

# THE ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION SYSTEM'S LEGISLATION IN LITHUANIA

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## Abstract

In this article the laws governing the special education system formed in 1991 – 2012 are analyzed. Although Lithuania is very fast and well prepared in adopting legislations concerning the environmental adaptation of the disabled people, their education and integration into the community, the implementation of those laws is very slow and problematic: the laws are adopted but the funding is not provided or the provided amount is too low for their implementation, the attitude of society to disabled students is changing too slowly. In this article the methods of scientific literature, statistics and law analysis were used. Up to now, Lithuanian schools are not properly prepared to accept disabled children because of the lack of highly skilled professionals who would be able to work with children with special needs. There are also problems of not adapted environment for those children, not implemented posts of teacher's assistant, attendant and reader, the lack of specific teaching means and the society's directional attitude towards the disabled student and their families can still be felt. While examining the legal base it can be concluded that Lithuania theoretically is well prepared for the integration of disabled children into the education system, but the reality is in odds with the theory. Schools (teachers' groups) should recognize the variety of needs of their students and adjust to it by choosing different educational approaches, methods and different learning pace and by providing qualified special educational, psychological and social assistance.

KEYWORDS: special educational needs, special education system, legislation, integration.

## Introduction

One of the most important legislation of the education systems' reform is to create a continuous learning model in the Lithuania. Only continuous learning can provide an opportunity for people to form their knowledge system, to gain the corresponding competence and to understand the purpose of economic and social life processes and also to participate in them actively. In the context of the ongoing education reform it is important to provide the human rights teaching system, its content and methods, so that students in a high school would already be familiar with the equal rights and opportunities guaranteed for all people, including the disabled persons.

By the given data of United Nations Organization there are more than 500 million people with disabilities living in the world. This represents about 10% of the whole human population. Another 30-40% of people one way or another have faced with these problems (the data about people with disabilities from different countries is different. It ranges from 1% to 18%. The reason of it is that not all countries have the same statistical accounting system; the interpretation of the concept differs too. By the data of Lithuanian Department of Statistics the number of people with recognized disability for the first time also varies as it is seen in the 1 picture.

Table 1. People from first time recognized as disabled<sup>1</sup>

Persons	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Children (less than 18 years age)						1968	2170	2243	2222	1974	2040
Working age persons	18733	20244	21347	21263	22321	20169	25557	26649	22507	15432	14880

The substantial modernization of curricula and improvement of its quality is necessary for Lithuania's integration into the rapidly changing global society. One of the objectives of Lithuanian education concept is to develop a person who is respectful and able to adapt in the changing social, economic life.

After Lithuania regained its independence in 1991–2012 the detailed analysis was performed concerning the attitude to the disabled people integration, the possibilities, principles and forms as well as obstacles and problems of inclusion of disabled children to education system and general schools, the recognition of special needs of disabled children, providing of special assistance for them etc. These aspects were analysed in the publications of Ališauskas, Ališauskienė, Ambrukaitis, Barkauskaitė, Galkienė, Gudonis, Gerulaitis, Giedrienė, Karvelis, Unčiurys, Kafemanienė, Kunigytyė-Arlauskienė, Ruškus, Valantinas, Meliene, Miltenienė, Merkys, Udrenienė, Ustilaitė and others.

During this period the legal acts for the education of the disabled children were adopted fast and smoothly. Those legal acts included the environmental adaptation for the disabled, their education, integration into society. The exemplary professional job descriptions were prepared: special educator, speech therapist, social educator, tiflo teacher, teachers assistant and others. Also many different kinds of methodology, procedure descriptions, employment regulations and other legal acts regulating, work organization, services were approved. However, the implementation of those legislations is very slow and problematic: developing legislation often excludes or provides very small amount of funds for their implementation, the slowly changing society attitude disabled students.

In Lithuania social and pedagogical conditions for comprehensive learning of disabled children to fully maximize their education are not sufficiently provided and there is not yet created the system of various types of open schools which would allow for children with special needs to learn, to meet their needs for the comprehensive development.

The Lithuanias' regulatory provisions proclaiming system democracy, equality and accessibility principles are violated. Lithuanian schools, municipalities and Ministry of Education are unable to deal with these problems.

**Research methods** – scientific sources, statistical data and analysis of rules of law.

“The policy of State in the field of education is to ensure that education of people with disabilities would be an integral part of education system and that special education services would be gradually integrated into the general education system. The education of those people must be an integral part of educational planning, curriculum development and school organization part, “- is stated in Rehabilitation strategy<sup>1</sup>. Municipalities must develop real possibilities for children to be able to educate in their place of residence.

Lithuanian Constitution (adopted by citizens of the Republic of Lithuania in the Referendum of 25 October 1992)<sup>2</sup>. Chapter 2, article 18 states that “*Human rights and freedoms shall be innate*”. Article 19: “*The right to life of a human being shall be protected by law*”. Article 20: “*The freedom of a human being shall be inviolable. No one may be arbitrarily detained or held arrested. No one may be deprived of his freedom otherwise than on the grounds and according to the procedures which have been established by law*”. Article 21: “*The person of the human being shall be inviolable. The dignity of the human being shall be protected by law. It shall be prohibited to torture, injure a human being, degrade his dignity, subject him to cruel treatment as well as establish such punishments*”.

In 1991 November 28 Republic of Lithuania enacted law on the integration of disabled<sup>3</sup>. This is the first act which established the principle that people with disabilities, regardless of its reason, its nature, the degree of manifestation in Lithuania have the same rights as non-disabled. For those who cannot independently implement their rights, the state and state structures must help to make it happen. No one besides themselves can not decide on their life and work-related issues, everything should be decided by the disabled themselves or their parents or guardians. In this law it is very clearly stated that people with disabilities should be protected from discrimination of any abuse, and abusive or scornful behavior. This law establishes a provision that persons with disabilities are educated, trained according to their abilities, interests, and physical or mental condition of public education and training institutions where you live, at home or in special institutions. These provisions allowed for families raising children with disabilities access to the general education institutions in their place of residence. In 11 May 2004 the new successive version of the Law on the Social Integration of the Disabled was adopted<sup>4</sup>, because of the formation of a more humane approach to people with disabilities had to replace an old and today's expectations not fitting laws starting from the title of the law.

In observance of the aforementioned Law the Government of the Republic of Lithuania passed the Resolution No. 253 of 7 April 1992 on “Approving the Directions of the National Programme of Medical, Occupational and Social Rehabilitation of the Disabled for 1992–2002<sup>5</sup>”; the program provided “*to prepare educational programs for disabled children with physical and mental disabilities*”; Authorized institutions will develop textbooks and other educational tools. Municipalities authorized to organize the education of persons with disabilities, and environmental adaptation. However, it should be noted that all Government approved long-term programs had very limited funds.

<sup>1</sup> Klimavičius, R. Reabilitacijos strategija; Vilnius; 1995m.

<sup>2</sup> Valstybės žinios, 1992-11-30, Nr. 33-1014

<sup>3</sup> Valstybės žinios, 1991-12-31, Nr. 36-969

<sup>4</sup> Valstybės žinios, 2004-05-22 Nr. 83-2983

<sup>5</sup> [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=9677](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=9677)

In 1996 March 14 Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the Law on Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child<sup>6</sup>, and its article 26 states that: *“A disabled child shall have equal rights with normal children to lead an active life, develop and acquire an education befitting his physical and mental potential and desires, to be engaged in work that suits him and to participate in creative and social activity”*. Art.29: *“Recognizing his special needs, a disabled child shall have the right to obtain special (extraordinary) care”*, art. 30 states that: *“Public buildings, streets and transportation means, which are to be used by a disabled child, shall be adapted to the special needs of a disabled child. Specially adapted accommodations shall be installed within institutions intended for these children. State and municipal executive institutions shall ensure according to their competence and potential that requirements indicated in parts one and two of this article, would be implemented”*.

In the article 32 of aforementioned law it is stated that: *“State and municipal institutions must create the necessary conditions for education of the disabled child, his professional preparedness and, in accordance to work opportunities and also, by taking into account the health, special needs and talents of such a child”*.

If all public institutions in their work would follow the rights of disabled child established in this law, than in Lithuania not only the legislation would be developed and established more rapidly, but it also would lead to a sooner adapted educational institution environment, more qualified and sufficient education measures.

In 1995 November 28 Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania in the declaration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities celebration on the occasion<sup>7</sup> stated, that *“The Republic of Lithuania undertakes to take care, so that more people with disabilities would be independent, would be able to protect their dignity and realize their rights”*. In 1996 June 27 Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania adopted a resolution on “Rights of persons with disabilities“. The document states that *“because of the difficult economic situation in the country, many of the projects were not implemented. Not always and everywhere public authorities show good will and understanding”*. Seimas suggested to the Government to accelerate the application of the environment for disabled people, to train specialists to work with disabled and etc. However, the Government did not pay greater attention to the implementation of this legislation, because of its recommendatory nature, and because there was no additional funding provided.

Seimas in 1996 October 9 adopted the Law on social services of the Republic of Lithuania<sup>8</sup>. This law is very important and necessary. After the restoration of Lithuania’s independence a new set of provided social service types, their receipt and delivery conditions financing arrangements and more were needed. One of the main goals of social services can be identified: the vital needs satisfaction and the creation of not degrading humans’ dignity conditions. The ultimate goal is to return a person to a full-pledged life. All of the social security system is guided by this framework, which serves perfectly for integration of children with special needs. A big number of families raising children with special needs are the recipients of social services.

In 1998 June 2 Republic of Lithuania adopted the Law of Education<sup>9</sup>. This law states that *education is a priority area of societal development that receives State support. The law is based on the humanistic values of the nation and freedom, democracy and generally recognized human rights and freedoms. Education is crucial to the cultural, social and economic progress; it also strengthens the solidarity between peoples and nations, tolerance and cooperation*.

Only one article in the entire Law of Education concerns the education of children with special needs.

In 1998 December 15 – Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the Law on Special Education<sup>10</sup>. With this law special education was excluded from general education system as a separate education system. The law defines in detail the structure of special education system, its management, early and pre-school education, general training, vocational, college and university education, adult education and supplementary education of persons with special needs. The basic concepts of special education are established and special education place in the Lithuanian education system is defined.

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<sup>6</sup> Valstybės žinios: 1996-04-12 Nr.33-807

<sup>7</sup> Valstybės žinios, 1995-12-08, Nr.: 100 -2231

<sup>8</sup> Valstybės žinios, 1996-10-30 Nr.104-2367

<sup>9</sup> Valstybės žinios. 1998-07-24 Nr.66-1909

<sup>10</sup> Valstybės žinios: 1998-12-31 Nr.115-3228

Table 2. Students with special needs integrated into the general schools by place of residence<sup>11</sup>

Type of dysfunction	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Total by dysfunction	45539	48029	49989	54240	51970	51103	52232	51159	48741	46780	42616	41934
Mentally impaired	6223	6804	7095	3834	3110	3209	3118	3086	3077	2975	2835	2670
Recognition disorders	8827	10217	11196	7286	7190	7108	7006	6533	6120	5920	5652	5621
Speech Impaired	26675	27921	29464	29377	26520	24681	29613	26704	26144	25089	21526	20943
Visual impaired	2386	1664	808	501	766	674	385	237	166	122	106	93
Hearing impaired	489	435	437	414	414	574	377	317	304	257	219	195
Muscle and motion system disability	939	988	989	1213	1516	1706	1507	996	586	310	258	248
Dysfunctional emotions, behavior and social development				901	725	886	1237	877	899	854	853	881
Chronic somatic and neurological dysfunctions				3501	3281	3051	3441	2524	1219	371	285	255
Complex dysfunctions				4318	4747	5113	5567	5781	6139	6747	6722	6906
Other cases				2895	3701	4101	4260	4104	4087	4135	4160	4122

Persons with special needs shall be instructed in general and special subjects according to the instruction plans and general and special programmes approved by the Ministry of Education and Science or approved according to its established procedure.

Teachers shall prepare special educational programmes for training the impaired functions of persons with special needs and, if necessary, modify general education or special education programmes and upon the recommendation by the Pedagogical Psychological Service, adapt a general education programme. They shall devise individual programmes for persons with profound needs of Special Education.

In 1999 February 4 Minister of Education and Science approved “The guidelines of general education network transformation”. The order of Minister states that “With the States of Lithuania integrating into rapidly changing modern world community, the need of radical modernization of curricula and improved the quality of education is growing. Today’s education should not only focus on knowledge transfer, but also into forming the person’s independent, critical thinking skills, values and specific operating skills. Because of society with open information education must find a new way to enhance people’s civil consciousness. It is important to focus education on proactive, responsible and participatory human development, which is directly dependent on the economic and social well-being. Therefore, the modernization of general education and social, educational learning conditions for students is a priority of the education reform goals.

Resolution No 764 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 9 June 1999 approved “The social and educational conditions for children’s learning program”. The aforementioned program is a part of Lithuanian educational reform for creating educational system more flexible, capable of taking a much better regard of different needs of children, which would contribute to their educational success and open school ideas. The program noted that, due to rapid economic and social changes in society of Lithuania the number of socially and educationally neglected children is growing.

The State is currently unable to fully realize the declared children rights for education by Lithuanian Constitution and Children Rights Convention. The Lithuania Republics Law of Educations declared rights for systems democracy, equal rights and its accessibility principles are being violated. As neither Lithuanian schools, nor municipalities are able to deal with it, a purposeful program is needed. The purpose of this program is to create social and educational learning conditions for all Lithuania children and to make the nation more educated. Making a school as a cultural center would help to prevent the increasing decline of society and it would also help to form the values of local community. Currently the most relevant issue in the school is the creation of pedagogy which would be orientated into child’s personality. It would lead to a more successful teaching of children, including disabled children. The child’s personality-oriented pedagogy is a sturdy starting point for shaping the society, respecting the dignity and diversity of children. Different types of school system, as an effective tool can provide all the

learning needs of individuals and its development should be recognized as one of the most important goals in the State.

The situation analysis given in the program highlighted that Lithuanian schools are not prepared to accept disabled or children fallen into asocial environment, it is not ready to create favorable conditions for them to adapt and develop, because of a low funding and the lack of qualified specialists. Schools also should be equipped with appropriate technical teaching tools to ensure the success of an integrated teaching system.

Schools must recognize a variety of needs of their students and react to it by choosing different educational approaches, methods and different teaching pace, and by providing qualified special educational, psychological and social assistance.

Resolution No 160 the Government of 12 February 2001 approved "Disability assessment and social protection measures reform concept". Resolution No 850 the Government of 7 June 2002 approved "National social integration of disabled persons in 2010-2012". It stated that "*the number of disabled students integrated into general education schools will be increasing, the special educational and psychological help for them and their families will improve*<sup>11</sup>".

The Government while implementing the resolution made by Seimas in 2002 No IX-850 "For announcing the year 2003 - year of the disabled in Lithuania"<sup>12</sup>, in 2003 February 3 approved the resolution No 159 "For a year of the disabled action plan" which had a various measures provided for the program to implement.

Plan evaluation of the current situation indicates that "*education and training institutions are still having difficulties with meeting the special needs caused by disability, the environment and curriculum are still not adapted for disabled (special needs) children, lacking for compensatory technology for education, special training measures, information technology, additional special pedagogical and psychological assistance, professionals (teachers' assistant, readers, attendants, sign language interpreter); often neglected the experience of Europe Union and other countries in the developing of system for disabled persons social integration*;<sup>13</sup>". After analyzing this action plan it can be concluded that even though many of the legal acts for improving of the conditions in education for disabled children were approved during the years after Lithuania's independence, the Government itself acknowledges that there is a lack of means, specialists and the country is not ready for integration.

In 2011 July 1 - Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania approved the new Law of Education<sup>14</sup>. The idea was to combine two laws, integrate the Special Education Law into Education Law, motivating it on the fact that special educating system is a part of general education and it cannot be regulated separately. Also some of the expired provisions of the law were removed. This amendment of Law of Education and integration of special education to general education system did not provide additional possibilities for integration of children with special needs.

## Conclusions

1. It can be concluded from the analysis of Lithuanian legislation on special education that in Lithuania legal acts regulating the adaption of environment to the needs of disabled people, their education and integration to society are swiftly and rapidly developed and adopted. However, these legal acts are not implemented or they are implemented very slowly: there are not provided or there are not enough funding for their implementation, the attitude of society to disabled people is changing too slowly, conditions for education of disabled children together with other children often are not created.
2. The system of different schools is created in Lithuania in order to create conditions for the education of children with special needs and to satisfy their educational needs. General schools integrate children with special education needs using flexible system. These children are educated in general classes, separate special classes or by teachers at home. However, the system of different type open schools to create social and pedagogical conditions for comprehensive full education of children with special needs is not yet created in Lithuania.

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=366748&p\\_query=&p\\_tr2=](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=366748&p_query=&p_tr2=)

<sup>12</sup> Žin., 2002, Nr.42-1562

<sup>13</sup> [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=224547](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=224547)

<sup>14</sup> Valstybės žinios: 2011-03-31 Nr.38-1804

3. One of the most important conditions for successful education of children with special needs is the attitude of general schools teachers to the integration of those children and their readiness to work with them. Teachers need to know not only general requirements of special education of different disabled children, be able to individualize, adapt or modify their education programs but also to understand the special didactics as they need to work also with the parents of those children and to collaborate themselves.

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## LIETUVOS SPECIALIOJO UGDYMO SISTEMA REGLAMENTUOJANČIŲ TEISĖS AKTŲ ANALIZĖ

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojami 1991–2012 metais priimti teisės aktai reglamentuojantys specialiojo ugdymo sistemą. Nors Lietuvoje gana gerai ir pakankamai greitai parengiami ir priimami teisės aktai reglamentuojantys neigaliųjų aplinkos pritaikymą, ugdymą, integraciją į visuomenę. Tačiau šių teisės aktai įgyvendinami labai lėtai ir problemiška: teisės aktai dažnai priimami, bet nenumatomos arba numatomos labai menkos lėšos jų įgyvendinimui.

Šalyje lėtai gerėja visuomenės požiūris į neįgalius ugdytinius ir jų šeimas. Straipsnyje naudojami mokslo šaltinių, statistinių duomenų bei teisės normų analizės tyrimo metodai. Iki šiol Lietuvos mokyklos nėra tinkamai pasirengusios priimti neįgalius vaikus, nes jose trūksta aukštos kvalifikacijos specialistų gebančių dirbti su vaikais, turinčiais specialiųjų poreikių, nepritaikyta aplinka, neįvestas, palydo ir skaitovo etatai, stinga specialių mokymo priemonių, ir kt. Lietuvoje kuriama įvairių tipų mokyklų sistema, kuri bando sudaryti sąlygas specialiuosius poreikius turintiems vaikams mokytis, tenkinti visus vaikų lavinimosi poreikius. Bendrojo lavinimo mokyklos vaikus, turinčius specialiųjų poreikių integruoja, pagal lanksčią sistemą: vieni integruojami į bendrąsias klases, kiti - pedagogų ugdomi namuose. Lietuvoje dar nesukurta įvairių tipų atvirų mokyklų sistema, sudaranti sąlygas specialiųjų poreikių vaikams mokytis, tenkinti jų poreikius pilnutiniam ugdymui(si).

Teisinės bazės analizė rodo, kad Lietuva įstatymiškai gerai pasirengusi integruoti neįgalius vaikus į ugdymo sistemą, tačiau realybė prasilenkia su teorija. Mokyklos (pedagogų kolektyvai) turėtų pripažinti savo mokinių poreikių įvairovę ir reaguoti į ją pasirinkdamos skirtingus ugdymo būdus, metodus ir skirtingą mokymo tempą, teikdamos kvalifikuotą specialiąją pedagoginę, psichologinę bei socialinę pagalbą. Viena iš pagrindinių vaikų, turinčių specialiųjų poreikių integracijos sėkmės sąlygų – bendrojo lavinimo mokyklų mokytojų požiūris į integraciją, jų pasirengimas ugdyti šiuos vaikus. Mokytojai turėtų ne tik žinoti specialiojo ugdymo bendruosius reikalavimus, būti susipažinę su įvairiomis negalių rūšimis, gebėti individualizuoti, adaptuoti ar modifikuoti ugdymo programas, bet ir gerai orientuotis specialiojoje didaktikoje, gebėti tinkamai bendrauti su tėvais, auginančiais neįgalius vaikus, bendradarbiauti su kitais specialistais ir mokėti dirbti komandoje.

**RAKTINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** specialūs ugdymo(si) poreikiai, specialiojo ugdymo sistema, teisiniai aktai, integracija.