximizing the learning effects. The teachers can practically achieve the objectives of the lesson with all students by doing so. The Ministry of Education has issued a comprehensive circular, and the Minister is also very concerned about the progress of this project. Therefore, let’s work together to finalize this Masterplan,” he said.

Representatives of diverse sectors explained how each sector is contributing to the Master Plan. The workshop opening was moderated by Mr. Shuhei Oguchi, the Team Leader of the REACH-SS.