



To Inclusive Education and BEYOND

EASPD Conference Report





To Inclusive Education and BEYOND

5th-7th May 2021

Online Conference Report



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

To Inclusive Education and BEYOND (BEYOND)
Grant Agreement No. 2018-1-BE02-KA201-046900



When everyone is included, everyone wins.

- **Jesse Jackson**



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

To Inclusive Education and BEYOND (BEYOND)
Grant Agreement No. 2018-1-BE02-KA201-046900

Acknowledgements

EASPD would like to firstly, express its gratitude towards our partners- CECD Mintra and the BEYOND project partners.

Secondly, we wish to thank all the speakers and panellists for their enthusiasm and passion for inclusive education and for their time speaking at the BEYOND conference. Lastly, we would like to thank all participants who took out time and attended this conference across all three days.

Authors:

Tavishi Rekhi, Communication and Operations Assistant, EASPD

Rachel Vaughan, Head of Operations, EASPD

Copyright © EASPD 2021 All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system without the prior permission of the copyright owners.



This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation “EaSI” (2014-2020). The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



The Partners



The European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (**EASPD**) is a non-profit European umbrella organization, established in 1996 and currently representing over 20,000 social and health services for persons with disabilities. EASPD advocates effective and high-quality disability-related services in the field of education, employment and individualised support, in line with the UN CRPD principles, which could bring benefits not only to persons with disabilities, but to society as a whole. (<https://www.easpd.eu/>)



CECD Mira Sintra is a Portuguese-based Cooperative for Social Solidarity which seeks to respond annually to 2,200 children, young people and adults, who need specialized support in the areas of education, training, employment, occupational activities, health, homes and home support.



'To Inclusive Education and BEYOND' (**BEYOND**) is an Erasmus+ funded project, which aims to empower special schools and service providers supporting children with special needs, to facilitate the transition towards fully inclusive education systems.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

To Inclusive Education and BEYOND (BEYOND)
Grant Agreement No. 2018-1-BE02-KA201-046900

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
The Partners	4
Introduction	6
Overview - panel sessions	6
Panel 1: Where are we now? State of play of inclusive education in Europe	6
Panel 2: Working in partnership to move towards inclusive education	7
Panel 3A: Lifelong learning and VET for persons with disabilities	7
Panel 3B focused on the development of the social service workforce through education and training	8
Panel 4: Developing EU policies for inclusive education	8
Key points of discussion	9
Level of education	9
Employment	10
Extra-curricular activities	10
Technology	11
Staff training	11
Quality of Life Index for Inclusion	12
Conclusion	13
Contact	14



Introduction

The 'To Inclusive Education and BEYOND' conference on transitioning towards a more inclusive education systems in Europe was a three-day online event. It was held in partnership between the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), CECD Mira Cintra and the 'To Inclusive Education and BEYOND' project between 5th May - 7th May 2021. 337 attendees participated (including the speakers) during the three-day conference.

Spread across the three days were a total of 5 panels and 11 workshops with speakers from around the globe discussing a range of topics pertaining to the challenges and opportunities faced by children with disabilities in mainstream schools. The conference aimed to:

- Bring together all stakeholders, including service providers, learners with disabilities, teachers, parents and local authorities to discuss the way forward for inclusive education as their participation is important to enable all learners to reach their full potential.
- Discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education of learners with disabilities.
- Discuss innovative tools and practices for the training of social care and support staff to achieve inclusive education.
- Together build on [EASPD's 2015 Salzburg Declaration](#) to develop key recommendations for the achievement of inclusive education.

The guiding principle of this conference was that inclusive education must be a foundational aspect of education at all levels. By realising this, we can help children with disabilities achieve their dreams and goals.

Overview - panel sessions

Panel 1: Where are we now? State of play of inclusive education in Europe

Day 1 of the online conference opened with EASPD President, **Jim Crowe**, welcoming all attendees and panellists. Along with **Miguel Valles**, President of the Board CECD Mira Sintra and **João Costa**, Portuguese Secretary State for Education.

Prior to kicking off the [first panel session](#), **Tony Booth**, co-author of the Index for Inclusion, gave a moving keynote speech on the importance of inclusion. He drew attention to the importance of inclusive education in creating more sustainable communities, arguing that schools must reflect our wider societies and address the current challenges that our communities face.

Speakers for Panel 1: **Aija Rinkinen**, World Bank; **Stefan Iszkowski**, European Commission; **Carmen Dorrance**, Hochschule Fulda; **Denisa Denglerová**, Masaryk University; **Andreia Filipa Baleca**, Humanitas.

This panel discussion addressed the state of play of inclusive education in various countries across Europe. The panel highlighted challenges to the full inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools and discussed how the pandemic has further exposed social inequality in Europe.



In countries like Portugal, special schools have been closed for a transition towards an inclusive education environment. Although, the inclusion of children into mainstream schools was seen as inadequate.

Other countries like Germany still have special schools running in the southern region of the nation, even though most special schools are closed in the rest of the country, as a step towards inclusion.

A common point of complexity regarding inclusion is the fact that every EU member state has its own education plan. This has made it challenging for the EU to smoothly play its role of ensuring the principle of inclusion persists in mainstream schools across all member states. Therefore, the question arises as to what can be done to better the situation?

This panel set the scene for the following discussions conducted during the online conference.

Panel 2: Working in partnership to move towards inclusive education

Day 2 started with an [energizer by Christopher Kreinbacher-Bekerle](#), University of Graz alongside some athletes from Special Olympics Austria. Following this, there was a panel on how to work in partnership to achieve inclusive education.

Speakers of Panel 2: **Miguel Valles**, President of Board of CECD Mira Sintra; **Yousra Sandabad**, Centre de la Gabrielle; **Filipa Pereira**, Special Education Teacher; **Andreia Caeiro**, Service Provider from the Resource Centre for Inclusion (RCI).

This [panel discussion](#) encapsulated the importance of stakeholders involved in designing and delivering inclusive education. Co-production was central to the discussions, shedding light on the importance of responsibilities of every stakeholder which includes parents of children with disabilities, NGOs and support services along with educational organisations.

While discussing stakeholders, the role of teachers was brought to focus. Wherein it is crucial for them to identify various barriers in the classroom while teaching and engaging with children with Special education Needs (SEN). It was agreed upon that this identification of barriers and finding a solution to overcome them can be challenging for a school that was never really built to tackle issues regarding special educational needs. On a positive note, the speakers concluded that children without disabilities did not pose a barrier towards creating an inclusive educational environment. In fact, they are seen as helpful and able to quickly adapt to the requirements of children with SEN.

Panel 3A: Lifelong learning and VET for persons with disabilities

Day-3 commenced a [morning energizer by Jesús Placencia](#). All participants gathered a sheet of paper and pen to do an interesting sketching exercise to kick start the day well.

Three panel sessions took place on the last day. [Panel 3A](#) focused on Lifelong learning and VET for persons with disabilities.

Speakers for Panel 3A: **Michael Longhino**, Chance B; **Anja Edelsbrunner**, Chance B; **Catriel**, Lino Spiteri



Foundation; **Jelena Opačak**, URIHO; **Esmeralda Micallef Zarafa**, Lino Spiteri Foundation.

The speakers agreed upon learning being a lifelong experience, which is why making it inclusive is necessary. The discussions emphasized learning soft skills and giving it equal weightage as hard skills. Furthermore, when it comes to employment of persons with disabilities, Malta turned out to be a promising example.

A variety of measures exist which include fiscal incentive schemes for companies which offer partial financial reimbursements; work exposure schemes funded through EU and local projects; job coaching support on the place of work when persons with a disability are employed; as well as legislation that compels companies of a certain size to employ persons with a disability.

The key takeaway of this panel was that without inclusive learning, inclusive employment is a distant dream, as quality of education is important for future work opportunities. Therefore, it is seen as a domino effect, which is why inclusion in mainstream schools is important for the future of children with disabilities.

Exploring this link, the panellists also agreed that an effort has to be made to think beyond placements in companies. There should be emphasis on vocational training and higher education as well.

Panel 3B focused on the development of the social service workforce through education and training

Speakers for [Panel 3B](#): **James Churchill**, Social Care Training; **Sylvain Renouvel**, Social Employers; **Marcela Hajtmánková**, TENENET; **Anastasia Poulidou**, CEDEFOP; **Jakob Embacher**, EPSU.

The discussions focused on training teachers to ensure inclusive education can become a reality in mainstream schools. This included:

- Teachers being well equipped with core skills and sub-skills. This training should be available across all age groups.
- Often, training has had a top-down approach, but to achieve a more holistic result, it was discussed that a bottom-up approach should be adopted. One where the abilities of the teacher is assessed according to which the most appropriate training must be provided.
- With the coming of the pandemic and increased usage of digital tools, the status of Massive open online courses and their quality was also brought to focus.

It was discussed that short MOOCs are useful for training teachers and their real value should be recognised by educational institutions. Some suggestions to achieve this included creating MOOCs that can fit the national qualification framework for a training course. Therefore, this panel concluded with agreement on the increasing recognition of micro-credentials in training teachers.

Panel 4: Developing EU policies for inclusive education

Speakers for [Panel 4](#): **Luk Zelderloo**, Secretary General, EASPD; **Lieven Boeve**, Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen; **Dora Husz**, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture; **Amanda Watkins**,

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education; **Albert Prévós**, European Disability Forum

This panel closed the 3-day online conference. It covered an array of topics, with a focus on the role of the EU in supporting and complementing activities for inclusive education by member states. There was an emphasis on how the EU can do more even in the field of adult education by playing a bigger role in developing learning across all its member states.

Furthermore, the discussion reflected on how segregation of children with SEN is not the way forward and should be avoided at all costs. To make schools inclusive, the panellists agreed on the importance of bringing 'systemic change'. Since there already exists a number of individual rights for persons with disabilities, it is necessary to have rights and laws that empower the system that is currently in place.

To bring systemic change, a crucial step is allocating funds. It is a pre-requisite to ensure educational institutes are well-equipped to provide inclusive education in mainstream schools. This also comes with the realisation of early childhood intervention and ensuring that all children with support needs are in an inclusive environment from childhood.

Key points of discussion

Evidently, as gathered from the panel discussions, for inclusive education to become a possibility, there are a range of parameters that require attention. 5 overarching themes were recorded under which various workshops were organised. These include the following:

- Level of Education;
- Transition to Employment;
- Extra-Curricular Activities;
- Technology;
- Staff Training;
- Quality of Life Index for Inclusion

Level of education

For mainstream schools to transition towards becoming inclusive, it is imperative to ensure that inclusion is met at every level of education. This starts from the very beginning, with early childhood intervention for persons with disabilities.

In this regard, one of the workshops: [Working with Early Intervention Services to Build Inclusive Education](#) (**Speakers: Vivien Gyuris and Ezer Harsányi from Nesting Play**) touched upon how teachers must be provided support to better help children that are in transit from kindergarten to school.

Along with this lies the problem of parent's fearing stigma surrounding children with disabilities. To overcome this, it is important to:

- Improve data collection on availability of services and support to families and children;
- Create awareness campaigns to support families in the process of recognition of the needs of the child;

- Create policies and reforms about early childhood intervention in the framework of the prevention of institutionalisation;

Moving on to higher education, it is often competitive and tougher to ensure inclusion here. Universities in Austria, Germany, Iceland, Ireland and Switzerland were discussed where measures for inclusivity are present. The [Inclusion on the Move](#) workshop (**Speakers: Michael Shevlin, Trinity College Dublin; Wolfgang Plaute, PH Salzburg**) had discussions where speakers agreed that there was a need to highlight better: the already existing policies and laws regarding inclusive higher education in Europe.

Within these policies, there seems to be more importance given to physical disabilities rather than intellectual. This gap that exists in higher education needs to be bridged with better equipped policies. Furthermore, an all-inclusive culture is yet to be installed in universities spanning across Europe with a needs-based and personalised support system at its core.

Employment

For inclusion to be a success there has to be a ripple effect. If we have inclusion at kindergarten level and higher education, better opportunities in the workplace can exist for persons with disabilities. The [From Inclusive Education to Inclusive Employment Opportunities](#) (**Speakers: Koen Deweer, Konekt; Katrien De Baets, Konekt; Hickmah Tagaully, LADAPT**) focused on inclusive education leading to inclusive work opportunities. A conclusion from this workshop was the absolute importance of achieving systemic change in schools and universities so that students can explore their talents. This can be achieved by creating inclusive learning environments based on the 2015 Salzburg Declaration.

Extra-curricular activities

Education does not begin and end in the classroom. The workshops that come under extra-curricular activities include sports and arts and culture. They are seen as important contributors to a holistic educational experience.

The [Inclusion through sports](#) workshop (**Speaker: Christoph Kreinbacher-Bekerle, University of Graz**) shed light on making physical education inclusive and adaptive to the needs of persons with disabilities. The speaker put into perspective the importance of including persons with disabilities in competitive sports. Largely, mainstream schools do not provide enough opportunities for persons with support needs to take part in sporting events because of lack of infrastructure and funding. This workshop also had a discussion on how funding needs to be pumped into this sector.

Additionally, it is important to adapt sporting activities according to the needs of persons with disabilities which will help everyone participate equally. A conclusion from this workshop was ensuring sports are inclusive as they are seen as an integral part of helping persons with support needs grow, which is why sports should be seen as a part of inclusive education and not a separate entity.

Shifting to arts and culture, [The Role of Arts and Culture in Inclusive Education](#) (**Speakers: Ger Canning, Cork Education and Training Board; Hugh McCarthy, Munster Technological University**). The speakers discussed with the participants a new initiative by Cork University and Munster Technological University in



achieving inclusive music education for adult learners with disabilities. This initiative is in line with articles 24 and 30 of the UNCRPD.

The speakers shed light on the importance of accessible artistic educational opportunities. A big challenge that has to be overcome is the stigma around arts and culture when it comes to its potential and it often being undervalued. Therefore, belief systems have to be challenged and organizations have to work together to achieve inclusion in this sector.

Technology

Technology has left no sphere of life untouched. Innovation has been on the rise, with technology impacting all our lives. The workshop on [The Use of Technology in Inclusive Education and Training](#) (Speakers: **Noa Nitzan, Beit Issie Shapiro; Klaus Höckner, Hilfsgemeinschaft**) explained the various ways in which technology can promote participation in the educational setting for students with disabilities.

The speakers emphasized on the potential that technology has when it comes to 'active participation' of children with SEN. Looking at the bigger picture, the national accessibility laws should provide for funding to cover cost of technology needed for communication and education (like tablet, ACC, computer etc) that follows the students. Lastly, an important point was training teachers in utilising UDL and adapting it according to the technology that is there at present.

In a similar vein, the [#RightToConnectNow: tackling the digital divide through accessibility training](#) (Speakers: **Susanna Lauri, Funka; Ilaria Valoti, AIAS Bologna**) workshop encapsulated the opportunities that exist within the ambit of technology for persons with disabilities. The workshop was a bit different in format as it had opinion polls presented in the zoom session which concluded that although there is a general understanding regarding accessibility requirements, there still exists a requirement to increase accessibility of digital tools and the training of staff in using these digital tools optimally.

Staff training

To make inclusive education a reality, a big role is played by the staff and they require good training with the adequate tools in place. The [Staff training for the achievement of Inclusive Educational Settings](#) (Speakers: **Caroline Breyer, University of Graz; Barbara Gasteiger-Klicpera, University of Graz; João Canossa Dias, ARCIL**) workshop explained in detail about the various ways in which staff training can take place and how to better the approach.

Firstly, supporting training of staff and users in digital tools and solutions is essential to ensure education methods can be moulded into the needs of the learner.

Secondly, there is a mention of how technological solutions are not enough, it has to be accompanied by flexible and creative thinking for adapting education to requirements of



persons with SEN. This also implies that inclusive education should not only be prioritised for special education teachers, rather for all teachers.

Lastly, strong national legal frameworks, curricula and policies are needed to support inclusive education with policies on inclusive education put the person with SEN at the centre.

The [*Raising awareness of disability issues amongst childcare and education professionals*](#) (**Speakers: Mónika Tóth; Iringó Vargancsik; Tímea Markovics**) focused on the how to increase awareness about disability issues amongst education and childcare professionals to promote greater inclusion in schools. The work of the KEP project was discussed in this workshop. Among a few conclusions, it was agreed upon by the speakers that it is important to foster teachers and educators on building open and inclusive schools and nurseries alongside a requirement of broad social acceptance of persons with disabilities.

Lastly, there was also a recognition of including parents in the process of creating inclusive educational environments.

Quality of Life Index for Inclusion

Looking into the future it is important to understand the quality of life of persons with disabilities. The workshop, [*A Quality of Life Index for Inclusive education*](#) (**Speakers: Prof. Dr. Antonio M Amor and Prof. Dr. Miguel Verdugo, University of Salamanca**) focused on the QOLI.

Quality of life index for inclusion (QoLI) model was created by Schalock and Verdugo to measure the level of inclusion in schools QoL is a state of personal wellbeing considering 8 domains in the student's life: emotional wellbeing, physical wellbeing, material wellbeing, personal development, self-determination, social inclusion, interpersonal relations and rights.

The workshop discussed yielded some conclusions on how schools must move forward in being inclusive on the basis of the QoLI model. Schools should be offered the means to promote inclusive education of students with intellectual development disabilities.

The 'Quality of Life Index-Inclusive Education' is a standardized, evidence-based valid instrument that schools can use to monitor their cultures, policies and practices as well as the students' personal outcomes. Schools and high schools can use this tool to enhance decision-making so that students with IDD can achieve relevant outcomes in eight core life domains linked to the goals of access, participation, learning and development.

Lastly, more research is needed to further enhance inclusivity instruments. Next steps should focus on other educational stages, placing special emphasis on elements such as self-determination in the secondary education stage. This will help provide students with IDD with the best guarantees of transition to adulthood and employment to enable them to join and participate at an equal footing with others in democratic, 21st century societies.

Conclusion

Inclusive education no longer needs to be a distant dream in Europe. The BEYOND conference brought together various stakeholders and continued a dialogue on how we can realise inclusive education, which is absolutely key for change to happen.

The fruitful discussions spread across all the panels and workshops touched upon crucial parameters which can be used to promote higher levels of inclusion for learners with disabilities in Europe. The impact of COVID-19 and the increasing digitalisation of our societies pose new challenges and opportunities for the realisation of inclusive education.

The conference highlighted a number of key messages including:

- Systemic change is required at all levels, to ensure that learners with disabilities are able to full enjoy their rights to a high-quality education throughout their lives.
- High quality and up-to date training is crucial for education professionals and teachers, to ensure that they have the adequate tools and knowledge to support the learning needs of all leaners.
- New technological advancements can provide new opportunities to support the inclusion of learners in mainstream classrooms.
- The inclusion of learners with disabilities in art, cultural and sporting activities should be as important as their inclusion in traditional academic subject, with these activities being crucial to full inclusion and participation in society.
- Despite Education being a competence of EU Member States, the EU can play an important role in the realisation of inclusive education systems.
- Following the contributions of conference participants EASPD will build on the recommendations of its 2015 Salzburg Declaration, to develop new recommendations for policy makers and local stakeholders in the field of education. These recommendations are due to be released in October 2021.



Contact

In case of inquiries regarding the BEYOND conference, please contact:

Rachel Vaughan
Head of Operations
rachel.vaughan@easpd.eu
+32 2 233 7720



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

To Inclusive Education and BEYOND (BEYOND)
Grant Agreement No. 2018-1-BE02-KA201-046900