

ACT-InclusivE – Actors of Change Towards Inclusive Education

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Foreword

The Country Sheets on Inclusiveness in Mainstream Schools is a series of key deliverables produced in the framework of the European project "ACT INCLUSIVE" funded by the Erasmus+ programme "Partnership for Cooperation in the field of Education and Training" (ERASMUS-EDU-2022-PCOOP-ENGO). The "ACT INCLUSIVE" project brings together different stakeholders with expertise in disability rights, support provision, inclusive education and capacity building. The aim of this project is to enable the dissemination of knowledge to mainstream schools, spreading inclusive practices and materials suited to awareness raising of the school community (students, teachers, school staff) and empowerment of students with disabilities.

The Country Sheets on Inclusiveness in Mainstream Schools were developed through desk research on national level (Cyprus, France, Hungary, Slovenia and Spain) and conduction of interviews to teachers, students and school staff from the same target countries. This research format aimed at making sense of the state of play of inclusiveness in school settings based on the current structure of the educational system, recognition of students' rights and needs, and support instruments available, as well as the views and concerns as expressed by interviewees. The Country Sheets will constitute a basis for the development of ACT INCLUSIVE Targeted Awareness Raising Manuals, but are also composed as an informative material for education professionals, researchers, policy makers and interested public.

The ACT INCLUSIVE project is supported by the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (Belgium), besides educational centres and service providers supporting people with disabilities from 5 different countries: Spain (COGAMI), Hungary (ETA), Cyprus (CARDET), France (LADAPT), and Slovenia (Center VAL). For each target country, one Country Sheet has been issued with key information on Inclusiveness for students with disabilities, detailing current structures for access to education, legal provisions, current challenges to build inclusiveness in mainstream schools and ways forward.

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Introduction

Inclusive education is an evolving concept that, today, englobes the full access to quality instruction and educational guidance by all groups of society, regardless of their level of vulnerability or marginalisation (Florian 2019¹). Equally important, as precised by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, inclusive education provides the means to realisation of other human rights, holding an overarching empowerment effect towards social mobility, participation and autonomy.

In the specific context of disability-inclusiveness, Inclusive education has been repeatedly enriched at European and International level through different instruments. Those clearly state **the right to equal opportunities and high-quality appropriate education; the right to participate in and contribute fully to an inclusive society; the right to choose and receive education in an inclusive environment; and to appropriate resources and expertise to meet their educational, social and health-related needs** (including respect to the best interest of the child).

Inclusiveness on School environment also has **supported evidence of bringing overall benefits to all students**, since the interaction between students with and without disabilities on school context enable both groups to learn more. Despite that, the realisation of fully inclusive education systems across Europe is yet to be achieved. The recent restrictive measures due to COVID-19 pandemic brought more emphasis to the **urgent need for inclusive approaches for conceiving adapted environments that can respond to all students' needs**. Bhan and Julka (2021²) pointed out that educational challenges faced by children with disabilities in this context were: lack of peer interaction; lack of therapies; lack of diagnostic assessment; break in routine; lack of teacher support; lack of access to meals.

The Special Rapporteur, in its 2019 report '*Empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights*'³ also points out **stigma and stereotypes due to their age, gender, impairment or other factor** (page 14) as some of the key factors for continued segregation of children with disabilities to the mainstream school system.

While the response to **educational systems transformation must certainly involve measures in multiple levels, the awareness of the school community, and capacity building of its professionals, is key to build up diversity in the school environment**. The identification of the state of play of current context and existing structures of school system comes as a logical step.

¹ Florian, L (2019). On the necessary co-existence of special and inclusive education, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23:7-8, 691-704. Available at: doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1622801

² Bhan, S. and Julka, A., 2021. Disability Inclusive COVID-19 Response. Best Practices. Available: unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378354

³ Empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights, including through inclusive education - Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, 2019

Methodology

In order to achieve our goals, **partners developed an extensive literature review concerning the history background, legislation and current school system structure and challenges/ limitations in the current state of play of inclusiveness in mainstream schools.** The development of such material was guided by a set of questions developed by LADAPT, with inputs from all partners. The information collected was also reviewed by expert organisations with field expertise and knowledge on the national context in each country. Comments were incorporated, and content was summarised to compose this Country Sheet.

In a second phase, **partners collected and analysed the perspectives, opinions, experiences, specific needs and challenges faced by students (disabled and non-disabled), teachers and staff of local schools.** Through data collection in schools, we aim to gain a comprehensive overview of the state of inclusive education in schools, as well as a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of school staff, teachers and students and the main difficulties they face in their daily work.

In line with the research objectives, we **collected data between May and September 2023 using different measurement tools** to understand schools' practices and opinions on inclusive education, its challenges and successes. The measurement tools were developed and finalised with our project partners under the guidance of the French partner LADAPT.

The **data collection focused on a total of X schools** in Cyprus, French, Hungary, Slovenia and Spain, **with 7 schools in Hungary.** When selecting the schools, it was important to select mainstream schools and to get the views of staff and students of primary and secondary education institutions. The schools were selected with particular attention being paid to the school's openness to the situation of people with disabilities and the importance of promoting acceptance and inclusion within the institution.

In Hungary, 126 students responded to the written survey; 14 semi-structured interviews to teachers and school staff were conducted, with 2-2 interviews in each school, and 61 online questionnaires were responded by professionals. The professional profile of interviewees comprised: head and vice principal school staff, teachers, conductive educator, school psychologists and other support staff with different relevant positions in relation to inclusive education in the school. Participation was voluntary and respondents were granted anonymity when summarising the results.

Due to the exploratory and descriptive nature of the data collection and the aim to learn about school practices, **the data collection does not aim to describe the entire institutional system and its functioning in the 5 countries, so the results presented in the following chapters are not, or only to a very limited extent, generalisable.** Nevertheless, they bring in evidence to views, needs and ways forward for enabling more inclusive practices and build welcoming and diverse environments for students and the school community as a whole.

I. Background of the Hungarian education system on national level

Since the emergence of integrated education nearly 30 years ago, **the number of children participating in integration has continuously increased, and currently, it affects over 70% of children with special educational needs.** Its widespread adoption in Hungary was facilitated by factors such as a decrease in the number of births leading to a reduction in the overall number of children in mainstream institutions, significantly increasing their capacity to accommodate integrated students. Other contributing factors include legal guarantees for parental rights and a paradigm shift in relation to disabilities, emphasizing the mismatch between the individual and the environment and highlighting neurodiversity rather than focusing solely on individual deficits. The integration movement was also supported by the growing advocacy of persons with disabilities and the emergence of the principle of **"Nothing about us without us."** While integration has become widely prevalent in Hungary, many other countries are already discussing the more advanced implementation of inclusive education. **Despite the relatively widespread adoption of integrated education in Hungary, we cannot yet speak of full inclusion.** Only a few domestic institutions meet the criteria of inclusive education (such as the "Children's House" Alternative Foundation Program (Kókayné, 1999)⁴ or the Istvánffy Elementary School in Szigetvár (Pirisi and Pesti, 1996)⁵

The **presence of objective material** (e.g.: physical environment, various learning support tools, digital tools, physical conditions, etc.) **and personal conditions** (e.g.: support teachers, special teachers, special needs teachers, etc.) **are important factors in the successful implementation of inclusive education.** Unfortunately, many shortcomings persist in their availability, which is related to the increased volume of integrated education, more and more children and educators need local support. **The composition of integrated children with special needs has also changed;** nowadays, students with more complex needs are educated in mainstream institutions, presenting more challenges for both mainstream and special education teachers.

The quality of **inclusion is affected by the cooperation of professionals and institutions** (cf. Papp, 2002⁶; Szekeres, et al., 2013⁷), as they represent the sufficient expertise needed to educate children with special needs. **The success of inclusive education requires establishing a partnership based on trust and the exchange of information between the parties of institutional education and the**

⁴ Kókayné Lányi M. (1999). Befogadó osztály a Gyermek Házában. in Kereszty Zs. (Ed.), Mindenki iskolája. Budapest: IFA-BTF-OM, old.: 269–282.

⁵ Pirisi J., Pesti G. (1996). Differenciált tanulásszervezés – differenciált képességfejlesztés. in Gereben F., Kereszty Zs. (Ed.), Különböznek. Budapest: BTF, 237–253.

⁶ Papp, G. (2002). Esélynövelés az integrációval. GYOSZE Különszám, 61–69.

⁷ Szekeres, Á., Perlusz, A. & Takács, I. (2013). „...egy ideális világban csak így szabadna tanítani...” Gyógypedagógusok véleménye az integrációval kapcsolatban. In Zászkaliczky, P. (Ed.), A társadalmi és az iskolai integráció feltételrendszere és korlátai (pp. 201–226). ELTE Eötvös Kiadó.

parents. In practice this cooperation often fails, and not only in Hungary (Meilinger, 2011⁸; Podráczy & Marton, 2012⁹; Belmont et al., 2012¹⁰; Marton, 2019¹¹).

History of inclusive education and evolution of practices in Hungary

The integration in kindergartens and schools in Hungary started in the late 1970s, almost simultaneously with the integration initiatives and movements in Western Europe. Initially, social integration appeared as the ultimate goal of special education, and then it was formulated in the 1980s "the idea of educating children of different abilities and development in an integrated, common system" (Lányiné, 1987, 933¹²). As a result of the inclusive education trends appearing in international practice, the integration of children / learners with disabilities also became more prominent in Hungary in the 1980s. **Act I of 1985 on Education abolished the regulation that special schools for disabled children give lower qualifications than mainstream primary schools**, which did not allow the students who attend them from continuing their education at secondary level. That was a significant step towards providing professional education to learners with disabilities. Hungarian legislation provided **for integrated education as an alternative to special institutions in the 1993 Public Education Act.** (Act LXXIX on Public Education) At the same time, it regulated the conditions for **co-parenting** by means of regulations (Csányi-Perlusz 2001.¹³). Since the 1990s, **the concept of inclusion** has also appeared in public education in Hungary.

A 2003 amendment of Act LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education extended the national categories of disability. The category of people entitled to special care was **extended to include children with autism and children with learning difficulties due to other psychiatric developmental disorders** which result in severe and permanent learning impediments. The number of learners with SEN due to other psychological developmental disorders increased fivefold over a five-year period and significant differences were found in the counties' statistics. As such, **the rules pertaining to diagnosis were amended and the population concerned was fully reviewed in 2007.** The significance of selection mechanisms and medical diagnosis aspects in inclusive education for children and learners with SEN is

⁸ Meilinger, A. (2011). Szülőszerep az integrációban. (Az eltérő fejlődés hatásai a szülőkre). In Papp, G. (Ed.), A diagnózistól a foglalkozási rehabilitációig (pp. 59–71). ELTE Eötvös Kiadó.

⁹ Podráczy, J. & Marton, E. (2012). A szülők bevonásának, aktívvá tételének lehetőségei az óvodai nevelésben. In Bodnár, G. (Ed.), Hét aranyalma. Módszertani gyűjtemény óvodapedagógusoknak (pp. 65–86). Bethlen Gábor Alapkezelő Zrt.

¹⁰ Belmont, B., Pawlowska, A. & Vérillon A. (2012). Partnership with Parents. In Kron, M. (Ed.), Growing up Together (pp. 68–75). Zentrum für Planung und Evaluation sozialer Dienste (ZPE), University of Siegen.

¹¹ Marton, E. (2019). A szülő és az iskola kapcsolata, szerepe a sikeres együttnevelés megvalósításában. PhD-értekezés. ELTE PPK Neveléstudományi Doktori Iskola.

¹² Lányiné E. Á. (1987). Az integrációs nevelési kísérletek pszichológiai megközelítésből Pedagógiai Szemle 37. évf. 9. sz. 931-935.

¹³ Csányi Y. - Perlusz A. (2001). Integrált nevelés - inkluzív iskola. In: Tanulmányok a neveléstudomány köréből, A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Pedagógiai Bizottságának gyűjteménye / [szerk. Báthory Zoltán, Falus Iván]. - Bp. Osiris, 314-332.

decreasing. There is a **growing emphasis on the development opportunities** adapted to different educational needs.

The classification of SEN is in line with European Union (EU) practices; the complex diagnosis and the acquisition of the inclusive educational content take place within the general school framework. Professionals (psychologists, special educators, conductive teachers, medical doctors) specialising in the given field assess children’s special rehabilitation needs (**complex diagnosis**). The curriculum is delivered with the help of special equipment, infrastructure and professionals with specialized training over the entire period or part of the education provision.

Besides diagnostics and counseling, the **pedagogical assistance service institutions also provide therapy and family care**. According to Act of CXXV of 2003 on Equal Opportunities, the parents of learners with SEN have the right to be involved in decision-making about where their children are placed.

There are now inclusive forms of schooling in most sectors of education. In the 2021/2022 academic year, 67% of the children and learners with disabilities participating in the public education system received education in mainstream schools. If we interpret children with severe and multiple disabilities as a separate group, then in 2021, 69% of the children and learners with disabilities participating in the public education system received education in an inclusive methodological framework. According to the last central statistical data collection (1 October 2021) 80 % of the educational institutions are involved in education of SEN learners (74 % in inclusive education). The rate of integration in the different disability categories are not the same, e.g. in the case of speech-impaired students, it is over 90%, while in the case of intellectual disability it is only 20-30%.

In the **higher education** The Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education states that **conditions for studying and taking exams shall be adjusted to the given disability in the case of students with disabilities**. Moreover, disabled students shall be provided assistance for fulfilling obligations ensuing from their status as students. In justified cases, disabled students shall be exempted from taking certain modules, studying certain unit or taking exams and being tested. They can have extra human help too, as note-taking person, tutoring, etc. Unfortunately, **there are no recent statistical data available on students with special needs studying in higher education**, their proportion is relatively low.

Rate of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties in mainstream schools:

2022/23 school-year	student number	of which in a separate special school/classes
	715.155 (100%)	16.434 (2.297%)

Chart 1:

Number of students in Primary education (1-8 classes, mainly 6-14 years) in mainstream and special schools and classes (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Culture and Innovation)

Number of students with SEN, by type of disabilities:

Schoolyear	TOTAL	mild learning disability	moderate learning disability	hard of hearing	deaf	visually impaired	blind	physically impaired	speech impairment
2021/2022	97 286	16 270	4 465	1 374	212	615	84	1 701	6 348

Schoolyear	mild learning disability and some associated disability	moderate learning disability and some associated disability	deaf-blind	autism spectrum disorder	severe learning difficulties	severe attention deficit	severe behavior deficit	Children with severe and multiple disabilities
2021/2022	2120	1469	12	8 437	45 333	5 874	2 972	2 579

Chart 2:

Number of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties in kindergarten, elementary and secondary institutions regarding to type of disability (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Culture and Innovation)

The **role change of the special institutions took place at the turn of the 20th-21st century**. The institutions of well-known historical background have lost more than half of their students in the past decades. By the increasing rate of inclusive education, it became clear that **it was of utmost importance to provide a wide range of services for the pupils with special educational needs at local schools**, which resulted in the dissemination of knowledge accumulated in special institutions.

While in western countries so-called special educational centers or resource centers have been set up, in Hungary the **special institutions were transformed into resource centers (USEMI) in the early 2000s**. USEMIs with a wide range of services aim at helping the mainstream schools to include pupils with special needs. On one hand, the primary target group of their services are pupils with SEN (specific development, equipment rental), on the other hand they also support the mainstream teachers and communities (inclusive attitudes, special methodologies, techniques, differentiation, retraining, etc.) Within the framework of the institution, there shall be a **unit exclusively performing each school level (kindergarten, primary school, school or secondary school activities) and conducting developmental education for learners with SEN, as well as a mobile network of special educators and conductors**. USEMIs may also fulfil the tasks of family support services and school healthcare services. **‘Mobile special educator’** or **‘mobile conductor’** (traveling teacher) means the special educator or conductor employed by the respective mobile network of special educators or conductors, who regularly perform their duties outside the location of their employer.

Another support institution is the **Pedagogical Assistance Service**. In every county (and in the capital), there is one pedagogical assistance service, which has a sub- institution and units in every district. These are under unified leadership and professional protocols. The pedagogical assistance services’ duties include:

- special education consulting, early development, education and care, (early intervention and prevention);
- expert activity (professional diagnostics diagnostical committee);

- educational guidance;
- speech therapy;
- further study and career counselling;
- conductive educational service;
- adapted physical education;
- school and pre-school psychology service;
- promotion of particularly talented children/students.

In Hungary, the 'Act CXCV of 2011 on National Public Education' (Hungarian Parliament 2011) defines terms of appointments of **school leaders as well as the school leaders' main duties and responsibilities**. More detailed information can be found in 'Decree No 20/2012 (VIII. 31.) EMMI on the operation of educational institutions and on the use of names of public educational institutions' (Minister of Human Capacities, 2012). Regarding quality issues, each education institution is obliged to conduct a self-evaluation every five years according to the **national pedagogical-professional inspection system**. Additionally, teaching staff and the parents' community of the respective educational institutions evaluate the work of the school leader in the second and fourth year of their mandate, which has a total duration of five years. **There are no direct references to inclusive leadership in Hungarian official documents**, but the school leader may be granted an incentive supplement by the employer, taking into account for example the following: the development of the number of pupils at risk of dropping out of school, him/her role and effectiveness in the education of pupils with special educational needs or in the support of the inclusive education of pupils with special educational needs with other pupils.

- **Alignment of the national education strategy with relevant UN and European strategies**

The government adopted the public education strategy for the EU programming period between 2021-2030 in August 2020, its main objective is to achieve an equitable, modern public education system. The main goal of the **Hungarian Public Education Strategy (2021-30)** is social catch-up and talent management, as well as students from socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups further improving the chances of access to high-quality education for any group increasing the learning effectiveness of children who are underachieving for some reason." **The planned development directions are in accordance with the elements of European Union strategies affecting public education.**

Hungary also ratified **the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol** on 6 July 2007. The countries that signed the convention recognize its provisions as mandatory for transposition in the national legislation. As a result, significant changes have taken place in Hungarian legislation, but the process is very slow.

Structures

Basic characteristics of the Hungarian education system¹⁴

According to the Fundamental Law of Hungary **every Hungarian citizen shall have the right to education**. Hungary shall ensure this right by extending and generalizing public education, by providing free and compulsory primary education, free and generally accessible secondary education, and higher education accessible to everyone according to their abilities, and by providing financial support as provided for by an Act to those receiving education. According to the **Act on National Public Education**, the Hungarian state has a duty to ensure the right to free and generally accessible education. The general rules are same for all children and learners, with or without disability. Every child is obliged to participate in institutional education in Hungary: Children shall participate in kindergarten activities in no less than four hours a day from the age of 3 years old, completed before 31 August. Children are said to be of school age in the calendar year when they turn six years of age by 31 August (or in some special cases, the following year at the latest). Compulsory school age lasts until a learner turns 16. The compulsory school age of learners with special educational needs may be extended until the end of the academic year when they turn 23, if necessary.

In Hungary, a **free early intervention** program is available for **every SEN child** immediately following diagnosis, which is provided mainly in the child's home, or in Special Educational Methodology Centers. **The professional diagnostic committee (committee of experts) of the county pedagogical assistance service institution shall draw up an expert opinion on the basis of their complex psychological, pedagogical-special educational, and medical examination**, and shall make suggestions, based on the results of the examinations, as to the education of children/students with special education needs within the framework of special treatment, as well as the method, form and place of education. The professional diagnostic committee informs the parent based on the list of institutions in which his child with special educational needs can take part in education (including the inclusive education also). **The public education institution is chosen by the parent from the institutions recommended by the professional diagnostic committee**. The diagnostic test is followed by kindergarten care, which is implemented in a special or integrated form.

Public education institutions may be established and operated by the state, national self-governments and churches registered in Hungary as well as other organizations or persons on condition that they have obtained the right for conducting such activity as laid down by statutory provisions. Kindergartens may also be established and operated by local governments. Church and private institutions often have better infrastructural conditions, in private institutions, parents pay tuition. Presently number of the public educational institutions in Hungary: 5885. From this 5885 institution there are:

- 173 segregated institutions,
- 150 partly segregated institutions,
- 3807 inclusive educational institution,

¹⁴ More details: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/hungary/organisation-education-system-and-its-structure>

- 1344 non-inclusive, non-segregated, non-partly segregated educational institutions,
- 411 other (pedagogical assistance service institutions, pedagogical professional service institutions, independent foreign schools, cross-sectoral mixed profiled institutions, independent halls of residence, independent primary art schools).

Primary and lower secondary education is mostly organized as a single-structure system in 8-grade primary schools (általános iskola). **Upper secondary education**, typically for pupils aged 15-18 covering grades 9-12 is provided by general secondary schools (gimnázium). However, general secondary schools (grammar school, gimnázium) are also allowed to offer longer programmes starting earlier (from grade 5 or 7). Other secondary schools are: vocational secondary schools (szakgimnázium), vocational schools (szakképző Iskola and technikum), vocational school for special education (szakiskola) and special skills development school (secondary school for pupils with moderate intellectual disabilities). The entrance examinations to upper-secondary schools are centrally organised. The Public Education Law also provides SNI and BTMN examinees with extended preparation time for the entrance examination; they are also allowed to use the tools they have used during their school studies in written or oral assessments.

General secondary schools provide general education and prepare for the secondary school leaving examination, which is the prerequisite for admission to higher education. Secondary vocational schools provide general and pre-vocational education, prepare for the secondary school leaving examination and offer vocational post-secondary non-tertiary programs (ISCED 4 C). The secondary school leaving examination is a state examination, which is also part of the entrance examination to higher education institutions.

Vocational schools provide general, pre-vocational and vocational education and may also provide remedial lower secondary general education for those who have not accomplished basic school. The **special skills development schools** provide general and practical skills education. During secondary education, there are no special general secondary schools (grammar school, gimnázium, vocational secondary schools (szakgimnázium), vocational schools (szakképző Iskola and technikum) in Hungary, young people with special educational needs can only continue their education in an integrated manner, or in vocational school for special education (szakiskola) and special skills development school (secondary school for pupils with moderate intellectual disabilities).

Bachelor programs are mainly for 3-4 years; this can be followed by a master program for 1-2 years. Doctoral courses last for 2+2 years.

Content of teaching and learning in schools governed by a three-tier curriculum regulation since 2000.

In January 2020, the **new National Core Curriculum (hereinafter: NCC)** and the accompanying document entitled **Guidelines for the Education of Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools (hereinafter: the Guidelines)**. Children with special educational needs follow the NCC in a similar way to their typically developing classmates, but the differentiated application of the curriculum is supported by the provisions of the Public Education Law on the one hand and the Guidelines on the other. The NCC states that "*In the case of students with special needs, the teacher*

must take into account the adaptation of the content of the subject to the specific characteristics of the student. Furthermore, "in order to ensure compensation for disadvantage (SEN, disadvantaged background, etc.), methodological procedures (tools, methods, therapies, special tools to support learning and teaching, incorporation of methodological guidelines of the special needs teacher, preparation and regular monitoring of individual development plans) must be applied in the various pedagogical settings."

The Guidelines define:

- the possibilities to modify, omit or simplify certain areas or to include new areas when designating content;
- areas for the correction of impaired abilities, skills and competences for the purposes of habilitation and rehabilitation;
- proposals for extending education and training and development over a longer period than is usual.

According to the **Budgetary Act** the nationality self-governments, churches, other private organizations and local governments get subvention from the central state budget to operate educational institutions. Amount of the subvention depends on the number of the children, students.

Irrespective of whether education and teaching are carried out separately or together with non-disabled learners, **institutions participating in education and teaching for children with SEN (disabilities) provide a "compulsory healthcare and pedagogical habilitation and rehabilitation"** (special development by the special educators for the learners with SEN) timeframe. This rehabilitation time frame depends on the type of disability. The required special education teacher can also be employed in his / her own staff or requested from the mobile special educator network. The development activities for children and young people with severe disabilities are provided at home or in the school institution, as requested by the parent, and skills necessary for independent life are also taught.

According to preliminary education data for the 2022/2023 school year (KSH) the number of full-time teachers in kindergartens has remained unchanged for years at 31,000. The number of primary school teachers **employed as full-time** is nearly 74,000, and more than 42,000 teachers work in secondary institutions. In this school year, 453 teachers provide the education of 2.6 thousand severely and multiple disabled children in the framework of developmental education. 83% of teachers are women. At the same time, due to the economic and educational policy factors affecting teachers, which are still taking place today, according to statistics, the number of primary school teachers decreased by almost a thousand people, and the number of kindergarten teachers by a few hundred people, while the number of people working in high schools and technical schools increased. **Proportion of schools where teaching assistants or other teaching support staff work in 2020 was 14,21% (maintained by state) 18,38% (maintained by church) and 20,19 % (maintained other, eg. private school).** The proportion of primary schools **employing staff assisting in pedagogical work is increases in the hierarchy of settlements, it is the largest in Budapest, in the villages the smallest. The highest proportion of pedagogical work is employed in those primary schools directly assisting employees,**

where the proportion of HHH students is low and among them is the smallest proportion, where the proportion of such students is very high.

The **shortage of teachers in Hungary is currently quite large**. This also affects the care and education of children with special needs. **There are large inequalities in access to specialists within the country. In some of the country's typically poorer, disadvantaged areas, there is a large shortage of professionals, and disabled children living here often do not receive the support required by law.** In addition, the private care system is "flourishing", which, however, is unaffordable for many families. The other difficulty is that **special needs teachers and mainstream teachers hardly ever meet, there is no time for joint planning, discussion and evaluation, and special needs support cannot make an impact on classroom processes**, even though this is where the SEN and students with difficulties in integration, learning or behavior" spends a significant part of their school time. Based on our experience, **despite the fact that traveling teachers' services generally reach children with special educational needs, the role of special needs teachers supporting integration is currently limited to the individual development of children with special educational needs, without real cooperation with the teachers.**

Accessibility and availability

Primary education is free and there are usually no entrance exams. Nevertheless, **some selection takes place.** Students with special needs or disabilities are less admitted to so-called "elite" schools (only if they are exceptionally talented), disadvantaged schools in our country become gathering points for these students, and the teachers working here feel almost impossible to meet the challenges. Principle, all public primary schools are obliged to admit children with special educational needs for which they have the appropriate conditions. For example, not all schools have access to physical barriers, but an elementary school in the district or city must accept the student with physically disabled. In big cities and the capital, it is easier to find an institution that accommodates all children with disabilities, from this point of view, **families living in small towns and villages in the countryside are in a more difficult situation.** There is a - so-called - support service that takes students with disabilities to school, but this service is often incomplete.

There are no accommodation options in the mainstream schools at elementary level. Secondary school dormitories are often not barrier-free, but at the same time, in the spirit of reasonable accommodation, they can become suitable for students with disabilities with minor modifications. **Special schools,** since they are usually further away from the place of residence, provide care in student homes and dormitories, and they are barrier-free.

Children with disabilities and/or learning difficulties in schools

- a. Children with special educational needs (SEN, hungarian: SNI) and children with integration, learning and behavioral difficulties (hungarian: BTMN)

According to the Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education children / students with special education needs (SEN) and children / students with difficulties in integration, learning or behaviour, belongs to the category of "**children / students requiring special attention**".

Definition of "**children / students with special education needs**" is: children / students requiring special treatment who - based on the expert opinion of the committee of experts - have physical disability, have sensory (visual, hearing), mental deficiency or speech disorder, or have multiple disabilities in case of the simultaneous occurrence of several deficiencies or have autism spectrum disorder or any other psychic disorder (serious disorder concerning learning or the control of attention or behaviour).

Definition of "**children / students with difficulties in integration, learning or behaviour**" is: children / students who require special attendance and significantly underperform compared to their age based on the basis of the expert opinion of the committee of experts, or face social relationship problems or suffer from deficiencies in learning or the control of their behaviour, or their integration into the community or personal development is impeded or shows special tendencies but do not qualify as students with special education needs.

Inclusion, or any Hungarian equivalent of the term is not defined in the Act on National Public Education, the National Core Curriculum and the National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education. According to the Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education, the kindergarten education of children with SEN, and the school education of student with SEN shall be conducted in a special educational institution, kindergarten-group or school class or partly or fully together with peers and students in the same kindergarten group or school class.

- b. Support for Children with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties

The curriculum is delivered with the help of special equipment, infrastructure and professionals with specialized training over the entire period or part of the education provision. The "**Guideline for kindergarten education of children with special educational needs**" and the "**Guideline for school education of learners with special educational needs**" includes the information, classification rules and detailed methodological aids for teachers disability by disability, and includes the possible deviations from the National Core Curriculum. Besides diagnostics and counseling, the county pedagogical assistance service institution also provides therapy and family care.

In educational institutions catering for learners special education needs, compulsory habilitation and rehabilitation class activities (personal development) shall be organised for learners with special needs. The student shall take part in as many habilitation and rehabilitation class activities for health and pedagogical purposes as necessary in order to reduce the disadvantage stemming from their special needs. Children both in special and integrated settings get regular extra help from traveling teachers, which is free for the parents. The education of learners with SEN requires:

- a special or conductive educator with appropriate skills according to the type and extent of the learners' SEN, special curricula, course (text) books and other tools;
- the committee of experts' decision on the areas to be developed.

The educational institution shall prepare **an individual development plan for the child / student with special education needs with the special educator, and shall record the results of the development at least once a year**. The parents shall be informed of the content of the individual development plan and the results achieved.

According to the "Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education": If the individual capabilities and the development of the student with special educational needs so require, the principal shall exempt him/her on the basis of the opinion of the expert committee

- a) from numerical evaluation and assessment and require written evaluation and assessment instead,
- b) from evaluation and assessment of certain subjects or parts of subjects, with the exception of practical training.

In the secondary school leaving examination, students can choose another subject instead of the subjects as defined above, in accordance with the examination rules.

Additional possibilities for student with special needs:

- a) the time allotted for answering the written questions for the examinee shall be increased by a maximum of thirty minutes,
- b) it shall be allowed for the examinee to use the tools generally used during their studies,
- c) examinees may sit an oral examination instead of a written examination.

The principal can permit individual progress education and training for the learner with SEN (based on the professional opinion of the diagnostical committee). Individual progression - from all or some subjects - can last until different grades, but no later than the end of the fourth grade.

The Act of Education guarantees free choice of school for all students. Parents are free to choose a kindergarten, school, or college in accordance with the child's abilities, skills and interests, based on his or her own religious, ideological beliefs, and nationality. However, every general secondary school may determine admission requirements and may organize entrance examinations. After consulting the teaching staff, the head teacher is entitled to decide on placing students into classes or groups.

Children/learners living in the so-called school district have priority in the **admission process**. **Annual revision of school district borders is an important desegregation tool**. At the same time, since residential segregation is also experienced in Hungary, significant differences can be observed between schools depending on where they are located. Disadvantages caused by the poor social situation are more prominent in the system in disadvantaged areas of Hungary. In these regions, the shortage of specialists is decisive, which makes it difficult to provide differentiated education of the appropriate standard, and segregation can also be experienced in several settlements.

SEN status lasts until the end of compulsory school age (16 years old), or until the student completes secondary education. After that, they can **also choose the status of “student with special needs” in higher education institutions.** This is voluntary, but in order to use the various services, they must prove their disability.

c. Children without any status – is it possible?

Children without any status can occur in two cases. One is, when the parent does not recognize that his/her child has any special educational needs, and therefore, does not want to bring him to the expert committee, even if the kindergarten or school recommends it. In Hungary, the law does not allow a parent to "dismiss" his or her child's SEN status. In this case, the kindergarten/school turns to the township clerk, who can compel the parent to do so in a procedure. In the other case, the parent is usually aware that her child has special educational needs, even if she has with an expert opinion, but "hides" this in order to get the student admitted to a particular school.

Challenges

1. On the way to be more inclusive

In Hungary, the system of teacher training includes six teacher qualifications: the kindergarten teacher, the primary school teacher, the subject teacher (i.e. history, mathematics etc.), the special educator, the conductor (conductive educator), and the infant and toddler educator (for nursery schools).

Currently, programmes in special educator training are organised into eight fields:

- Intellectual and multiple disabilities
- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment
- Speech and language therapy
- Behavioural disorders
- Physical disabilities
- Learning disabilities and difficulties
- Autism spectrum disorder.

As of September 2020, **nine universities (at 12 training places) train special educators and, in addition to special educator training, the Pető András Faculty at Semmelweis University offer conductive education training.** Conductive educators specialise in physical disabilities caused by central nervous system injury at either kindergarten or school age. The kindergarten teacher, primary school teacher and the subject teacher training prepares for **subject-specific education**, but also prepares the graduate teacher to take an inclusive approach, to create an inclusive teaching-learning environment, to develop differentiated education in the field of differentiated education. In the case of kindergarten teacher and primary school teacher training, the content of special education and inclusive pedagogy appears (in 14 universities) as a compulsory element in 6 universities', and as an optional element in 8 universities' curriculum. In the case of subject teacher training, the “training and output requirements”

(both current and previous legislation) provide for the teaching of students with special educational needs. It is a general requirement that the graduate / qualified teacher has a basic knowledge of (among other things), personality characteristics, causes of behavioral problems, and be able to recognize and educate students with special educational needs and multiple disadvantages.

Starting from the 1990s, **courses have been launched that deal with integrated education and the concept of inclusive schools** (Papp, Schiffer, 2011)¹⁵. In recent decades, several integration and inclusive education programs affecting teacher training, and further training have been developed and tested (eg. Special needs in the classroom: a teacher education guide by Unesco (Ainscow 1993¹⁶), the INTEGER, EUMIE and OCL: Inclusive project (Réthy 2006¹⁷), the PHARE Twinning project (Csányi – Fótiné, 2006.¹⁸), and the National Development Plan Operational Program for Human Resources Development No. 2.1.1 within the framework of comp. "B" of the central program 2004-2008. etc.).

There is an **official list of approved teacher training courses, which currently has 464 Organizations organizing further teacher training**, with a total of 1,561 programs offered to teachers. There is a significant number of further training available free of charge. The Education Office is professional its service-providing organizational units, the Pedagogical Education Centers, regularly organize accredited and shorter-term, non-accredited continuing teacher training courses, **more than 10,000 teachers attend these free continuing education courses every year.**

Teachers often cannot take advantage of the many training and course opportunities because the school administrator (school district) does not support the studies, does not pay the training fee, and the teacher cannot be replaced while attending the course. Teachers often do not have enough time for continuing education, as they have to work overtime. At the same time, the teachers of the mainstream schools would demand further training opportunities in the field of education for children with special educational needs. Often, non-profit organizations organize such free courses for parents, but it does not work in the state form.

2. Focusing on local schools: results of school data collections¹⁹

Key findings from the school staff's data collection

Availability and accessibility of mainstream schools

¹⁵ Papp, G., & Schiffer, C. (2011). Az integrált és az inkluzív nevelés hatása a pedagógusképzés egyes területein. *Pedagógusképzés*, 9(3-4.), 45-62. <https://doi.org/10.37205/TEL-hun.2011.3-4.03>

¹⁶ Ainscow, M. (Ed.) (1993). *Speciális szükségletek az osztályban*. Pedagógiai oktatócsomag. UNESCO-kiadvány. Bp., Bárczi Gusztáv Gyógypedagógiai Főiskola

¹⁷ Réthy Endréné (2006). Az EUMIE mesterfokú tanterv - inkluzív nevelés szakon *Pedagógusképzés*. - 4. (2006) 1-2., p. 93-99.

¹⁸ Csányi Y. - Fótiné H. É. (2006). *Inklúziós tanterv és útmutató a magyarországi pedagógusképzés számára* in. *Pedagógusképzés* 4. évf. 1-2. sz. 59-64.

¹⁹ When interpreting the results, it is important to note that Due to the exploratory and descriptive nature of the data collection and the aim to learn about school practices, the data collection does not aim to describe the entire institutional system and its functioning in Hungary, so the results presented in the following chapters are not, or only to a very limited extent, generalisable.

All the institutions included in the survey are integrated mainstream institutions, which means that students with disabilities are welcome in all schools. Respondents explained that the **institution's Statutes** and **Pedagogical Programme** specify the types of disabilities that the institution can welcome and the support that the institution needs to provide. Most institutions can accommodate several different types of students with different disabilities: typically, all welcome young people with ADHD and autism spectrum disorders, students with different physical disabilities (e.g. arm or leg impairments, mobility difficulties and, less frequently, wheelchair users) and children with different learning disabilities and difficulties. Children with reduced mobility and hearing impairments are excluded from some institutions, and pupils with visual impairments are usually not included in mainstream schools. Children with mental disabilities are also rarely admitted to these institutions.

Helping and supporting students with disabilities in everyday school life

The **vast majority of respondents said that there are currently students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties in their institution. In almost all cases, pupils with disabilities are integrated into education, school and class life.** Of course, as pointed out by several interview respondents, this is only the case if the student's expert opinion states that he or she can be educated in an integrated way. **Sometimes teachers differentiate their pupils, not only in lessons but also when they are testing the curriculum.** In some cases, they are assisted by a conductive educator in lessons, but most of the development takes place outside the school and classroom, with the children being taken out of the classroom. They are **also individual or group development provided by the school** for a few hours a week, as required by the peer review, in accordance with the legal obligations. **There are also pupils with individual programmes** (not individual curricula!).

The **Hungarian education system relies in many cases on class teachers (head of class).** They often coordinate/manage the special attention required for SEN and children with learning difficulties in the institutions surveyed. In the institutions surveyed, we found several solutions for monitoring who is receiving or should receive what help and support according to their Individual Development Plans. The key actors are the development and special needs teachers, who usually collect all the information about the students with disabilities.

The situation is similar in the **area of teacher collaboration with a special or developmental teacher.** This is not usually written into the policies or procedures of the institutions studied. It is important to stress that the presence of developmental and special education teachers is essential in these processes, and their cooperation is essential in strengthening support for students with disabilities at the institutional level.

Both in the online questionnaire and in the interviews, several respondents mentioned **that children with disabilities receive the benefits of the law and the benefits described in the expert opinion.**

In addition to development, they also try **to help students with disabilities with everyday tasks.** Some said that if they could reasonably meet 1-1 special request they would of course do so, but they could not go too far. For example, a boy with ADHD was allowed to leave the class at any time if he could not

longer stay in the classroom, or a parent was sent the materials so that they could learn with their child. Other good examples from one institution include the use of immediate reinforcement or an agenda board with pictograms for a child with autism, or allowing them to wear 'earplugs' if they are sensitive to sound. Care is taken to ensure that children with ADHD are not distracted by anything or anyone, or are seated next to someone who is more accepting.

Respondents also cited examples where **they help everyone, not just children with disabilities, and provide individual support to everyone when needed**. For example, in one institution, if someone breaks a leg, there are room transfers for certain classes, it should be natural. Or in another institution, they often help students on an individual level, including students with disabilities: for example, teachers accompany them to competitions, leisure activities, help them to participate in different activities, or they also mentioned the management and support of foreign students. One interviewee said that the methods, games and exercises that work for students with disabilities can also work for other students, they try to approach things in this way and pay attention to each individual. As there are usually many students in schools and classes, it is usually the responsibility of the class teacher to identify and advocate for this individual support.

Key challenges in developing inclusive education as seen by those working in schools

During the data collections among school staff members we could identify challenges and difficulties that hinder or make it difficult to develop a more inclusive education. The responses have been grouped and are briefly presented in the following section.

A general, structural problem is **that large class sizes are not a positive factor for the integration of students with disabilities**. Over a third (39%) of respondents to the online questionnaire identified **some form of generally high student numbers and large class sizes as one of the biggest barrier and challenge to the implementation of integrated and inclusive work-based learning**. Often there is no time to work with students individually or to give them special attention, and unfortunately there is no extra help available in the classroom to properly address these differences and individual needs. This is confirmed by the interviewees, with one citing it as a "challenge to successful inclusion". In another, a member of staff said that it would be good to teach in smaller groups, ideally with no more than 20 pupils in a class.

In this context, the vast majority of the respondents also mentioned in some way that **more professionals are needed to develop quality inclusive education. Teachers are overburdened, many more special needs teachers, special needs assistants, conductive educators or pedagogical assistants would be needed locally to provide the right support and assistance to students**. Many point out that support and individual attention in the classroom would be much needed, but this can only be provided in very rare cases. The interviews also confirmed this, and the lack of support professionals for visually impaired and speech impaired students is cited as a challenge. **Moreover, a number of them indicate that there are very few travelling special needs teachers "on assignment" and very few development teachers** - many cite this as a systemic difficulty.

Several respondents to the online questionnaires noted that **teachers frequently lack the necessary tools and knowledge to support the development of children with atypical needs**. 39% of the online questionnaire respondents identified a **lack of knowledge and skills among teachers, focusing on different areas**. Many of them acknowledge that **current teachers (including themselves) often lack general knowledge and understanding of specific types of disability; where the teacher has not previously encountered such issues, they lack the appropriate knowledge**. According to the online respondents, teacher training is not sufficiently detailed to deal with this diversity. Most feel that they lack the methodological knowledge and tools to meet individual needs and do not consider themselves professionally competent in all cases. Many believe that there is a strong **need for continuous training, specific methodological tools and knowledge, and practical methods**, or at least the presence of more support professionals with such knowledge, in order to promote inclusive education.

A smaller proportion of online respondents, but also a **lack of accessibility and physical environment and tools**, was generally cited, with a tenth of 61 respondents (11%) indicating this type of difficulty. These responses included a general lack of physical accessibility and a lack of specialized equipment as barriers to be overcome, with responses indicating that more space and more specialized equipment would be needed to meet individual needs. Some of the respondents confirmed that physical accessibility is still a problem in many institutions, but the lack of equipment (e.g. digital facilities, developmental toys for different age groups, speech therapy mirrors, etc.) can be a difficulty. Many institutions provide suitable accessibility features, including lifts, but in certain cases, parts of the institution may not be accessible. Furthermore, **young people with autism may face additional challenges due to the absence of a quiet room or designated break spaces, as mentioned by several respondents**. In regards to equipment, the survey respondents also mentioned the **lack of an induction loop and the possible lack of environmental and technical conditions** (e.g. transport, teaching materials, other equipment) for visually and hearing impaired pupils.

Many of the interviewees also expressed the **need for a change in the attitudes of teachers, educators and parents**. Many of the interviewees felt that in many cases teachers feel it is a burden to deal separately with pupils with disabilities. *"It's more of a constraint, why not do what worked before and then go to the special school and then it would be easier for everyone - for me at least. And that's a difficult attitude to change. Especially if you don't have the knowledge, most experiences are rather negative"*. One interviewee says that in many schools SEN pupils are treated as 'stupid', and he hears from other schools that parents want to remove this status from their children because they are patronized. In many cases, **parents perceive the special status as a stigma rather than a help during the school years**. For the institution, it can be a challenge that parents often do not report when the child is waiting for a specialist assessment or is between reviews. In their experience, parents often feel that this is a stigma for the child and often try to hide or ignore the fact that their child has special needs. According to several interviewees, actors should understand that services and support that provide stigma are help and are for the child. This should be systematically communicated to teachers and parents.

Students are also mentioned as important actors who often need to be sensitized. Several would like to see different awareness-raising sessions for primary school students, not necessarily focusing only on people with disabilities, but certainly addressing bullying and verbal aggression. The awareness-raising sessions should pay particular attention to 'invisible' disabilities and related abuse, as these types of 'difficulties' are less understood by young people than physical disabilities.

Some online respondents noted **difficulties integrating the student into the community. Unfortunately, bullying and teasing were also reported in class, which may disproportionately impact students with disabilities. The interviews revealed that some students in all classes lack inclusivity, which requires the class teacher's intervention.** While some respondents emphasized that inclusion, particularly for students with ASD, can be a difficult and slow process, several were able to give positive examples of situations where the presence of a student with SEN in the classroom has actually had a positive impact on the whole class.

In the interview data collection, several interviewees mentioned **teacher overload as a challenge**, with one interviewee summarizing the difficulty: *"The biggest problem I still see is that we, the teachers, are extremely overloaded. Very few teachers have the time to go deeper and deeper into cooperative techniques, for example. In today's world, it seems like a dead letter, but believe me, it is not.... As a practicing teacher, I have to say that yes, it does take more time to prepare - at first. But then our way of thinking changes, we don't always have to explain everything because there are rules and role systems that don't require so much preparation"*. In this context, many feel that **it takes a lot of time to develop a framework for differentiation**. This also has a negative impact on the ability to incorporate innovative methods, as new things can be very slow to become embedded in the system and it takes (can take) a lot of energy to maintain them in everyday life. Many point out that it is very important for teachers to move together, to work together and to move in the same direction, because then change can be effectively achieved.

In the interview research, several interviewees mentioned that ways should be found to properly facilitate and **support talent management and that SEN students should be able to show what they are good at** in some form, such as workshops or small groups. *"We should not only compensate and help his disadvantages, but at the same time find the one area in which he can be successful. This will have a positive effect on his whole personality"*.

The interviews show that, among other things, **more central support is needed**. Firstly, there is a **need for more state funded training** on the subject. There is also a great **need for places and/or platforms** where Hungarian teachers can turn for help or support in case of stagnation or problems, where they can get help as teachers in terms of methodology. Information channels are unknown, not widespread and parents often look to teachers for help and information on the different types of support and how to access them. Central support is also needed, according to several respondents, **to help them organize their work at institutional level**. They are not always prepared for the increasing number of students with student status and the need to organize their development and work organization within

the institution. This can take time and energy and can even create tensions within the teaching staff in terms of assessing pupils or preparing teachers for differentiation.

In addition to the challenges gathered during the data collection, we **also had the opportunity to learn about many good examples, individual initiative, individual stories and successes that are essential for inclusive education and approaches to become more and more inclusive in today's Hungarian mainstream schools.** Several of them mentioned special lessons in the classroom, interactive leisure programs, awareness days organized by the institution, joint programs with students from the local EGYMI or other groups with disabilities. There was talk of joint charity fundraising, organizing joint out-of-school activities, interactive awareness programs, organizing visits to other institutions, people with disabilities and groups.

Key findings from the student questionnaire survey

More than half of the students, 52%, said that the term **'disability'** meant some kind of **physical ('body') or intellectual ('mental', 'brain', 'mind') impairment, disorder or deficit.** For physical disability, more respondents mentioned sight, hearing and speech problems, as well as mobility problems and wheelchair use. For mental disability, intellectual disability, autism and 'thinking differently' were mentioned. " **One in four students added in their answer that it is also a disadvantage or difficulty in life that affects a person's daily life.**

The majority of students surveyed, **61% (77), know someone who has a disability, 2/3 of them contacted with a person with disability.** A higher proportion of high school students reported having had contact with a person with a disability than primary school students. Most students (44) mentioned school as the place of contact.

A total of 39 (31%) students said that they had experienced a situation where a person with a disability was bullied. Of these, the majority, 22, said that they had stood up for the victim: coming to their aid, defending them, even talking to the abusers about what was happening and/or explaining why what they were doing was wrong.

More than half of the students, 59%, said that they had a student with a disability in their school. 17% of the students said no, and 18% said they were "not aware". Visible disabilities were easier for students to recall when answering the question, but more people mentioned a classmate with autism, fewer mentioned a person with an intellectual disability, ADHD, hearing impairment or speech impairment - but most did not specify which disability their classmate had.

The **vast majority of students, 84%, say that it is possible to attend school and participate in school activities with a student with a disability. Many respondents (21) said that people with disabilities are 'just like us', 'they are full human beings', so being disabled is not a barrier to doing school activities together, 'it's their right'.** Many added that it depends on the nature and severity of the disability and the activity. A negligible **2 per cent of students answered no** to this question.

The importance of awareness-raising activities

83% of the respondents to the online questionnaire say that they organize awareness-raising sessions in their school, although more say that these are occasional rather than permanent and continuous. The interview results fully confirm this, several interviewees talked about specific occupations, they knew these programs in different depth depending on their professional role. Among the institutions studied, there were some that consciously seek these opportunities, others that do not necessarily seek them, but always find them somehow.

In most of the institutions, some kind of NGO is usually present from time to time. Organizations working with people with Down syndrome, autism, deafness, hearing loss, mobility problems, visual impairment and intellectual disabilities were reported to have visited the school on several occasions. Several mentioned programmes where the children had the opportunity to experience a disability (e.g. different types of visual impairment, trying out a wheelchair, etc.), meet people with disabilities, talk to them and ask them questions. In addition, various specialized exhibitions, films, theatre performances, talks, joint programs with local civil society organizations supporting people with disabilities were also listed.

Institutions usually also organize various "in-house" awareness-raising events. Several colleagues point out that class teacher or ethics lessons are used to talk to students about different topics, often in response to difficulties (if any) and problems within the class, with a particular focus on the class community. The school social worker, the school psychologist, but sometimes also the local family support service, the child protection worker, are often involved in this process, giving talks or presentations.

Responses to the online questionnaire showed that students typically respond well to awareness-raising events and activities, with 83% of respondents indicating a positive response to the question. Students typically enjoy and like these activities, and are open and accepting. In general, they are interested in people with disabilities, ask questions when they have the opportunity, and are receptive and empathetic. **Besides, according to respondents, there is a group of students who cannot be reached by these activities.** There are those who are bored or disengaged and those who do not respond to these sessions in any way. No one reported a high level of outright rejection via the online questionnaire. **Interviewees also agree that these sessions typically have a positive response and impact on students.**

More than three quarters of students, 78%, said they would like to meet a child or adult with a disability and tell them about their life. 17% of students answered no and 6% gave other answers. Those who are open, are mainly interested in how they live and "manage" their daily life, what difficulties they face, what their life is like in general, what their life story is. Others pointed out that they would like to get to know the perspective and world view of people with disabilities. This interest focuses on the personal life experiences of people with disabilities. A few mentioned that such an

event would be very informative and enlightening. The majority of those who answered 'no' did not give a reason, while a few feared that they would be traumatized by the meeting because of their sensitivity to the subject.

The importance of these sessions is acknowledged and stressed by all, and during the interview research, several students mentioned the most important things to consider when organizing such sessions. Several of them underline that:

- It is important **to keep these programs as small as possible**, and those that work well are those that are aimed at a class or even small groups within a class. One interviewee pointed out that she did not think it was worth singling out students from classes, but that it was most useful to have these events for at least one class.
- **Interactive and experiential learning sessions work well**, and children like them and are eager to participate. In schools at the moment everything is very theoretical, so experiential, hands-on things work best. Many point out that the frontal lectures often bore children, and the lectures themselves do not work well.
- It is also important to **have interaction between students and the people with disabilities, and it is important for students to be able to ask questions and talk to the people** in an informal way. Students typically do not meet many people with disabilities - or if they do, they may not know because they are not visible, so it is good to meet and gain experience at such times.
- These sessions need **to address the age group in an appropriate way**, a primary school pupil needs to be addressed in a completely different way to a young person in secondary school.
- It can be experiential for children **to participate in joint activities with children with disabilities**, to play together, to do tasks together or to participate in a joint program.

Conclusion: Challenges on the way towards inclusive education

One of the biggest challenges is **changing the culture of schools**. Ainscow (2012) refers to culture as the deep-seated beliefs and assumptions that people in an organization unconsciously share when defining themselves and their workplace. The degree to which these values include acceptance and respect for differences, a commitment to providing all students with the opportunity to learn effectively, and the extent to which this view becomes accepted among school staff is related to how well students will be able to learn and participate. Hungarian educational institutions adopted these principles mostly at the level of their organizational documents, rather than in everyday practice.

Many of those interviewed also expressed the need for a **major change in the attitudes of teachers, educators and parents**. In many cases, teachers also perceive the need to segregate pupils with disabilities as a burden and parents often perceive the status of children with disabilities or learning difficulties as a stigma rather than a help during the school years. There should be a systemic awareness among teachers and parents that this is a help and for the child.

According to the research results, there is also a **need for a change of attitude among students**. Many would like to see different awareness-raising sessions for primary school pupils, not necessarily focused only on people with disabilities, but certainly addressing bullying and verbal aggression. The awareness-raising sessions should pay particular attention to the 'invisible' types of disability and the abuse associated with them.

For the development of inclusive schools, **attention must be paid to the development of inclusive culture, school principals and teachers need to be trained based on inclusive values**, taking into account their ability to lead with an inclusive approach.

The **Hungarian school system is selective**, schools are simultaneously burdened by the performance expectations of school users (parents) and public education management (currently the state, church, others), which pushes the institutions in the direction of selecting students with better and better abilities and more and more homogeneous groups of students. Besides, **since residential segregation is also experienced in Hungary, significant differences can be observed between schools depending on where they are located**. Disadvantages caused by the poor social situation are more prominent in the system in disadvantaged areas of Hungary. In these regions, the shortage of specialists is decisive, which makes it difficult to provide differentiated education of the appropriate standard, and segregation can also be experienced in several settlements.

The toolbox of mainstream teachers is often not sufficient to deal with individual differences (lack of knowledge and application of differentiating methods), and in practice they often have to deal with the problems that arise alone.

The research findings clearly show that there is a **challenge in addressing the knowledge and skills gap for teachers, focusing on different areas**. In many cases there is a **lack of adequate methodological knowledge and tools to meet individual needs, and teachers do not always consider**

themselves to be professionally competent. There is a great need for continuous training, specific methodological tools and knowledge, as well as practical methods.

The research **clearly shows that more professionals are needed to develop high quality inclusive education.** This is partly related to large class sizes, difficulties in differentiation and teacher overload. Many more special needs teachers, special needs teaching assistants, development teachers or teaching assistants would be needed to provide the right support and assistance to pupils.

Integrated education and inclusive school practice shows significant differences in terms of special pedagogic support. While in integrated education, special pedagogic support is primarily aimed at children with special educational needs, while in inclusive education, the primary target of special help is the mainstream teacher. In Hungary, support is unfortunately concentrated on children with special educational needs, and the teachers find it difficult to accept the support of the special education teacher. Individual development often takes place in place of lessons, or worse, after lessons, when the integrated child could spend his free time with his peers. In addition to the many advantages of individual lessons (concentrated attention, efficiency), it must be taken into account that for the child, the extra help involves the risk of stigmatization, and during the development, the child is left out of classroom situations, even from the material taught during this time.

Despite the fact that integration is widespread in our country, there is a challenge **to improve more effective ways of helping children with special educational needs.** The care system has not yet been developed enough at the level of secondary education, there is a lack of special teachers in many places, there is little cooperation between the mainstream teacher and the special education teacher, and there is a lack of good practices aimed at involving parents.

According to the results of the survey, **high student numbers and large class sizes are seen by respondents as one of the biggest barriers and challenges to the implementation of integrated and inclusive work-based learning.** According to the respondents, this is a cardinal problem because with the current class sizes it is very difficult to differentiate between students and to address the individual needs of each student.

The results of the research show that **it takes a long time to develop a framework for differentiation, that new things can be very slow to become embedded in the system and that it takes (can take) a lot of energy to maintain it in everyday life.** Many stress that it is very important for teachers to move together, to work together and to move in the same direction, because then changes can be made effectively.

Lack of accessibility and lack of appropriate physical environment and equipment are also identified by research participants as barriers to inclusion. Unfortunately, although many institutions have reasonably accessible buildings and equipment to accommodate students with different disabilities, lack of accessibility can still be a challenge in many institutions. According to respondents, physical accessibility is still a problem in many institutions, but the lack of equipment (e.g. digital facilities,

developmental toys for different age groups, speech and language therapy mirrors, etc.) can be an even greater difficulty.

During the research, many highlighted the need to find ways to properly facilitate and **support talent identification and to allow students with handicap to show what they are good at in some form**, such as workshops or small groups. This could support the management of individuality and the acceptance of students with disabilities throughout the institution, both by teachers and students.

The research findings suggest that **more central support is needed to strengthen inclusive institutions**. There is a need for **more state-funded training** on the subject and for **places and/or platforms where Hungarian teachers can go for help or support** in case of stagnation or problems. Existing information channels are often not well known and widespread and parents often look to teachers for help and information on the different types of support and how to access them. There is also a need for **additional central support to help organize work at institutional level**. **In this challenging period, educational institutions should be given every support.**

Although **the institutions included in the study do not cover the system of mainstream educational institutions in Hungary**, and in addition to the experiences and challenges gathered here, there are certainly many challenges faced by institutions and staff at individual or institutional level. **Nevertheless, we believe that we are on the right track to change towards a more inclusive education in Hungary**

To know more

Key information on inclusive education available at national level can be found at:

- <https://www.efiportal.hu/egeszsegugy/fogyatekossagi-tipusok/>
- <https://www.meosz.hu/mozgaskorlatozott-vagyok/fogyatekossagi-tamogatas/>
- <https://ofi.oh.gov.hu/tudastar/oece-tanulmanyok/inkluziv-oktatas>
- <https://www.oktatas2030.hu/utmutatok-modszertani-segedletek/>

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Human Resources Development Operational Programme

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/in-your-country/programmes/2014-2020/hu/2014hu05m2op001_en

Az Európai Unió számára készített köznevelési Stratégia 2021-2030

<https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/download/d/2e/d1000/K%C3%B6znevel%C3%A9si%20strat%C3%A9gia.pdf>

Annex I. – Hungarian educational institutions

Educational institutions:

- kindergarten (in Hungarian: óvoda), typical age range 3-6/ ISCED02
- primary school (általános iskola), grades 1-4 (alsó tagozat), typical age range 6-10/ISCED1
- primary school (általános iskola), grades 5-8 (felső tagozat), typical age range 11-14/ISCED2
- general secondary school (grammar school, gimnázium), mostly grades 5-12 (8-osztályos), typical age range, 11-18(19)/ ISCED2-3
- general secondary school (grammar school, gimnázium), mostly grades 7-12 (6-osztályos), typical age range, 13-18(19)/ ISCED2-3
- general secondary school (grammar school, gimnázium), mostly grades 9-12 (4-osztályos), typical age range, 15-18(19)/ ISCED3
- vocational secondary school (szakgimnázium), typical age range 15-18(19)/ISCED3
- vocational school (szakképző Iskola and technikum), typical age range 15-18(20)/ISCED3
- vocational school for pupils with SEN (szakiskola), typical age range 15-18/ISCED3
- special skills development school (kétségfejlesztő iskola), typical age range 15-18/ISCED3
- primary art school (alapfokú művészeti iskola) /ISCED 1-2
- supplementary language school of those belonging to a nationality (kiegészítő nemzetiségi nyelvoktató iskola)
- Combinations of the above-mentioned institutions also exist.