

TOWARDS MORE INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN EUROPE

Salzburg Declaration



EASPD
IMPROVING SERVICES
IMPROVING LIVES

EASPD IS THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND REPRESENTS OVER 11.000 SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDER ORGANISATIONS ACROSS EUROPE AND DISABILITY

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PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The:

- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 4 and 24 on Education and Universal Design)
- Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education (1994)
- Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights), Article 2 Right to Education.
- European Social Charter (revised), Articles 15 and 17
- Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (Action Line 4, Education, and cross-cutting aspects)
- European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (Area of Action 5, Education and training)

all clearly state that all persons with disabilities (and their families) have the right to:

- equal opportunities and high quality appropriate education to maximize their potential, and to participate in and contribute fully to an inclusive society
- choose and receive education in an inclusive environment
- appropriate resources and expertise to meet their educational, social and health-related needs
- quality services which support them to realise self-determination and citizenship

The European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) is a European not-for-profit organisation representing over 11,000 social service provider organisations across Europe and disability. The main objective of EASPD is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

Through its Standing Committee on Education, comprised of teachers, professors, school managers and other education providers for persons with disabilities, EASPD has been actively working on inclusive education.

The Manifesto on Inclusive Learning of 2012¹ laid out the foundation of its policy, and its principles have been implemented in several European projects to improve inclusive education systems across Europe. Under the motto “Building a School for All”, EASPD has also organised several trainings on inclusive education, to raise awareness and understanding of the concepts of inclusive education, universal design and reasonable accommodation for teachers and staff of education providers. EASPD is a member of the “European Alliance for Investing in Children” bringing together 24 European networks.



1 Manifesto on Inclusive Learning : What should be done now?; <http://easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/budapest-manifesto-on-inclusive-learning-eng.pdf>

III

ADAPTING THE SYSTEM TO THE LEARNER

The OECD states that almost one-fifth of students may develop a special educational need during their schooling years. While data are limited, the most recent global estimate of the disability prevalence from the World Health Organisation (WHO) is that between **93 million and 150 million children live with disability**. Inclusive education, as enshrined in Article 24 of the UNCRPD, needs to be a founding principle of any education system.

While integration gives access to the mainstream education system, it expects the learner to fit into the existing mold, and doesn't change the fundamental structure of the education system. In an inclusive education system, the framework changes to adapt to and welcome every learner, who is welcomed and valued as able to contribute to the learning environment. Inclusive education providers **adapt the learning environment to the individual needs** of the student and adopt attitudes, approaches and strategies that include all learners in all activities with respect to their individual learning level. The methods used to measure success and failure in school are an important element to be redefined to allow the learner to express his knowledge and skill in the most appropriate way.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Article 24 of the UNCRPD challenges not only the school systems but also refers to **all levels of education in the human life-course** (e.g. pre-school services, vocational education and training and adult education services). Learners should be offered a complete set of inclusive learning environments, including parallel settings and post-graduate opportunities, to avoid the pitfall of being altogether excluded from education because of an overly rigid and formal education system.



An increased awareness is to be noted both of the educational potential and the citizen's rights dimension of inclusive education. There have been changes in educational and social laws to support learners with special educational needs to be educated in inclusive settings.

However, there are still fundamental barriers to inclusive education. Despite inclusion becoming an increasingly established concept, this unfortunately does not mean that it has been sufficiently realised in practice. Such a barrier is, among others, that school systems in most countries follow **two prevailing systems – inclusive and segregated**. These systems persist because of the belief that a certain percentage of children, such as those with more difficult forms of disabilities, cannot be included into the regular educational environments. For example, in some countries the majority of mainstream school buildings do not comply with **accessibility standards**. In addition, assistive transport is often only provided to special schools and, although adaptive technology is available in most of the inclusive settings, very often the knowledge, competence and creativity to apply, adapt and use the technology is still lacking.

Barriers may be found in all aspects of the school, as well as within communities, and in local and national policies. Barriers also arise in the interaction between students and what and how they are taught.

Solutions for removing barriers cannot be found by merely raising available monetary assets, but there are also **physical actors** – similar to barriers – in all aspects of the school environment: other students, parents/guardians, communities, and teachers. All of the aforementioned agents already operate with certain knowledge on how to increase teacher participation – the problem is that this knowledge is rarely fully exploited and used.

Overcoming these barriers doesn't require only legislative action, but above all a sustained and **systemic modification of attitude** and approach in the education system.

The education of teachers for learners with special educational needs is still dominated by the special school's perspective, especially in countries with a strong tradition of special education, and it is still a major challenge to find intelligent ways of categorization of learners that allows access to additional support in mainstream educational settings without producing segregation and stigma. There is a **need to harmonise definitions** of disability in the EU, such as through the resource-based approach and its tri-partite classification system (A/Disabilities, B/Difficulties, C/Disadvantages) agreed by OECD countries².

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2 OECD/European Communities (2009), Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties and Disadvantages in the Baltic States, South Eastern Europe and Malta. Educational Policies and Indicators. p. 21f.

V

EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY

In an inclusive perspective schools are to develop an understanding of their role as a **cooperative community institution**. Conceptually this means for schools to collaborate with other community services from the youth welfare, social and health care or cultural sector, and to see themselves as an active part of regional learning networks that are highly sensitive to excluding processes on all levels.

VI

IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

There is obviously much left to be done. Even what has been achieved is under threat because of the economic crisis across Europe. There are very worrying examples of arbitrary cost cutting and short termism. Some children do not get the right education and some, especially those with more severe disabilities, get no education at all.

The economic crisis has negatively affected general education, and the impact has been all the greater on already vulnerable groups such as students with disabilities. Resources available for early detection, personalised student support and adequate teacher training have been limited, resulting in **higher school dropout rates** from pupils with disabilities and diminishing the proportion of these students going on to third level education³. At the same time European education systems are challenged by an increasing number of migrant population with high and specific needs for education and training for children, young people and adults.

Strategic investment is all the more important in times of financial crisis. Inclusive lifelong learning is not only a right, but also **crucial to achieving growth and jobs**, social inclusion and active citizenship. Lifelong learning allows people to acquire key competences and to update skills throughout their lives. As studies show, access to quality education has a clear impact on future academic and labour market outcomes and is key to reducing inequalities⁴.



3 European Consortium of Foundations on Human Rights and Disability (2012), Assessing the Impact of European Governments' Austerity Plans on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

URL: http://www.efc.be/programmes_services/resources/Documents/Austerity2012.PDF

4 European Commission, 2015, High and rising inequalities; what can be done about it (at EU level)?

ROLE OF EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

VII

EASPD is aware that the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe have only limited supporting competence in the field of education. However, the EU could do more to fulfil the right to inclusive education and should **lead by example** as recommended by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the EU, starting with the European Schools. A first step is to more actively **promote trainings and programmes** which would help staff to succeed in achieving inclusive education and to encourage Member States to focus on transition from segregated education systems to mainstream schools. Additionally, the EU should strengthen the mandate of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and align it to the principles enshrined in the UN CRPD⁵, giving it a more important and impactful role in the EU processes, such as the European Semester, and taking better into account their quality researches.

ROLE OF THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

VIII

At the level of the Member States, despite their commitment to promote inclusive education, too many learners with special needs are still – sometimes increasingly so – placed in segregated institutions or in mainstream settings with inadequate support⁶.

It is above all at the local, at the community level that the changes are the most important to develop a **sustainable inclusive educational system**. Special education settings and the competence developed by disability organisations will increasingly become a source of expertise available to the wider education and community services.



5 European Commission (2014), Working Paper Commission Staff Working Document. Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) by the European Union, p.28.

URL: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/swd_2014_182_en.pdf

6 NESSE network of experts and European Commission (2012), Education and Disability/Special Needs — policies and practices in education, training and employment for students with disabilities and special educational needs in the EU.

URL: <http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports/activities/reports/disability-special-needs-1>

IX

TEACHER TRAINING AND A SHIFT OF ATTITUDE

However, the frontline of the learning environment is and will remain the education providers' staff, such as teachers, counselors, assistants and headmasters. For all learners to be fully included in the education system, it is paramount to have **adequate teacher education and training** to ensure the staff has the knowledge, skills and attitude to deal with diversity and inclusion. Teachers, educators and trainers need to be consciously aware of the diversity in their classroom and the challenge and opportunities that it can offer. The opinions about inclusion are very often diverse and a lot of this has to do with fear: fear of change, fear of the unknown, and so on. Understanding the framework of 'Universal Design' and the benefits it offers is a process, and from the point of view of the daily work of the teacher, it offers a very attainable way of teaching.

X

CONCLUSIONS

Access to education and lifelong learning programmes in mainstream schools and other educational facilities are still **far from being the reality** for many pupils and learners with disabilities. This is often due to a shortage of qualified staff, a lack of appropriate accessible buildings, facilities/equipment and widespread and persistent prejudice about the skills and potential of persons with disabilities.

EASPD is however convinced that the **goal of inclusive education is real and achievable**. A strong leadership from member states and European institutions must provide the legislative framework to encourage local and community actors to shift their attitude and approach towards an inclusive settings. Such incentives include 1) a shift of economic support from segregated to mainstream education

providers; 2) teacher and staff training to raise awareness and understanding of the concepts and advantages of inclusive education and universal design; and 3) a reform of the education system based on more flexible curricula leading to more flexible certifications adapted to the needs of each individual.

EASPD is however convinced that the goal of inclusive education is real and achievable.

Commitments of EASPD

- Collaborate with networks of other vulnerable groups to present a stronger common position
- Contribute to a European policy position on inclusive learning, consistent with the obligations of the UNCRPD
- Provide information, models of good practices and support to member organisations.
- Promote positive attitudes towards inclusion, diversity, partnership and network opportunities
- Organise and promote training for teachers, educators and other training professionals on inclusive education

Recommendations for European policy makers

- Develop clear and coherent policy framework and legislation promoting inclusive education, in co-operation with person with special needs, families, education providers and other stakeholders
- Develop a harmonised definition of disability in Europe
- Strengthen the mandate of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
- Allocate sufficient financial support for mainstream education settings to provide inclusive environments
- Promote the establishment and coordination of inclusive regional learning networks

Recommendations for national and regional policy makers

- Shift from institutionalised structures towards inclusive systems
- Adapt standards to allow the development of curricula with a universal design
- Redefine school achievements and assessment methods for a more flexible system
- Support the transition of students with special educational needs towards the labour market
- Support the post-secondary sector, such as universities, as inclusive places to live and learn
- Gather reliable data on the incidence, effectiveness and comparative costs of inclusive and segregating education
- Include training on inclusive education in the teacher training system

Recommendations for education providers

- Strengthen the awareness of local community actors about the importance of inclusive teaching
- Establish a clear vision on inclusive education and make sure it is shared by all levels of staff
- Share the knowledge and expertise of special education providers with mainstream providers through partnerships and common understandings
- Build a network with potential employers to facilitate the transition to the labour market
- Invest in adequate education and training for teachers and staff to ensure the understanding of Inclusive Education and Special Educational Needs
- Implement the Universal Design concept in the infrastructure and curricula

Recommendations for teachers, trainers and staff

- Collaborate with the family and the community of the child
- Encourage the collaboration of children and peer learning amongst learners
- Use innovative learning methods and technology to implement teaching methods with a Universal Design
- Transfer of good practices among teachers, educators and other training professionals
- Adapt and innovate evaluation methods, with written, oral or external evaluations

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