

# Social inclusion and inclusive education

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## Abstract

The key question addressed in this article is social inclusion, as an opposite concept of social exclusion. The author provides a historical of social inclusion/exclusion terminology. Further, some of the principles of social inclusion are presented.

A brief review of the literature provides key views and theories of social inclusion.

In particular, the author brings to attention that the included/excluded dualism apparent in the writings of social inclusion and exclusion cannot be taken at face value.

In line with global debate on social inclusion and exclusion, the author brings the way this debate has now pervaded both the official and development policy discourse in Albania. Social inclusion is considered as one of the priorities of the current government, with poverty reduction as its main focus, which will be ensured not only through economic development.

In the end, the article focuses on the role of education as a very important and useful tool for ensuring social inclusion. Social inclusion through education, in particular through vocational education, considered by the author as the only way towards sustainable development of Albanian society.

**Keywords:** Social inclusion; inclusive education; vocational education; Albania.

## Introduction

A socially inclusive society is defined as one where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity. A socially inclusive society is a society where all people are recognized and accepted and have a sense of belonging. Social inclusion is seen to be defined in relation to social exclusion. Some analysts have argued that both inclusion and exclusion are inseparable side of the same coin. Social exclusion is the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of a person into the community (Cappo, 2002). Social inclusion, community inclusion, social connectedness, normalization, social integration, social citizenship - all these are terms that relate to the importance of the links between the individual members of our society and the role of each person as a member of this group.

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Social inclusion is one of the clearly defined objectives of the European Union whereby it is an intrinsic goal that members of the Union should not be prevented from benefiting from and contributing to economic and social progress. The European Social Inclusion Strategy was propelled by the Lisbon European Council ('Summit') in 2000, as part of the Lisbon Agenda, a ten-year strategy to modernize and reform the EU social and economic model. There are some values that underpin social inclusion, such as: *everyone needs support* (sometimes some of us need more support than other; *everyone can learn* (as human beings we all grow and change and make mistakes: and we are all capable of learning); *everyone can contribute* (we need to recognize, encourage and value each person's contributions, including our own); *everyone can communicate* (not using words doesn't mean we don't have anything to say); *everyone is ready*, None of us has to pass a test or meet a set of criteria before we can be included, and *together we are better* (we are not dreaming of a world where everyone is like us, the difference is our most important renewable resource).

### **Social exclusion vs. social inclusion**

The *social exclusion* term was eventually imported from France by the New Labor government in the 1990s (Barry, 1998). However, for New Labor the socially excluded were regarded as the poor but not only the poor. They stated that the socially excluded often lack the necessary skills and capabilities to get and keep a job and are often cut off from the world of work and education. This definition, however narrow, resulted in the establishment of the Government's Social Inclusion Unit in 1997 (Driver and Martell, 2006). Social exclusion can also manifest itself in numerous ways: failure at school, job insecurity, social isolation, poor housing and excessively frequent illnesses, to mention but a few examples. The concept was later adopted by the European Union in the late 1980s as a key concept in social policy and in many instances replaced the concept of poverty. This concept which had first appeared in Europe as a response to the crisis of the welfare. The authorship of the expression is given to René Lenoir, which constituted the "exclusion" category of population, which, according to him, was a tenth of the French population. Lenoir determined as excluded people who are *mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social 'misfits'*. But, in fact, the concept of social exclusion, both France and in Europe, was due to the failure of integrative institution in these countries. The concept has its roots in functionalist social theory of Emile Durkheim (Room 1995, cited in O'Brien and Penna, 2007:3). In the early 20th century, society was undergoing a transition of moving from agrarian society to an industrial society. This economic displacement will be accompanied by a social dislocations. Durkheim was concerned with how social order and stability could be maintained in a such society. the concept of social exclusion and the contemporary European research agenda on it has been

informed by the problems associated with maintaining social order and stability (O'Brien and Penna, 2007). This concept, which first emerged in the policy discourse in France and its adoption later by other European countries, have had an increasing impact on the analyses of social disadvantages in Europe over the last couple of decades (Aasland and Flotten, 2000:1026; Gore and Figueiredo, 1997, cited in Francis, 2002:74).

While some claim that social exclusion is more illuminating and holds the promise of understanding disadvantaged groups better, others argue that this concept is so evocative, ambiguous, multidimensional and elastic that it can be defined in many different ways and owing to its ambiguity in definition it may mean all things to all people. However, the term has been used, defined, conceptualized, the article here makes an effort to review accessible literature on the topic. The concept of social inclusion gained prominence in the policy discourse in Europe since it replaced the concept of poverty, taking into its fold more dimensions of people's lives than the poverty concept. According to Aasland and Flotten (Aasland and Flotten, 2000:1027), the concept is vague and is employed to describe a multitude of situations and processes, which is often loaded with economic, social, cultural and political connotations. They consider social exclusion as multidimensional phenomena and have considered several important living condition variables as proxies for social exclusion. They are exclusion from *formal citizenship rights*, from *labor market*, from *participation in civil society* and from *social arenas*. At Geddes and Benington (Geddes and Benington, 2001) we find a multidimensional concept of exclusion, as a labeling of the Francis's multifaceted character of social deprivation concept (Francis 2000). Francis stressed that, in distinction to poverty, which has been primarily thought about in economic terms, social exclusion also takes into consideration deprivation in number of spheres. In support of his theory, he states three questions that are of vital importance in order to assess the concept of social exclusion:

- how does it differ from that of poverty?
- what does it add to our understanding of deprivation?
- does it increase our capacity to address such social ills? (Francis, 2000:75).

The concept of social exclusion clearly indicate different conceptions of what constitutes social inclusion and exclusion.

The concepts and definitions vary both in the academia and in development policies. Thus, some analysts see social exclusion as a cause of poverty, others suggest that it is both an expression and a determinant of poverty, and most would probably agree that poverty is a form of social exclusion (de Haan, 1998, cited in Jackson, 1999:126). Although, social exclusion has developed in a range of paradigmatic styles in different political and intellectual contexts (Silver, 1995, cited in Jackson, 1999:126), social exclusion is discussed predominantly in terms of its relationship to poverty. Is it a cause or consequence of

poverty? How does it differ from other ways of conceptualizing poverty? (de Hann, 1998, Gore and Figueredo, 1997, cited in Jackson, 1999:126).

Given his variations on the conception of exclusion, Francis (2000) contends that the notion of social exclusion, while carrying a number of pointers for a broader and less income - focused conception of generation is not a very precise or a nuanced one (Francis, 2000:76). Indeed one may suspect with Atkinson (1998:13) that it has gained such wide currency partly because it means all things to all people.

*Social inclusion* is seen to be defined in relation to social exclusion. Some analysts have argued that both inclusion and exclusion are inseparable side of the same coin. However, some comment that academic debate on social exclusion has been relatively silent on its assumed conclusion. It therefore remains the case that in the majority of the exclusion literature the nature and meaning of social inclusion is merely implied or requested (Cameron, 2006:396). Despite the fact that social inclusion has been defined with regards to social exclusion in many of the literatures, Jackson (1999) argues that there can be simultaneous exclusion and inclusion, that is individuals and groups can be excluded in one domain and included in another. Thus, the included/excluded dualism apparent in the writings of social inclusion and exclusion cannot be taken at face value. The politics of dualistic inclusion/exclusion deserve questioning in other ways. One of these is to consider in what sense there is a single centre of social integration, who is excluded from what, and whose representation of the centre is privileged (Jackson, 1999:133). Social inclusion, the converse of social exclusion, is affirmative action to change the circumstances and habits that lead to (or have led to) social exclusion. The World Bank defines social inclusion as the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society. (World Bank 2013, *Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity*). Social Inclusion ministers have been appointed, and special units established, in a number of jurisdiction around the world. The first Minister for Social Inclusion was Premier of South Australia Mike Rann, who took the portfolio in 2004. Based on the UK's Social Exclusion Unit, established by Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1997, Rann established the Social Inclusion Initiative in 2002. It was headed by Monsignor David Cappo and was serviced by a unit within the department of Premier and Cabinet. Cappo sat on the Executive Committee of the South Australian Cabinet and was later appointed Social Inclusion Commissioner with wide powers to address social disadvantage. Cappo was allowed to roam across agencies given that most social disadvantage has multiple causes necessitating a "joined up" rather than a single agency response (April 2006, Cappo appointed Social Inclusion Commissioner). The Initiative drove a big investment by the South Australian Government in strategies to combat homelessness, including establishing Common Ground, building high quality inner city apartments for "rough sleeping" homeless people, the Street to Home initiative

and the ICAN flexible learning program designed to improve school retention rates. It also included major funding to revamp mental health services following Cappelletti's "Stepping Up" report, which focused on the need for community and intermediate levels of care and an overhaul of disability services. In 2007 Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd appointed Julia Gillard as the nation's first Social Inclusion Minister. There are countries, Italy for example, that have a legal concept of *social exclusion*. In Italy, "*esclusione sociale*" is defined as poverty combined with social alienation, by the statute n. 328 (11-8-2000), that instituted a state investigation commission named "*Commissione di indagine sull'Esclusione Sociale*" (CIES) to make an annual report to the government on legally expected issues of social exclusion. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, a document on international human rights instruments affirms that "extreme poverty and social exclusion constitute a violation of human dignity and that urgent steps are necessary to achieve better knowledge of extreme poverty and its causes, including those related to the program of development, in order to promote the human rights of the poorest, and to put an end to extreme poverty and social exclusion and promote the enjoyment of the fruits of social progress. It is essential for States to foster participation by the poorest people in the decision making process by the community in which they live, the promotion of human rights and efforts to combat extreme poverty.

### **Inclusive quality education lead to more inclusive societies**

Exclusion starts very early in life. A holistic vision of education is imperative. Comprehensive early childhood care and education programmes improve children's well being, prepare them for primary school and give them a better chance of succeeding once they are in school. All evidence shows that the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children benefit most from such programmes. Ensuring that adults, particularly mothers, are literate has an impact on whether their children, and especially their daughters attend school. Linking inclusion to broader development goals will contribute to the reform of education systems, to poverty alleviation and to the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals. An inclusive system benefits all learners without any discrimination towards any individual or group. It is founded on values of democracy, tolerance and respect for difference. It is inefficient to have school systems where children are not learning because of poor quality. Schools with high repetition rates often fail to work in preventive ways. The expenditure incurred by schools when students repeat a grade would be better used to provide additional support to those who encounter difficulties. Several cost-effective measures to promote inclusive quality education have been developed in countries with scarce resources. These include training-of-trainer models for professional development, linking students in pre-service teacher training with schools and converting special

needs schools into resource centres that provide expertise and support to clusters of regular schools.

Inclusion in education involves (Booth and Ainscow 2011, 3rd edition):

- Putting inclusive values into action.
- Viewing every life and every death as of equal worth.
- Supporting everyone to feel that they belong.
- Increasing participation for children and adults in learning and teaching activities, relationships and communities of local schools.
- Reducing exclusion, discrimination, barriers to learning and participation.
- Restructuring cultures, policies and practices to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally.
- Linking education to local and global realities.
- Learning from the reduction of barriers for some children to benefit children more widely.
- Viewing differences between children and between adults as resources for learning.
- Acknowledging the right of children to an education of high quality in their locality.
- Improving schools for staff and parents/carers as well as children.
- Emphasising the development of school communities and values, as well as achievements.
- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and surrounding communities.
- Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

Why inclusion? Because the world is changing, because moral values are being re-examined as stereotypical thinking is increasingly exposed, because national and international guidance advocates inclusion and, quite simply, because any alternative seems unacceptable, if not morally flawed. Education need to change to accommodate everyone. The overall goal is to ensure that school is a place where all children participate and are treated equally. This involves a change in how we think about education. Inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It means enhancing the quality of education by improving the effectiveness of teachers, promoting learning - centred methodologies, developing appropriate textbooks and learning materials and ensuring that schools are safe and healthy for all children. Strengthening links with the community is also vital: relationship between teachers, students, parents and society at large are crucial for developing inclusive learning environments.

Inclusive education can promote successful learning. Efforts to expand enrolment must be accompanied by policies to enhance educational quality at all levels, in formal and in non-formal settings. We have to work on an 'access to success' continuum by promoting policies to ensure that excluded children get into school coupled with programmes and practices that ensure they succeed there. It is a process that involves addressing and responding to the diverse needs of learners. This has implications for teaching, the curriculum, ways of interacting and relations between the schools and the community.

Profound economic and societal changes in the countries of Western Balkans, like Albania, have resulted in great inequities in the access to and participation in education, training and employment. Skill mismatches have emanated as a consequence of these structural changes, giving rise to the long term unemployment, poverty and social exclusion of young people and older workers alike. Although skill mismatches should ideally be addressed by vocational education and training (VET), national systems have failed to provide this vital function. In omitting to equip the most disadvantaged workers with appropriate skills they have also failed to fulfill their role of supporting social inclusion (at an individual level) and social cohesion (at a societal level). The Western Balkans, on the other hand, share common present-day aspirations for EU membership and are involved in the process of accession to the European Union, although at various stages. Combating social exclusion and poverty is among the key priorities of the European Union. Building a more inclusive Europe is vital to achieving the European Union's goals of sustained economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, as re-iterated by the Europe 2020 strategy. Therefore, social inclusion is a policy area highly relevant to the candidate countries and the potential candidates.

### **Inclusion issue in Albania**

The inclusion issue has now straddled, both the official and development policy discourse in Albania. Inclusion as an official policy made inroads into the government policy after inclusion was incorporated as one of the main pillar of the National Strategy for Development and Integration. The Social Inclusion Strategy, approved on January 2008 by the Council of Ministers, is one of the most important government policy document and also an imperative strategic document in Albania's way towards integration to the European Community. This strategy remarks a qualitative time in the government social policies and a very important step in crossing towards integrated, preventive and active social policies. It aims our investment and commitment in the social inclusion widening instead of the struggle against social exclusion. In this framework, social inclusion is considered as one of the priorities of the current government, with poverty reduction as its main focus, which will be ensured not only

through economic development. It focuses on poverty and social exclusion risks that remain even after the onset of economic growth. As a crosscutting strategy, it is fully consistent with the underlying sector strategies and in particular those policies and institutional arrangements described in these strategies that aim to assist vulnerable individuals, families and groups in the community so that they are able to operate on their own, to be self-sustaining and to have the same rights as other members of society. Social inclusion definition in Albania is:

- *Greater prosperity based on sustainable development will lift people out of poverty.*
- *Social development will enable participation by all in our society.*
- *Every child will have the best possible start in life.*
- *There will be opportunities to work for all those who are able to do so and for those who are unable to work there*
- *Will be sufficient provision to enable a decent quality of life.*
- *No one will be excluded or left behind.*

Strategic priorities for social inclusion in Albania are:

- to raise the income generation opportunities of individuals through facilitating labor market participation of particular groups, extending and formalizing labor market and promoting lifelong learning.
- to facilitate access to services (social care, education, health, justice, housing, transport, telecommunications, water and sanity)
- to assist vulnerable groups. Regarding to this priority, SIS is as an umbrella document for a set of strategic texts on vulnerable groups like children, Roma, people with disabilities, women, young people in risk and elderly people.

SIS addressed the key policy challenges, which are:

- Increase labor market participation. Expand active labor market policies and ensure better linkage with social protection, particularly of the groups in need (women, disabled, roma, youth etc.)
- Ensuring protection of the formal labor market. Expanding the size of the labor market, at the same time reducing the size of the informal labor market.
- Tackling disadvantage in education and training. Prevent early departure from formal education and training by ensuring access for all children and particularly for the marginalized groups and improving quality of education. Empowering vocational training in conjunction with the labor market requirements in the country and abroad.



- Modernize social protection systems. Ensuring new social assistance schemes targeted to needy households and individuals which contributes to the adding value to the work.
- Improving access to services, for vulnerable groups (Social Care Services, Health Services.
- Access to accommodation, Legal Assistance Services, Access to water supply Access to transport services, Access to telecommunication)
- Overcoming participation barriers for vulnerable groups (Children at risk, Roma Community Disabled Persons, Elderly People, Gender Equality, Reducing domestic violence )

According to the general evaluation of the National Strategy on Social Inclusion, some of the main achievements are considered: increased responsibility of the central government through new programs and services; engagement of civil society and international organizations as well as capacity building at all levels (Draft Report Evaluation of the National Strategy on Social Inclusion 2007-2013 prepared by the ACER, supported by UNICEF, September 2012, page 4).

## Conclusions

The concept of social inclusion emerged in response to the crisis of the welfare state in Europe, which had an increasing impact on the analysis of social disadvantages in Europe over the last couple of decades. When the concept was first employed in France in the 1970s, it took into account people unable to adjust to mainstream society and later other European countries adopted it with their own interpretation. The concept gained widespread applicability after the First World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 as a result of which, it was embraced into the development discourse and development agencies. Likewise, inclusion was also incorporated in the official policy discourse of Albania in 2008, after which, the issue has gained considerable currency. However, Albania's meet with the concept should also be understood in the broader context of policy discourse that surrounds official development agencies, and its considerable leverage in the development policy of Albania.

As is seen social inclusion is contestable term, and thus its relevance to Albania in its european context is open to a lot of questions. Furthermore, given the diversities in Albania, with its own social, cultural, historical realities, the concept needs more deliberation and needs to reflect the realities of Albania, going beyond popular discourse and emotive appeal for a segment of the population. Greater prosperity with sustainable development, will lift people out of poverty. Social development will enable the participation of all in society. Each child will live a better life. All people of

working age will have the opportunity to work and those who can not work, will have enough income for a dignified life. No one will be excluded or not will be left behind.

Education, training, and employment represent central dimensions of social exclusion. These are interlinked, as limited access to educational and training services affects employability. Unemployment does not relate only to poor living conditions and inability to afford material goods, services and housing, but in itself it inhibits people's ability to fully participate in society, build social networks and realize their potential. Beyond individual benefits, vocational learning is commonly viewed as having two purposes: increasing economic competitiveness and increasing social inclusion and cohesion.

An inclusive education system benefits all learners without any discrimination towards any individual or group. Inclusive education can promote successful learning. Inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It means enhancing the quality of education by improving the effectiveness of teachers, promoting learning - centered methodologies, developing appropriate textbooks and learning materials and ensuring that schools are safe and healthy for all.

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