

AGENCY POSITION ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Background Information Paper

2024 Update

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
Changes to the legislative and policy context	4
Responding to the challenge	5
DEVELOPING A COHERENT LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS	7
The right to education	7
Debates around inclusive education	9
A broader definition of inclusive education	11
KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR A SINGLE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK	13
OPERATIONAL ELEMENTS	18
Enabling collaboration and effective communication at all levels	18
Increasing participation in quality inclusive early childhood education	19
Supporting all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life	20
Facilitating co-operation between schools, parents and members of the community	21
Improving data/information collection systems	21
Developing specialist provision to support all learners	23
Supporting school leaders who work with others to create an inclusive and equitable school ethos	23
Providing guidance to develop learning and teaching environments	24
LOOKING TO THE FUTURE – KEY MESSAGES	26
<i>Cross-sector collaboration at all system levels</i>	26
<i>A clear and widely agreed definition of inclusive education</i>	27
<i>Monitoring, quality assurance and accountability</i>	27
<i>Use of digital technologies</i>	28
<i>Listening to learners</i>	29
Moving forward	29
REFERENCES	31



INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) published its [Position on Inclusive Education Systems](#) (European Agency, 2015). This expressed an ultimate vision for inclusive education systems: **to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers.**

All Agency member countries agreed that this vision could serve as an aspiration to support their policy development work and as a focal point to ensure alignment with European and international commitments. To meet this aim, the position paper set out the essential features of inclusive education systems that would guide the development and direction of Agency activities in the medium to long term.

Since 2015, the position has, therefore, been central to Agency work. It has contributed to the development of thinking about ways to support member countries in their efforts to develop more inclusive education systems.

The Agency's [Key Principles – Supporting policy development and implementation for inclusive education](#) (2021a) particularly informed such work. The document describes the essential features of inclusive education systems that must be in place to enact the vision stated in the second edition of the position paper (European Agency, 2022a). The Key Principles are a culmination of the development work with Agency member countries since 2003, that recognise and adjust the essential elements of inclusive education systems to changing trends (Murdoch, Bilgeri & Watkins, 2023).

[Celebrating 25 years on the path to inclusive education](#) (European Agency, 2022b) describes how the Agency has responded to changes in key concepts and thinking around inclusive education. Over the years, the Agency has extended its focus from knowledge building and sharing to consultancy and advice, becoming a more active agent for policy change. It works with international and European-level organisations to analyse national legislation and policy and examine issues around implementation and impact evaluation.

A central element of the Agency's work is ensuring alignment with the main aim of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 7). The Agency Key Principles (2021a) link with several targets in relation to education, and to wider areas, such as gender equality (SDG 5) and health and well-being (SDG 3). SDG target 4.7, which recognises education's role as 'the foundation for peace, tolerance, human rights and sustainable development', is increasingly relevant (UNESCO, 2023a, p. 14).

In 2024, the vision for inclusive education systems remains constant. However, the context for this work at international and European level has changed, with implications for the organisation and implementation of Agency activities. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the fragility of education systems worldwide and the urgency of strengthening their resilience and relevance to better deliver SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2023b). This will require the transformation of education policies and plans, management and governance systems, monitoring and evaluation activities and curriculum development.



To reflect recent events and ensure the continued relevance of Agency activities, this 2024 update of the Agency position paper's background information paper builds on the 2022 version (European Agency, 2022c), incorporating key background evidence and literature published from 2021 onwards. It provides recent information on the legislative and policy context for the position and concludes with key messages for countries in their on-going development work.

This update will be central in informing the future direction and focus for the Agency and its work with member countries. It will support all stakeholders to consider equity, inclusive education and success in education and training as a whole as:

... intersecting and interdependent points that can help determine the ability of education and training systems to provide truly socially inclusive and cohesive, fair and successful high-quality education and training for all (Council of the European Union, 2021a, p. 4).

Changes to the legislative and policy context

The OECD notes that 'education policy does not happen in a vacuum', but 'is influenced by economic, political, social and technological trends' (2023a, p. 7). Therefore, the Agency must consider its individual member countries' contexts and histories, and take into account the overall context in which current challenges need to be addressed.

The OECD also states that major global developments, such as 'demographic shifts, migration and refugee crises, rising inequalities, and climate change, have contributed to the increasing diversity found in our countries, communities and classrooms' (ibid., p. 7). This diversity may present in terms of learners' abilities and religious, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, and many learners will have complex needs resulting from their experience of trauma.

UNESCO and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees point out that the 'world is experiencing the most acute forced displacement crises' ever recorded (2023, p. 7). Around 40% of the forcibly displaced people at the end of 2022 were children (ibid.).

European Union (EU) Member States have integrated high numbers of third-country migrants (including refugees) of school age into their education and training systems. In particular:

... challenges arise in the context of people fleeing the war in Ukraine, a large proportion of whom are children of school age requiring targeted learning support (including acquisition of the language of schooling) and psycho-social support (Council of the European Union, 2022a, p. 2).

The COVID-19 pandemic 'may have increased the likelihood that learners at risk of disconnecting from school' will drop out (ibid., p. 3). It has highlighted 'the need to address longstanding structural challenges', particularly the 'well-being and mental health of children, learners and educators' (Council of the European Union, 2021a, p. 5).



The challenges identified before the pandemic include:

- the continued presence of systems of special provision in many countries;
- an absence of data on learners excluded from education;
- poor targeting of finance and resources;
- unco-ordinated government responses, resulting in inconsistent laws and policies (UNESCO, 2020a).

The ‘context of disruption’ created by recent events (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2023, p. 14) has heightened these challenges. Indeed, countries are now likely to fall short of the SDG 4 ambitions, even if they ‘reach their benchmark values by 2030’ (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021, p. 12).

These contextual changes increase the need for everyone to take responsibility for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, building resilience through more inclusive education systems. The paper [Reimagining our futures together](#) examines the future role of education (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). It stresses the need for education to be a ‘shared social commitment’ – one of the key human rights – strengthening everyone’s capacity to care and co-operate across all levels of society (ibid., p. 47).

The United Nations (UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) stresses that horizontal and vertical integration are more necessary than ever for COVID-19 recovery. There is a need for greater clarity around the principles underpinning a more holistic approach to investing in quality in education. Such integration is needed for effective educational responses to all unforeseen global events.

Responding to the challenge

To address the challenges outlined above, there must be a focus on policies relating to governance, quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation, teacher professional learning, and curriculum (UNESCO, 2020a), recognising that schools cannot work alone.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted deep inequalities and exposed the inadequacy of many of the traditional structures and processes within education systems. Watkins, Donnelly and Meijer point out:

... many of these are the very same structures and processes that need to be transformed to make education systems more inclusive and ensure that all learners, in particular those from disadvantaged groups are included (2023, p. 43).

The growing diversity and the complexity of learners’ needs will require greater flexibility within the education system. In particular, funding and resource allocation must enable schools and communities to increase their capacity to support all learners together, moving away from formal diagnoses or labels to address learners’ multiple and overlapping challenges.



Within Agency member countries, the categorical approach – underpinned by a medical model focused on learner deficits and requiring compensatory measures – is still prevalent in the wording of policy and legislation. ‘Many countries continue to use categorical descriptions of disability’ and forms of classification to determine eligibility for services and to gather data for monitoring/evaluation (European Agency, 2022b, p. 58).

Addressing this inconsistency and moving to a rights-based approach will require less reliance on single institutions and/or schools and a changed role for education professionals. These professionals will need support to respond to diversity with personalised pedagogies, use of digital technologies and varied learning pathways.

Consistent policy measures and co-ordination with ‘other relevant policy areas (such as youth, health, culture, social services, employment, housing, justice, migration and integration)’ will be needed (Council of the European Union, 2022a, p. 5). So, too, will effective co-operation ‘between different actors at all levels’, to engage all stakeholders, including learners, parents and members of both ‘local and wider communities’ (ibid.).

In particular, the voices of learners should be valued in all development processes to ensure learner-centred provision for everyone in local schools and institutions. Efforts must be made to listen to previously unheard voices, beyond the non-active involvement and partial participation that is currently in place (Mangiaracina, Kefallinou, Kyriazopoulou & Watkins, 2021).

In short, one system is needed for all learners, with policy-makers and stakeholders sharing responsibility for each individual’s success.

In this way, the diversity of educational systems, cultures and traditions of European countries can be further aligned to benefit all, through a unified commitment to more inclusive education systems and to meeting the goals and targets of SDG 4 in full (Murdoch et al., 2023, p. 56).



DEVELOPING A COHERENT LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Agency work focuses on supporting its member countries to adopt a rights-based approach to their legal and policy frameworks to safeguard the right to inclusive education for all learners and ensure that no-one is left behind (UNESCO, 2021). This updated background information paper reflects this approach and highlights essential information that puts the *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems* into the wider context of international and European developments. It particularly aligns with the overarching principle that **there must be a clear concept of equitable, high-quality education to inform a single legislative and policy framework for all learners** (European Agency, 2021a).

Within countries, legal frameworks that enshrine both equality and anti-discrimination offer much stronger legal protection and a more supportive policy environment (European Agency, 2022a). The Council of the European Union stresses the need to maintain education institutions as ‘safe environments, free from violence, racism, bullying, cyberbullying, sexual harassment, sexism, harmful speech, disinformation, misinformation and all forms of discrimination’ (2021a, p. 8).

Recent resolutions and recommendations from the Council of the European Union (2022a; 2023) stress the importance of guaranteeing a quality and inclusive education for all – a principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2018a). These promote a focus on improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all to enable the ‘personal, social, civic and professional development of all European citizens’ (Council of the European Union, 2023, p. 36). Furthermore, the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022) recognises that the benefits of education and training go well beyond individuals and affect the whole of society.

In summary, the legal and policy framework should fulfil the right of all learners to inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning, and ‘ensure that economic, social, cultural, or personal circumstances do not become sources of discrimination’ (Murdoch et al., 2023, p. 49).

The right to education

‘Human rights instruments have, over the years, established a solid international normative framework providing for the right to education’ (UNESCO, 2021, p. 8). This right was first recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). The Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960) followed; in addition to prohibiting any form of discrimination in education, this addressed equality of opportunity, access to free education and the rights of minority groups (UNESCO, 2021). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations, 1966) is also significant, as Articles 13 and 14 form part of the International Bill of Rights (UNESCO, 2021).



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), one of the most widely ratified treaties, affirms the right of the child to education and the State's duty to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory (United Nations, 1989). It also states that school discipline should be administered in a manner consistent with a child's human dignity and encourages States to ensure regular school attendance and to reduce drop-out rates.

General Comment No. 13 on the Right to Education states that this right 'imposes ... the obligations to respect, protect and fulfil' (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999, p. 10). These obligations must comply with the essential features set out by Tomaševski (2001), who states that education must be:

- **available** at all levels in sufficient quantity, with schools in all locations, including remote areas;
- **accessible**, with schools developed around the principles of equality and non-discrimination, eliminating administrative, economic and physical barriers that may exclude part of the population from education;
- **acceptable** to children and parents (i.e. relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality), with respect for parental freedom;
- **adaptable**, with support for teachers and schools to meet the unique needs of all individual learners and respond to society's changing needs, as well as local needs and contexts (UNESCO, 2021).

Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) notes that learners with disabilities are entitled to quality and inclusive education according to the principles of non-discrimination and equality (UN, 2006).

General Comment No. 4 on the UNCRPD clarifies inclusive education and states that 'the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the general education system should be prohibited' (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, p. 6). Section III, paragraph 40 clearly states that the UNCRPD is 'not compatible with sustaining' both mainstream and special or segregated education systems (ibid., p. 11). Parents should not be faced with having to express their preference for an education that ensures that their child's needs are met (which may imply placement in a special school or separate classroom) or ensuring that their child has the same rights and opportunities as other learners (through placement in a mainstream school).

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights notes that inclusion in education should be reinforced by 'the provision of reasonable accommodation' for learners with disabilities (2019, p. 12). 'Impairment-based assessment for the assignment of schools should be discontinued, and the support needs for effective participation in mainstream schools assessed' (ibid.).

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance General Policy Recommendation No. 7 (2018) highlights that segregation is explicitly considered a form of discrimination. Furthermore, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights states that 'laws and policies should explicitly comprise a "no-rejection clause", forbidding the denial of admission into mainstream schools and guaranteeing continuity in education' (2019, p. 12).



More recently, in the EU context, the Council of the European Union (2021b) recommends that Member States guarantee effective and free access to high-quality early childhood education and care, as well as education and school-based activities, nutrition, healthcare and housing. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee (ibid.) bring together all new and existing EU legislative policy and funding instruments on the rights of the child in a single framework.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also enshrines the right to education, with SDG 4 committing all countries to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (UNESCO, 2015, p. 15). UNESCO stresses that here: ‘Unlike legally binding treaties, States choose to be *morally* and *politically* bound to achieve SDG 4 within the time span of 15 years’ (2021, p. 21). UNESCO concludes that States need to establish ‘strong, rights-based, national legal and policy frameworks aligned with right to education principles and obligations’ to address ‘gaps resulting from incomplete national legal frameworks’ (ibid.).

While great efforts have been made at country level, these ‘are not sufficient; further concrete actions are needed to ensure domestic implementation and effective enforcement of this key human right’ (ibid., p. 8).

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the right to education of many learners. Social isolation, differences in support for home schooling, and a lack of connectivity and digital tools, among other factors, have increased existing inequalities (Vincent-Lancrin, Cobo Romani & Reimers, 2022; International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). Learners’ right to education has also been affected by other events, such as conflict and the climate emergency.

UNESCO notes that such events provide ‘an opportunity to rethink the resilience and preparedness of education systems’ and strengthen the ‘foundations of the right to education at national level’ (2021, p. 8).

This requires the necessary provisions to be integrated into national laws to ensure that all learners’ rights are fulfilled. In addition, monitoring data must go beyond presence in education to record learners out of any form of education (UNESCO, Network of Education Policy Centers & European Agency, 2021) and those who are not fully included and participating in mainstream provision (European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al., 2020).

The European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture recognises ‘opportunities for innovation’ arising from the disruption the pandemic has caused. It calls for a greater focus on skills and abilities such as ‘self-awareness, relationship building and forming resilience, enabling individuals to adjust and to overcome personal adversity, long-term life challenges and societal shocks’ (2021, p. 3).

Debates around inclusive education

Across European countries, the debate about developing education systems that are inclusive and equitable for all learners first moved from ‘integration’ (the mainstreaming of learners with special educational needs), to ‘inclusion’ (more focused on ‘learning opportunities’ for all learners), and then to the ‘more current and broader understanding



of inclusive education as an equitable and high-quality education for all learners’ (European Agency, 2022d, p. 13).

Despite extensive evidence on the benefits of inclusive education (e.g. Kefallinou, Symeonidou & Meijer, 2020), debates continue across Agency member countries. To inform these debates, this section re-visits the justification for inclusive education.

UNESCO summarises the justification for inclusive education as follows:

There is a **human rights** justification; education is the right of the individual learner, and not, in the case of children, the right of a parent or caregiver. ... Learning with peers in the community where ... [the learner lives] promotes a sense of self-worth and dignity, equal access to opportunities and other services in the community [...].

There is an **educational** justification; the requirement for inclusive schools to educate all children together means that they have to develop ways of teaching that respond to individual differences (UNESCO, 2019, p. 14).

‘Challenges presented by individual needs can motivate and inspire new modalities of teaching and learning’ (ibid.). These result in ‘potential positive outcomes for all learners when inclusive education is well-designed and successfully implemented’ (Kefallinou et al., 2020, p. 139).

There is a **social** justification; inclusive schools are able to change attitudes to difference by educating all children together, forming the basis for a just and non-discriminatory society. This leads to improved social integration, greater resilience and better preparedness for the world of work for learners with disabilities.

There is an **economic** justification; it is likely to be less costly to establish and maintain schools which educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of schools specialising in different groups of children. If access is only made possible in segregated special schools, there will always be large numbers of children with disabilities (especially in remote and poor regions) who do not have access to education (UNESCO, 2019, p. 14).

‘Furthermore, segregated schooling does not build inclusive communities’ or enable all learners to ‘contribute socially and economically through the job market’ (ibid.).

The International Commission on the Futures of Education sets out the need to ensure the right to quality education throughout life as the foundation for a new social contract. The contract will involve ‘strengthening education as a public endeavour and a common good’ (2021, p. 2). This should ensure public funding and include an emphasis on participation.

As Kefallinou et al. point out:

... not all stakeholders involved in education have a clear and common understanding of the values it represents, the benefits it can bring to all learners and teachers, the ways it can be implemented, and the systemic changes that need to take place (2020, p. 146).



To address this, further research is needed, linked to international literature and contexts, that can be communicated to policy-makers, teachers and wider stakeholders.

A broader definition of inclusive education

At the heart of any future development is a need for clarity about what inclusive education means. Recent work by the Agency notes that:

Inclusive education is often interpreted as being specifically aimed at learners with disability and/or special needs, instead of catering for **all learners**, with all of their diverse and individual needs, by identifying and removing barriers to learning (2022e, p. 6).

In developing a concept of inclusive education that fully reflects the right of **all** learners to high-quality inclusive education, reference should be made to the Convention against Discrimination in Education, supported by the UNCRC, the UNCRPD and the full range of human rights treaties. This will ensure full participation of all minority groups who may be vulnerable to exclusion. Developing multi-level approaches to diversity will also take account of intersectionality and the impact of concentrations of diversity (OECD, 2018).

The Council of the European Union stresses that ‘particular attention must be paid to the intersectionality of issues, i.e., learners facing additional or overlapping challenges’ (2021a, p. 6). It is necessary to ensure that ‘all groups and individuals have effective equal access to quality learning opportunities’ (ibid., p. 5) and recognise that ‘discrimination can stem from a combination of potentially intersecting aspects’ (Murdoch et al., 2023, p. 54).

The Agency’s ecosystem model (European Agency, 2017) supports this multi-dimensional and intersectional approach. The model considers the interactions between system levels, as well as processes essential to learner-centred education. It can help when considering discrimination, stereotyping and marginalisation that affect all learners who may be vulnerable to exclusion from inclusive education for different reasons. Nevertheless, recent Agency work notes that few member countries mention intersectionality in their legislation or policy (European Agency, 2022e).

At EU level, the European Commission Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 builds on the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025, the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy and the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The action plan aims to ‘take into account the combination of personal characteristics, such as gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation and disability’ (European Commission, 2020, p. 6).

The end goal of debates around inclusive education should be an inclusive education system with a model of teaching to diversity. It should recognise and value each learner’s unique identity (Mezzanotte, 2022) and support the integration of input from sectors other than education.

A recent Agency report discusses terminology and suggests that the term ‘**learners vulnerable to exclusion**’ ‘covers the widest range of different groups of learners and all the factors that may negatively affect their learning opportunities’ (2022d, p. 53). This



term ‘encapsulates the broad vision and rights-based approach of including all learners in inclusive education’ (ibid.).

In summary:

Inclusive education has developed from a single-layered concept, focused on ‘mainstreaming’ learners with disabilities or special needs into regular schools ... to a multi-layered concept. The latter is concerned with developing equitable quality education systems for all learners by removing barriers to their presence in mainstream schools, full participation in school and community, and achievement of valued goals (including those wider than academic learning) (European Agency, 2022b, p. 58).



KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR A SINGLE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

In developing a single legislative and policy framework, the key requirements outlined in this section must adhere to the belief that **inclusion and equity are not separate policies; they are principles that inform all national policies** – for example, those that deal with the curriculum and assessment, school quality assurance and evaluation, teacher education, and financing and resource allocation. They must also inform all stages of education and be consistent across sectors (UNESCO, 2020b).

Going beyond the essential prerequisite of an agreed definition of inclusive education, the OECD (2023b) notes the need for a shared mindset of evaluative thinking. This will require all agencies to work closely together, keeping in mind that ‘isolation is the enemy of improvement’ (Elmore, 2004 in McGrath, 2023, p. 12).

In an Informal Conference held in response to the COVID-19 crisis in October 2020, Ministers of Education recognised that the education offered today must reflect the kind of society countries wish to build tomorrow. The Conference reaffirmed that ‘democracy, human rights and the rule of law’ must be reflected in the pandemic response, which will:

... encompass all school subjects and academic disciplines, encourage interdisciplinary learning, teaching and research, as well as closer cooperation across educational stages and at points of transition, and make good and responsible use of the pedagogical and technological opportunities at our disposal (Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and Council of Europe, 2020, p. 3).

Ministers also called for the role of stakeholders, including staff, learners, parents and civil society, in developing education policy and practice to be ‘strengthened and given greater recognition’ at both national and local levels (ibid., p. 5).

The **development of flexible funding and resource allocation systems** is a particular challenge. As the Agency notes:

Flexible financing systems must ensure a school-development approach that builds learning communities through the development of innovative and flexible forms of teaching that combine performance and equity. The main message underpinning this issue is supporting school teams to take responsibility for meeting all learners’ needs (2018a, p. 11).

The European Commission suggests that, despite different country contexts, ‘there are similar governance and funding challenges’ across Europe (2017, p. 10). The Commission recognises that ‘making the best use of limited resources to enhance the performance of all’ learners is critical but that ‘at a comparable level of spending, some Member States achieve better results than others’ (ibid.). It suggests that ‘strengthening cooperation between education and economic policy areas can improve the evidence-base and generate consensus about “what works” in education investment’ (ibid.).



The European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture stresses that:

... ensuring an adequate level of investment and making the best use of all available public resources to enhance educational outcomes and foster equity is now of critical importance (2022, p. 18).

The Agency (2021b) notes that education spending has slowed since the COVID-19 pandemic began. This will inevitably affect developments in inclusive education while increasing the cost of achieving SDG 4 by 2030 (ibid.). It reinforces the need for more efficient, collaborative strategies to address priorities.

The Agency (2018a; 2018b) suggests that some schools use input funding mechanisms as a financial opportunity to overcome difficulties in meeting learners' needs, rather than seeking more creative solutions. In the context of financial constraints, some schools may engage in strategic behaviour directly linking the support learners may need with an official decision (European Agency, 2016).

Effective and equitable funding and resource allocation, combining decentralised and flexible education with clear principles and social justice requirements (ibid.), are needed to enable stakeholders to act inclusively.

To support funding of policy for and implementation of inclusive education, **an effective governance plan is needed, outlining clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders.** The OECD report on *Governing Education in a Complex World* suggests that effective governance can be identified by:

- focusing on 'processes, not structures';
- flexibility and adaptability to 'change and unexpected events';
- working through 'building capacity, stakeholder involvement and open dialogue';
- requiring a whole-of-system approach ('aligning roles, balancing tensions');
- harnessing 'evidence and research to inform policy and reform' (Burns & Köster, 2016, p. 230).

Berendt et al. (2017) note the need to take account of the growing complexity of governance in education as more actors and stakeholders become involved.

The Council of the European Union and Representatives of the Governments of the Member States assert:

Mainstreaming multilevel governance when promoting young people's participation in decision-making processes fosters inclusive and resilient societies, strengthens social, civic and territorial cohesion, and enhances links between European and local level policies ... At the same time, it empowers young people by creating opportunities for them to put into practice and improve the knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes they need to fully participate in diverse societies and to be prepared for future challenges (2021, p. 10).



In particular, the governance needs to take account of education technology, which has changed how children exercise and realise their rights (to both education and privacy) (UNESCO, 2023b). While technology can enhance learning, it can also affect safety and well-being and increase inequity by opening a digital divide. Here, clear frameworks, effective regulations, oversight and dispute resolution mechanisms will be required.

Monitoring, quality assurance and accountability is a key area of both funding and governance to support inclusive policy and practice. All ministries, local governments and non-government partners need to work closely together (and with schools and communities) to develop and implement an effective monitoring and evaluation framework to support continuous improvement (OECD, 2023b), keeping in mind that: ‘Disjointed services and communication protocols, inadequate coordination efforts, insufficient capacity and financing lead to poor implementation and weak accountability’ (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 109).

Golden (2020) notes that, while many countries have monitoring and evaluation units, they often operate as silos, where management and information systems work independently of policy analysis.

Monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation for inclusive education can provide the qualitative and quantitative data needed for accountability, ‘school quality enhancement’ and ‘system-level improvement’ (Maxwell & Staring, 2018, p. 5).

Maxwell and Staring also recognise the merits of embedding:

... primary responsibility for quality assurance and continuous improvement at the ‘front line’ [built on trust] rather than seeking to impose quality primarily through ‘top down’ mechanisms of prescription and regulation (ibid., p. 9).

New quality assurance approaches should therefore ‘start from the strengths of schools and school education systems and be developed’ from there (European Commission, 2018b, p. 33). There should be an emphasis on providing feedback on policy and practice that will inform improvement (OECD, 2023b) and impact on equity and inclusion (Cerna et al., 2021).

Efficient evaluation can inform a more holistic approach to policy, based on a ‘balanced understanding of learner development’ (Maxwell & Staring, 2018, p. 6) covering the full range of competences. Such evaluation can support the identification of policies, programmes and processes that best address the needs of learners (OECD, 2023b). In the context of limited resources, it can be crucial in ensuring value for money (Cerna et al., 2021).

To improve inclusion, the focus of monitoring should be broader than for equity. In addition to examining learners’ equal opportunities to reach their potential, monitoring should consider how learners feel at school, their well-being outcomes and socio-emotional development (Mezzanotte & Calvel, 2023). It should also explore the potential barriers to inclusion that learners may face (OECD, 2023b).

Clearly, the successful implementation of quality assurance measures has implications for the development of teachers and leaders. It could, at first, be included in initial teacher



education, which should **combine pedagogical theory with both subject knowledge and classroom practice**.

The Council of the European Union suggests that all statutory initial teacher education programmes should: ‘Embed inclusion, equity and diversity, understanding underachievement and disengagement, and addressing well-being, mental health and bullying’ (2022a, p. 12).

On-going professional learning must be ‘accessible, affordable and relevant’, ‘involving schools and teachers in identifying’ key areas to ‘help to improve its quality’ (European Commission, 2017, p. 8). ‘To improve pupils’ learning experience, teachers need to be able and willing to work and learn in teams’ – with others in school, ‘in multi-professional school teams and with external partners’ (ibid., p. 9).

The Council of the European Union suggests that countries should:

Explore ways to support educators in promoting learners’ critical thinking, media and digital literacy and working with data and information, including an informed approach to misinformation and disinformation (2022b, p. 25).

Rethinking the role of specialist teachers, Florian and Sretenov emphasise that an inclusive pedagogical approach is about ‘extending the scope of ordinary provision to include a greater diversity of children’ (2021, p. 38). It does not ignore individual differences between learners or ‘rule out the use of specialists or specialist knowledge’ (ibid.). Whereas the ‘additional needs approach’ focuses on learners who have been identified as needing additional support, ‘the inclusive pedagogical approach focuses on ... *relationships* in the community of the classroom’ (ibid.), requiring a more flexible approach.

This links to the final requirement: **a single curriculum and assessment framework that includes all learners**.

UNESCO International Bureau of Education believes that ‘the curriculum cannot be reduced to a summation of plans and programmes of study fragmented by levels, course offerings, and learning environments’ (2023, p. 72). Rather, the curriculum is:

... an educational, societal, political, and policy construct—necessarily contested, with a back-and-forth dynamic and agreements struck between a range of institutions and actors both within and outside of education systems (ibid.).

Inclusive curricula are flexible, involving interactive or group work to facilitate learning and enhance achievement (Flecha, 2015). It is important to recognise that: ‘Inclusive curricula do not lower standards or reduce knowledge’ (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 117).

The Council of the European Union notes the need to: ‘Develop curricula that are learner-centred and based on inclusive and relational pedagogies, and allow for diversified and personalised forms of teaching and learning’ (2022a, p. 11). Moreover:

Active involvement of children and young people in the creation of learning materials should be considered, as appropriate, in particular as regards



resources for bullying prevention, social and emotional education, conflict resolution and overcoming prejudice (ibid.).

A further identified need is to ‘strengthen competence in the language(s) of schooling’, particularly for ‘refugees and newly arrived migrants’ (ibid.).

To add coherence to the curriculum, cross-curricular approaches can ‘strengthen the connections between the different subjects in the curriculum’ (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2023, p. 33). This enriches learning and establishes ‘a firm link between what is being taught at school versus its evolving societal relevance’ (ibid.).

To ensure flexibility to meet all learners’ requirements, accommodations or adaptations will be needed. These must maintain curriculum standards and expected outcomes, but focus on processes to enable participation and improve access to learning materials. These could include, for example, modified materials, but should increasingly focus on the use of technology, such as the ethical use of artificial intelligence.

This does, however, require learners to develop resilience and an ‘awareness of potential threats in the digital world’ (Council of the European Union, 2022b, p. 25). This will help ‘to reduce the risks and offer safe online opportunities’, while also ‘supporting data protection and online privacy’ (ibid.). Further strategies will be needed to overcome potential new barriers to participation and different forms of vulnerability arising from the growing use of technology (European Agency, 2022f).

Hargreaves (2020) notes that children’s well-being is not an alternative to success in school but rather a precondition for learning, especially for the most vulnerable groups (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2023). Countries need to:

... rethink the competencies the next generations need to develop in order to lead, be proactive, and take responsibility for their individual and collective futures (Mateo and Rhys, 2022). This requires identifying, integrating, and establishing synergies between personal, interpersonal, social, and digital skills to be developed over the course of the educational and curricular programme, from early childhood education onward, understood as a unified, coherent, progressive whole (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2023, p. 49).



OPERATIONAL ELEMENTS

In addition to the requirements above, the Agency's [Key Principles](#) report (2021a) sets out eight operational elements for rights-based inclusive education.

- Structures and processes to **enable collaboration and effective communication at all levels** – between ministries, regional- and local-level decision-makers and between services and disciplines, including non-governmental organisations and schools.
- A strategy to **increase participation in quality inclusive early childhood education** and support families experiencing disadvantage.
- A strategy to **support all learners at times of transition between phases of education** – and particularly as they move into adult life – through vocational education and training, further and higher education, independent living and employment.
- Structures and processes to **facilitate co-operation between schools, parents and members of the community** to support inclusive school development and enhance learner progress.
- A **system for data/information collection** that:
 - provides feedback to inform on-going improvement across the whole system (for example, monitoring access to formal and informal education, participation, learning and accreditation);
 - supports decision-makers at all levels to identify 'signals' that indicate the need for urgent action regarding schools needing additional support.
- A strategy to **develop specialist provision to support all learners** and increase the capacity of mainstream schools, detailing cross-sectoral working and professional development for all staff.
- A strategy to develop and **support school leaders who work with others to create an inclusive and equitable school ethos** with strong relationships, high expectations, proactive and preventative approaches, flexible organisation and a continuum of support to intervene when learners are at risk of failure and exclusion.
- A **guidance framework to develop learning and teaching environments** where learners' voices are heard and their rights fulfilled through personalised approaches to learning and support.

This section will discuss these inter-linked elements in more detail.

Enabling collaboration and effective communication at all levels

In moving towards more inclusive policy and practice, many issues will inevitably span the responsibilities of government departments and agencies. Ministries, local governments



and non-government partners need to work closely together (with schools and communities). The separate traditions, cultures and working practices of different agencies and sectors need to be addressed to ensure better integration of services, with co-ordinated standards and information (Patana, 2020).

The Council of the European Union notes that:

The cooperation between institutions of formal and non-formal education and training has a particularly positive impact on social inclusion, as was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic (2021a, p. 5).

Furthermore, it suggests that:

... timely information exchange between education and training institutions, youth work and the social sector would enable early detection of learners at risk of early leaving and provide more appropriate support measures for vulnerable young people (ibid., p. 7).

The Council of the European Union stresses the need for broad dialogue between public authorities, education and training institutions and key stakeholders. This would ensure the establishment of inclusive education to promote equity and inclusion and meet the needs of the wider community. It invites Member States to make maximum use of opportunities under the *Framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)* (Council of the European Union, 2021c) via the '[open method of coordination](#)'. This enables the exchange of innovative approaches and strengthens mutual and peer learning, through co-operation with the Agency and other relevant international organisations.

The role of local and regional authorities is also crucial. The European Committee of the Regions (2021) presents evidence of the sub-national level's active contribution to achieving a European Education Area.

Increasing participation in quality inclusive early childhood education

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) can play 'a major role in levelling the playing field in education and society' (OECD, 2023c, p. 15). However, 'this requires extending enrolment and providing high-quality learning and development opportunities for all children, and especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds' (ibid.).

The Council of the European Union aims to:

... encourage Member States ... to increase participation in accessible, affordable, and high-quality early childhood education and care ... to facilitate ... women's labour-market participation and to enhance the social and cognitive development of children and their educational success, in particular for children in vulnerable situations (2022c, p. 7).



The Council sets out targets for 2030 (the Barcelona targets). These include a recommendation for targeted measures to increase ECEC participation among children from disadvantaged backgrounds and to close the gap between those children's participation and that of the overall population. The targets also call for training programmes for ECEC staff and greater participation in mainstream ECEC for children with disabilities (Council of the European Union, 2022c).

The OECD (2023c) stresses the need for resources, staff training and support to enable practices that adapt to children's needs and recognise the value of diversity and engagement with families and communities and other services.

Supporting all learners at times of transition between phases of education and into adult life

The OECD recognises that well-designed and well-delivered transitions into upper-secondary education in particular can 'help young people to understand their talents and strengths and how these relate' to available options for adult life (2023d, p. 16). It says:

The risks for individual learners, education systems and society of ineffective transitions when learners end up in pathways that do not reflect their strengths or interests are high. Transitions that automatically direct lower-performing students to certain programmes – often vocational – without a broader reflection on their talents and personal pathways create high risks for society by contributing to their perception as being of lower prestige (ibid.).

Relevant here too is the European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency (2023) reference to evidence that tracking policies (that is, the separation of learners into different academic or vocational education pathways or schools) can 'reduce education equity', with 'mixed effects on efficiency' (European Commission et al., 2022, p. 12).

Schools and learning communities should draw on the support of stakeholders in the wider community who play a significant role in young people's lives (OECD, 2022a). The development of social capital within school communities can support formal learning and informal connections that extend learning opportunities (Iyengar, 2021). This is particularly relevant to the transition from school to training and employment.

A change in overall educational culture is needed to move from compensatory support to remedy 'deficits', to a focus on supporting schools to build their capacity to respond to diverse needs through more flexible environments and teaching approaches and to work to learners' strengths and prevent difficulties (European Agency, 2022a).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to greater recognition of the need for more flexible approaches, such as blended learning. These 'improve the quality, relevance and inclusiveness of education and training', particularly 'in rural and remote areas' (European Commission, 2021, p. 11). This can increase opportunities for:

... learners who may not attend the school site full time: those who are part of traveller communities; young carers; those with health issues ...; those



engaged in high-performance training; and those in vocational training or paid work (ibid.).

Facilitating co-operation between schools, parents and members of the community

A multi-level, multi-stakeholder framework requires commitment to close co-operation and policy alignment at higher levels of government. It also requires guidelines and resources to support implementation with the engagement of all stakeholders to improve outcomes (European Commission, 2015; Patana, 2020). Long-standing norms can hinder the transition from ‘siloes’ service delivery to new ways of co-operating between education and other sectors (Patana, 2020). Therefore, any further development should focus on removing these long-standing norms.

In a policy framework for school success, the Council of the European Union stresses the need for ‘effective communication and cooperation with parents, legal guardians and families on their children’s educational progress and well-being’ (2022a, p. 14). These stakeholders should be involved ‘in curricular and non-curricular activities’, such as ‘reading and homework clubs, tutoring in school libraries, and after-school programmes, as well as job clubs ... workplace exposure’, etc. (ibid.).

As most children (including those less likely to access health and/or social services) attend school, provision of services on-site can represent the most ‘efficient allocation of attention, instruction, care, monitoring, and identification of needs for large amounts of the population in a non-stigmatizing, time-efficient manner’ (Patana, 2020, p. 6).

With regard to ECEC, the Council of the European Union recommends that Member States ‘remove obstacles to equal access’ by, among other things, offering:

... appropriate information and communication for children and parents with disabilities or with special educational needs as well as those in vulnerable situations, ... addressing linguistic and cultural barriers, including barriers faced by children with a migrant background ... to enable children’s participation in ... mainstream facilities that are inclusive and non-segregated (2022c, p. 9).

Improving data/information collection systems

To inform improvement:

... data can highlight gaps in education opportunities and outcomes among learner groups. ... [Data] can identify those at risk of being left behind and the barriers to inclusion. ... with data on who is being left behind and why, governments can develop evidence-based policies and monitor their implementation (UNESCO, 2020, p. 65).

This may include, for example, ‘ensuring more disaggregated data to better track inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, language, income, disability status, migratory status and geographical location’ (UNESCO, 2018, p. 4).



In this complex area of work, UNESCO highlights a common dilemma, noting:

Outcomes can be monitored at the population level; service delivery can be monitored at the student level through administrative systems that identify needs. Understanding the purposes and types of inclusion-related data can therefore ease dilemmas of identification: Identifying groups for statistical or policy purposes need not create a false dichotomy between ‘normal’ and ‘special’ groups that distorts efforts at inclusion. For instance, collection and use of administrative data can occur without assigning corresponding labels in the classroom (2020, p. 67).

Any central monitoring strategy should include indicators to monitor performance at school level, so that:

... teachers, school leaders, and local authorities are more likely to engage, create meaning around national indicators from a school perspective, and ultimately take action according to the objectives of the strategy (OECD, 2022b, p. 3).

This demands effective two-way communication between national-level authorities and schools. The latter should benefit from a statistical analysis of their profile to support them in their internal analysis and further planning (OECD, 2023b).

A central monitoring strategy fulfils the key functions of accountability and identifying strengths and weaknesses to inform improvement. The OECD notes the need for transparency of ‘resource allocation to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of spending’ (2022b, p. 1).

Furthermore, the OECD stresses that:

Framing data use as a continuous school improvement process, and not solely as compliance to accountability demands, contributes to aligning stakeholders’ beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about data use (ibid., p. 5).

In this way, data use is more likely to support successful policy implementation.

Finally, Maxwell and Staring (2018) synthesise the actions EU Member States have taken to achieve a balance between empowering schools and strengthening the contribution of information from school self-evaluation. These include:

- ‘Developing a national set of quality indicators for schools’
- ‘Providing training for practitioners on self-evaluation techniques, including how to generate, analyse and interpret data’
- Encouraging collaborative ‘peer review activity’
- ‘Providing schools with relevant “benchmark” data’, which enables schools ‘to see how their own development and outcomes compare to other schools, including more specific benchmarking against other schools serving learners in similar socio-economic circumstances’ (ibid., p. 10).



Such practices should also engage a wider range of stakeholders in collecting information to inform improvement.

Developing specialist provision to support all learners

A variety of support interventions are needed to address the multi-faceted needs of all learners. Most education systems report policies and measures promoting the provision of learning support in schools, and in particular targeted support interventions for specific groups of at-risk learners.

All learners may also be supported by, for example, policies or measures on social-emotional support. This follows the approach set out by the Council of the European Union, which suggests:

... systematically combining, in inclusive settings, universal school-wide measures for all learners with targeted actions for some learners or groups of learners sharing similar needs or at moderate risk, and more individualised ones for those with complex or chronic needs and at highest risk (2022a, p. 9).

To plan such measures, formative assessment can make a crucial contribution. Formative assessment is a dynamic process, integral to teaching.

Components of effective formative assessment include a planned and structured classroom, feedback ... aimed at helping the learner, learners' active engagement, the use of different assessment tools, and the adjustment of teaching and learning (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2023, p. 34).

The Council of the European Union (2022a) also sets out prevention measures, intervention measures and combined intervention/compensation measures to be promoted at school and system level in national education systems. These measures aim to improve success at school for all learners. They include equipping 'school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff ... to understand and tackle educational inequality, underachievement and disengagement' and helping them to 'acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences', providing 'appropriate working conditions in terms of time, space and means' (ibid., p. 12).

Supporting school leaders who work with others to create an inclusive and equitable school ethos

At school level, leaders clearly play a key role in quality assurance for both accountability and improvement. According to the Agency, school leaders must:

... be able to set out the vision, values and outcomes for which they (and other stakeholders) wish to be held to account (e.g. equity, non-discrimination and meeting all learners' personal, social and academic requirements) (European Agency, 2021c, p. 5).



The Council of the European Union recognises the need for:

... ‘whole-school approaches’, in which all members of the school community (school leaders, teachers, trainers and other educational staff, learners, parents and families), as well as a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. social and health services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, specialist emotional counsellors/therapists, nurses, speech and language therapists, guidance specialists, youth workers, local authorities, NGOs, businesses, unions, volunteers, etc.) and the community at large, engage actively and in a collaborative way (2022a, p. 13).

Supported by effective school leadership, such collaboration should help to prevent potential difficulties and enable early intervention when they do occur.

Research ... confirms that mental health issues, as well as violence and bullying, racism, xenophobia and other forms of ... discrimination, have devastating effects on children’s and young people’s emotional well-being and educational outcomes (Council of the European Union, 2022a, p. 2).

To ensure an inclusive and equitable school ethos, school leaders should establish a democratic school environment that uses participatory methods, values diversity and attends to the well-being of learners (ibid.). Furthermore, according to the Agency (2021b), better collaboration is required between schools and parents – a need that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted.

Providing guidance to develop learning and teaching environments

The Agency has recognised the importance of a ‘participatory school policy’ (2022g, p. 50) to give learners a more active role in shaping their own learning processes. More recently, it has raised the need for ethical approaches at all stages of participation, along with the importance of building the capacity of learners and families to participate (European Agency, 2023). Crucial, however, is a welcoming and supportive ethos to enable all learners to achieve their educational potential and foster a sense of belonging (OECD, 2023a).

Learning and teaching should be adapted to learners, rather than expecting learners to adapt to traditional classroom practices (ibid.). Approaches such as universal design may reduce barriers to participation by providing flexibility to support diverse learning needs and styles (Brussino, 2021). Blended learning can also be used flexibly and contribute to a more equitable and resilient school system (Council of the European Union, 2021d).

Technology has a growing influence on learning and teaching environments. UNESCO asks decision-makers to:

... look down at where they are, to see if technology is appropriate for their context, and learning needs. They are asked to look back at those left behind, to make sure they are focusing on the marginalized. They are reminded to look



up at whether they have evidence on impact and enough information on the full cost needed to make informed decisions. And, finally they are asked to look forwards, to make sure their plans fit their vision for sustainable development (2023b, p. v).

The Council of the European Union expresses the view that:

Digital environments may bring some challenges, including within the digital education context, e.g. cyberbullying, which can negatively impact well-being, especially if some aspects of those environments are poorly designed or deployed. In contrast, well-designed digital education ecosystems that are effective and inclusive can promote the development of learners' well-being and improve their educational, life and work prospects (2022b, p. 21).



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE – KEY MESSAGES

In supporting policy-makers in member countries to develop high-quality inclusive education for all learners, the Agency will continue to align all its work with the shared vision that **all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers.**

To focus and direct Agency activities, this background information paper identifies the essential features of inclusive education systems to support member countries' work and inform continuous improvement.

Countries need to take account of priorities highlighted by the pandemic, conflict and increased migration and work towards more resilient education systems that will prepare young people for an increasingly uncertain world. Key requirements in addressing these priorities are set out below.

Cross-sector collaboration at all system levels

Bringing all sectors together across all system levels with stronger horizontal and vertical co-ordination should ensure greater coherence. It should also ensure that all stakeholders are accountable for the success of every learner, with clear responsibilities for equity and inclusion (OECD, 2023a).

This requires 'valuing networked, multi-level learning' (McGrath, 2023, p. 11), adopting a more holistic approach that makes best use of all competences in the workforce, and reducing silo working.

According to Patana, there are four steps in working towards a high level of integration of services:

- Co-ordination of services is 'a crucial first step ... to make the best use of existing resources' and to 'connect multiple sectors at the services delivery level and other levels of government involved in the policy process'. Co-ordination can reduce 'duplication of services and help users access the services they need'.
- Collocation: for example, 'having health, mental health, counseling and social support services all available in schools' can reduce costs, improve accessibility and 'enable service providers to communicate and collaborate more effectively'.
- 'Collaboration involves inter-agency work via information sharing, joint training, and the establishment of a network of providers'. It often improves the experiences of service users.
- Co-operation 'brings the greatest degree of integration. Whereas collaboration involves work between agencies', co-operation entails service professionals communicating and working together (2020, pp. 4–5).

This approach has implications for areas such as governance, monitoring, evaluation, quality assurance and professional development. It entails ensuring that common structures and processes are in place across sectors and services to build consistency and facilitate effective collaboration and co-operation.



A clear and widely agreed definition of inclusive education

A key factor in the success of any attempt to bring sectors and services together is a clear and widely agreed concept of inclusive education that underpins a single legal and policy framework and incorporates a right-based approach, with attention to equality and anti-discrimination.

Recent Agency work has shown that many of its member countries can provide evidence of a broader vision in their legislation. However, ‘most countries’ legislation still addresses specific groups of learners and their need for special provision’ (European Agency, 2022d, p. 51). In many countries, ‘it is unclear how strongly anti-discrimination legislation is considered within the education sector’ (ibid., p. 53). Moving to a rights-based approach, in line with the Agency’s position, requires thinking around learners who are vulnerable to exclusion for any single or multiple reasons, with a ‘focus on characteristics of inclusive education systems that build capacity to more effectively ensure all learners’ rights to inclusive education are met’ (ibid., p. 54).

This will also include a greater focus on intersectionality, which should follow from examination of evidence and debate with stakeholders. Looking at learners through a ‘single lens’ can lead to marginalisation and exclusion. Increasingly, it is recognised that learners’ identities overlap. Learners can embody multiple dimensions of diversity and be exposed to ‘different types of discrimination and disadvantages that occur as a consequence of the combination of identities’ (Lavizzari, 2015, p. 5).

These identities can be due, among other factors, to:

... gender, remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes (UNESCO, 2020a, p. 4).

As Varsik and Gorochovskij (2023) point out, significant gaps remain in applying an intersectional approach, with some dimensions of diversity being covered better than others. Intersectionality requires explicit attention within policy areas such as curriculum, resourcing and pedagogy. Administrative data is not designed with an intersectional lens in mind (Dubrow & Ilinca, 2019). By recognising and acting on the importance of disaggregated data, researchers and policy-makers could receive valuable data that would enable them to consider lived experiences. Such evidence could also close previous research gaps and provide policy-makers with valuable insights for policy design and improvement.

Monitoring, quality assurance and accountability

National and local governments should be held accountable for learners who are out of school or other forms of education. They should, therefore, collect and analyse relevant data and develop clear action plans to support learners back into some form of education.

Particularly in the context of the pandemic, resources must be directed to bringing learners back into school or other forms of education, supporting their social, emotional and mental health needs, and addressing ‘gaps’ in their learning arising from school closures or other disruptive events.



In its [Country Policy Review and Analysis](#) work (European Agency, 2021d), the Agency found that policies addressing issues around monitoring and quality assurance were less comprehensive than many other policy areas.

Mezzanotte and Calvel discuss this critical area. They consider the ‘inputs, processes and outcomes a system should monitor to evaluate its inclusiveness’ (2023, p. 55). They suggest the sub-areas to be considered, which include:

... investments in resources and teacher education, the development of an inclusive climate and inclusive practices in schools, the measurement of students’ well-being and lifelong outcomes, among other areas (ibid.).

Such activity (adapted to local contexts) can monitor changes (for example, in learner performance or impact of reforms) and support self-evaluation.

... when deciding to disaggregate data to monitor the needs and challenges of specific diverse groups of students, systems should ponder the risks of labelling students. Yet, it is fundamental to disaggregate some indicators to account for the barriers and the needs of specific populations. This concerns, in particular, individuals whose characteristics overlap, creating intersectional identities that lead to more complex needs (ibid.).

Use of digital technologies

‘The application of digital technology varies by community and socioeconomic level, by teacher willingness and preparedness, by education level and by country income’ (UNESCO, 2023b, p. v).

Digital technologies can be used to support the inclusion of diverse student groups in education in a number of ways including enhancing accessibility of educational content, increasing personalisation and providing distance learning opportunities However, persistent digital inequalities can undermine digital equity and inclusion and equity and inclusion in education generally, particularly for the most disadvantaged students (Gottschalk & Weise, 2023, p. 4).

The pandemic has highlighted ‘the need for adequate technological resources and for clear plans’ regarding the use of digital technologies (ibid., p. 6). Therefore, a further consideration for countries is how digital technologies can support equity and inclusion and enable all learners to succeed.

A key issue here is digital well-being. The Council of the European Union defines digital well-being as:

... a feeling of physical, cognitive, social and emotional contentment that enables all individuals to engage positively in all digital learning environments including through digital education and training tools and methods (2022b, p. 20).



Digital well-being should maximise learners' 'potential and self-realisation', help them 'to act safely online' and support 'their empowerment in online environments' (ibid.). This requires attention to potential threats in the digital world – for example, cyberbullying, isolation, disinformation and misinformation – and allocation of resources to address the digital divide.

Listening to learners

Recognising the importance of the voices of learners and their families, countries should be encouraged to systematise and develop 'effective processes for learners' and families' participation', in co-operation 'with all institutions and stakeholders in all matters affecting children' (European Agency, 2023, p. 7). Here, policy-makers should take account of ethical issues around enabling meaningful participation, paying attention to 'intergenerational approaches' and the needs of those who are marginalised and vulnerable to exclusion from participation (ibid., p. 9).

Policy-makers should adopt 'a top-down policy approach, supported by bottom-up initiatives at local and school level, as a way forward' (European Agency, 2022h, p. 64). This, in turn, will require the use of a range of models, approaches and resources to build capacity and facilitate participation and new ways of working with non-governmental organisations, civil society and advocacy groups. This should bring positive benefits, as multiple voices contribute different perspectives, which can shape the future direction with greater confidence (OECD, 2023b).

Moving forward

Work with Agency member countries should focus on the key requirements and operational elements set out in this paper, based on the Agency's Key Principles (2021a). This work should also align with UNESCO's summary of key considerations for inclusion in education:

- **Widen the understanding of inclusive education:** It should include all learners, regardless of identity, background or ability. [...]
- **Share expertise and resources:** This is the only way to sustain a transition to inclusion. [...]
- **Engage in meaningful consultation with communities and parents:** Inclusion cannot be enforced from above. [...]
- **Ensure cooperation across government departments, sectors and tiers:** Inclusion in education is but a subset of social inclusion. [...]
- **Prepare, empower and motivate the education workforce:** All teachers should be prepared to teach all students. [...]
- **Collect data on and for inclusion with attention and respect:** Avoid labelling that stigmatizes (2020a, pp. 20–22).



In aiming to provide member countries with individualised information and targeted support towards inclusive education systems, the Agency recognises that all countries are at different points in their thinking and action around the position on inclusive education systems. Countries have different understandings of and ways of operationalising key concepts. These differences need to be understood and considered to guide future Agency work towards the vision of inclusive education systems.

In working as an active agent for change, the Agency supports self-review and reflection, providing feedback to countries and following the principle of continuous improvement. The new Agency activity, [Country Policy Development Support](#) (CPDS), will give countries opportunities to explore concrete policy development issues to aid policy revision and development, for on-going progress in inclusive education. Furthermore, the Agency has developed a new way of working through its [Thematic Country Cluster Activities](#) (TCCA), addressing member countries' priorities by working in small country groups.

This should ensure effective implementation of national policy at all system levels to address disparities and equity gaps between regions, local communities and schools.

In conclusion, the Agency position on inclusive education systems and this background information paper will continue to provide the focal point and inspiration for taking forward work with member countries in the coming years.



REFERENCES

- Berendt, B., Littlejohn, A., Kern, P., Mitros, P., Shacklock, X. and Blakemore, M., 2017. *Big data for monitoring educational systems*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/38557 (Last accessed October 2023)
- Brussino, O., 2021. 'Building capacity for inclusive teaching: Policies and practices to prepare all teachers for diversity and inclusion', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 256. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/57fe6a38-en (Last accessed March 2024)
- Burns, T. and Köster, F., 2016. *Governing Education in a Complex World*. Educational Research and Innovation. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/9789264255364-en (Last accessed June 2022)
- Cerna, L., Mezzanotte, C., Rutigliano, A., Brussino, O., Santiago, P., Borgonovi, F. and Guthri, C., 2021. 'Promoting inclusive education for diverse societies: A conceptual framework', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 260. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/94ab68c6-en (Last accessed June 2022)
- Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016. *General comment No. 4, Article 24: Right to inclusive education*, 2 September 2016. CRPD/C/GC/4/. www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-4-article-24-right-inclusive (Last accessed June 2022)
- Council of the European Union, 2021a. *Council conclusions on equity and inclusion in education and training in order to promote educational success for all*. 2021/C 221/02. [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610(01)) (Last accessed June 2022)
- Council of the European Union, 2021b. *Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee*. eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2021.223.01.0014.01.ENG (Last accessed March 2024)
- Council of the European Union, 2021c. *Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)*. 2021/C 66/01. eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021G0226%2801%29 (Last accessed March 2024)
- Council of the European Union, 2021d. *Council Recommendation of 29 November 2021 on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education*. 2021/C 504/03. [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021H1214\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021H1214(01)) (Last accessed March 2024)
- Council of the European Union, 2022a. *Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving*. 2022/C 469/01. eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H1209%2801%29 (Last accessed March 2024)



Council of the European Union, 2022b. *Council conclusions on supporting well-being in digital education*. 2022/C 469/04.

eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022XG1209%2801%29 (Last accessed March 2024)

Council of the European Union, 2022c. *Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030*. 2022/C 484/01.

[eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H1220\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H1220(01)) (Last accessed March 2024)

Council of the European Union, 2023. *Council resolution on The European Education Area: Looking to 2025 and beyond*. 2023/C 185/08.

eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023G0526%2801%29 (Last accessed March 2024)

Council of the European Union and Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 2021. *Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Strengthening the multilevel governance when promoting the participation of young people in decision-making processes*.

2021/C 241/03. [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0621\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0621(01)) (Last accessed June 2022)

Dubrow, J.K. and Ilinca, C., 2019. 'Quantitative Approaches to Intersectionality: New Methodological Directions and Implications for Policy Analysis', in O. Hankivsky and J.S. Jordan-Zachery (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Intersectionality in Public Policy*. The Politics of Intersectionality. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98473-5_8 (Last accessed March 2024)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2015. *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*. Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/agency-position-inclusive-education-systems-flyer

(Last accessed June 2022)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2016. *Financing of Inclusive Education: Mapping Country Systems for Inclusive Education*. (S. Ebersold, ed.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/financing-inclusive-education-mapping-country-systems-inclusive-education

(Last accessed June 2022)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017. *Raising the Achievement of All Learners: A Resource to Support Self-Review*. (V.J. Donnelly and A. Kefallinou, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/raising-achievement-all-learners-self-review

(Last accessed June 2022)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018a. *Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems: Final Summary Report*. (E. Óskarsdóttir, A. Watkins and S. Ebersold, eds.). Odense, Denmark.

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/financing-policies-inclusive-education-systems-final-summary-report (Last accessed June 2022)



European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018b. *Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems: Resourcing Levers to Reduce Disparity in Education*. (S. Ebersold, E. Óskarsdóttir and A. Watkins, eds.). Odense, Denmark.

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/fpies-synthesis-report (Last accessed July 2022)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021a. *Key Principles – Supporting policy development and implementation for inclusive education*. (V.J. Donnelly and A. Watkins, eds.). Odense, Denmark.

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/key-principles-supporting-policy-development-implementation (Last accessed June 2022)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021b. *The Impact of COVID-19 on Inclusive Education at the European Level: Literature Review*. (C. Popescu, ed.). Odense, Denmark.

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/impact-covid-19-literature-review (Last accessed March 2024)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021c. *Supporting Inclusive School Leadership: Policy Messages*. Odense, Denmark.

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/SISL-policy-messages (Last accessed March 2024)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021d. *Country Policy Review and Analysis: Key messages for working with and for countries*. (A. Watkins, V.J. Donnelly, S. Symeonidou and V. Soriano, eds.). Odense, Denmark.

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/CPRA-key-messages (Last accessed October 2023)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022a. *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*. Second edition. Odense, Denmark.

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/agency-position-inclusive-education-systems-second-edition (Last accessed October 2023)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022b. *Celebrating 25 years on the path to inclusive education*. Odense, Denmark.

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/celebrating-25-years (Last accessed October 2023)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022c. *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems: Background Information Paper for the Second Edition*.

Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/agency-position-inclusive-education-systems-second-edition (Last accessed April 2024)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022d. *Legislative Definitions around Learners' Needs: A snapshot of European country approaches*. (M. Turner-Cmuchal and A. Lecheval, eds.). Odense, Denmark.

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/Legislative-Definitions-report (Last accessed October 2023)



European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022e. *Legislative Definitions around Learners' Needs – Policy Brief*. (M. Turner-Cmucha, ed.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/Legislative-Definitions-policy-brief (Last accessed March 2024)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022f. *Inclusive Digital Education*. (H. Weber, A. Elsner, D. Wolf, M. Rohs and M. Turner-Cmucha, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/inclusive-digital-education (Last accessed March 2024)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022g. *Inclusive Education and the Pandemic – Aiming for Resilience: Key European measures and practices in 2021 publications*. (L. Muik, M. Presmanes Andrés and M. Bilgeri, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/BRIES-report (Last accessed October 2023)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022h. *Voices into Action: Promoting learner and family participation in educational decision-making*. (A. Kefallinou, D.C. Murdoch, A. Mangiaracina and S. Symeonidou, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/VIA-synthesis (Last accessed March 2024)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2023. *Voices into Action: Including the Voices of Learners and their Families in Educational Decision-Making – Final Summary Report*. (A. Kefallinou and D. Murdoch, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/via-final-summary (Last accessed October 2023)

European Commission, 2015. *Comparative study on quality assurance in EU school education systems – Policies, procedures and practices: Final report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/422920 (Last accessed April 2024)

European Commission, 2017. *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life*. COM/2017/0248 final. eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2017%3A248%3AFIN (Last accessed June 2022)

European Commission, 2018a. *European Pillar of Social Rights*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. data.europa.eu/doi/10.2792/154364 (Last accessed June 2022)

European Commission, 2018b. *Quality assurance for school development. Guiding principles for policy development on quality assurance in school education*. 2nd Edition. ET2020 working group schools 2016-2018. education.ec.europa.eu/document/quality-assurance-for-school-development (Last accessed October 2023)



European Commission, 2020. *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*. COM/2020/758 final. eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0758 (Last accessed June 2022)

European Commission, 2021. *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education*. COM/2021/455 final. eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0455 (Last accessed June 2022)

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2021. *Education and Training Monitor 2021: Executive Summary*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/480191 (Last accessed June 2022)

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022. *Investing in our Future – Quality investment in education and training*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/45896 (Last accessed March 2024)

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2023. *Education and training monitor 2023: Comparative report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/936303 (Last accessed March 2024)

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Fack, G., Agasisti, T., Bonal, X., De Witte, K., Dohmen, D., Haase, S. et al., 2022. *Interim report of the Commission expert group on quality investment in education and training*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/37858 (Last accessed March 2024)

European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2023. *Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/443509 (Last accessed March 2024)

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), 2018. *ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 7 on National Legislation to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-7-revised-on-national-legislatio/16808b5aae (Last accessed July 2022)

European Committee of the Regions, 2021. *The Role of Local and Regional Authorities in Achieving a European Education Area by 2025*. cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/LRAs-achieving-EEA_Study.pdf (Last accessed March 2024)

European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Horváth, A., Krémó, A., Sigalas, E. and Parveva, T., 2020. *Equity in school education in Europe: Structures, policies and student performance*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/658266 (Last accessed March 2024)



- Flecha, R., 2015. *Successful Educational Actions for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe*. Cham: Springer
- Florian, L. and Sretenov, D., 2021. *From Special School to Resource Centre: Supporting Vulnerable Young Children in Central and Eastern Europe: A Guide for Positive Change*. Open Society Foundations. www.issa.nl/content/special-school-resource-centre (Last accessed June 2022)
- Golden, G., 2020. 'Education policy evaluation: Surveying the OECD landscape', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 236. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/9f127490-en (Last accessed March 2024)
- Gottschalk, F. and Weise, C., 2023. 'Digital equity and inclusion in education: An overview of practice and policy in OECD countries', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 299. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/7cb15030-en (Last accessed March 2024)
- Hargreaves, A., 2020. 'What we have learned so far from the Coronavirus pandemic' *Diane Ravitch's blog*, 30 April 2020. dianeravitch.net/2020/04/30/andy-hargreaves-what-we-have-learned-so-far-from-the-coronavirus-pandemic (Last accessed March 2024)
- Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and Council of Europe, 2020. *Informal Conference of Ministers of Education organised under the Greek Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. The education response to the COVID crisis. Political Declaration. 29 October 2020*. rm.coe.int/the-education-response-to-the-covid-crisis-political-declaration-for-t/16809fee7a (Last accessed June 2022)
- International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021. *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*. Paris: UNESCO. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707?1 (Last accessed June 2022)
- Iyengar, R., 2021. 'Rethinking community participation in education post Covid-19' *Prospects*, 51 (1), 437–447. doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09538-2 (Last accessed March 2024)
- Kefallinou, A., Symeonidou, S. and Meijer, C.J.W., 2020. 'Understanding the value of inclusive education and its implementation: A review of the literature' *Prospects*, 49, 135–152. doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09500-2 (Last accessed March 2024)
- Lavizzari, A., 2015. *Intersectionality Research*. Brussels: IGLYO. www.iglyo.org/resources/intersectionality-research (Last accessed April 2024)
- Mangiaracina, A., Kefallinou, A., Kyriazopoulou, M. and Watkins, A., 2021. 'Learners' Voices in Inclusive Education Policy Debates' *Education Sciences*, 2021, 11 (10), 599. doi.org/10.3390/educsci11100599 (Last accessed March 2024)
- Maxwell, B. and Staring, F., 2018. *Better learning for Europe's young people: developing coherent quality assurance strategies for school education. Report from an expert assignment*. European Commission DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1361c84b-80c8-11e8-ac6a-01aa75ed71a1 (Last accessed October 2023)



McGrath, J., 2023. 'What systematic connections should we have around schools to support the work of teachers? Global lessons and the potential of ambition loops', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 296. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/77de597c-en (Last accessed October 2023)

Mezzanotte, C., 2022. 'The social and economic rationale of inclusive education: An overview of the outcomes in education for diverse groups of students', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 263. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/bff7a85d-en (Last accessed March 2024)

Mezzanotte, C. and Calvel, C., 2023. 'Indicators of inclusion in education: A framework for analysis', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 300. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/d94f3bd8-en (Last accessed March 2024)

Murdoch, D., Bilgeri, M. and Watkins, A., 2023. 'Shared Principles for Working Towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 in European Countries', in D. Lane, N. Catania and S. Semon (eds.), *Progress Toward Agenda 2030 (International Perspectives on Inclusive Education, Vol. 21)*. Leeds: Emerald Publishing Limited. doi.org/10.1108/S1479-363620230000021004 (Last accessed March 2024)

OECD, 2018. 'Why equity in education is so elusive', in *World Class: How to Build a 21st-Century School System*. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/9789264300002-4-en (Last accessed June 2022)

OECD, 2022a. *Review of Inclusive Education in Portugal*. Reviews of National Policies for Education. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/a9c95902-en (Last accessed October 2023)

OECD, 2022b. 'How to select indicators that support the implementation of education policies', *OECD Education Spotlights*, No. 1. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/d1ec8007-en (Last accessed October 2023)

OECD, 2023a. *Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity (Abridged version)*. Paris: OECD Publishing. www.oecd.org/education/strength-through-diversity/Equity-and-Inclusion-in-Education-abridged-version.pdf (Last accessed March 2024)

OECD, 2023b. *Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity*. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/e9072e21-en (Last accessed October 2023)

OECD, 2023c. 'Equity, diversity and inclusion in early childhood education and care', *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 83. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/72ab31c1-en (Last accessed March 2024)

OECD, 2023d. 'Policy pointers for equitable, effective and personalised upper secondary transitions', *OECD Education Spotlights*, No. 7. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/ac6c2095-en (Last accessed March 2024)

Patana, P., 2020. *Inclusive Education and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration between Education and Other Sectors*. Background paper prepared for the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion and education. Paris: UNESCO. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373664 (Last accessed October 2023)



Tomaševski, K., 2001. *Right to Education Primers No. 3: Human Rights Obligations: Making Education Available, Accessible, Acceptable and Available*.

www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/Tomasevski_Primer_3.pdf (Last accessed July 2022)

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019. *Empowering children with disabilities for the enjoyment of their human rights, including through inclusive education: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*.

digitallibrary.un.org/record/3791961?ln=en (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO, 1960. *Convention against Discrimination in Education*. Paris: UNESCO.

unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000132598 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO, 2015. *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Paris: UNESCO.

unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO, 2018. *Global Education Meeting 2018: Brussels Declaration*. ED-2018/GEM/1.

unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366394 (Last accessed June 2022)

UNESCO, 2019. *Inclusive education for persons with disabilities – Are we making progress?* Background paper prepared for the International Forum on inclusion and equity in education – Every Learner Matters, Cali, Colombia, 11–13 September 2019.

unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370386 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO, 2020a. *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all*. Paris: UNESCO. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO, 2020b. *Towards Inclusion in Education: Status, trends and challenges: The UNESCO Salamanca Statement 25 years on*. Paris: UNESCO.

unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374246 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO, 2021. *Guidelines to strengthen the right to education in national frameworks*. Paris: UNESCO. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375352 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO, 2023a. *Management report: Education Sector 2022*. Paris: UNESCO.

unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385819 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO, 2023b. *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023: Technology in education: A tool on whose terms?* Paris: UNESCO.

unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385723 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. *SDG 4 Data Digest 2021: National SDG 4 benchmarks: fulfilling our neglected commitment*. Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380387 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2023. *Curriculum in transformation mode: Rethinking curriculum for the transformation of education and education systems*. Geneva: UNESCO International Bureau of Education.

unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387188 (Last accessed March 2024)



UNESCO, Network of Education Policy Centers and European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021. *Global Education Monitoring Report 2021 – Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia – Inclusion and education: All means all*. Paris: UNESCO. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375490 (Last accessed March 2024)

UNESCO and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023. *Paving pathways for inclusion: A global overview of refugee education data*. Paris: UNESCO and Geneva: UNHCR. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387956 (Last accessed March 2024)

United Nations, 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights (Last accessed March 2024)

United Nations, 1966. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. New York: United Nations. [treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/MTDSG/Volume I/Chapter IV/IV-3.en.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/MTDSG/Volume%20I/Chapter%20IV/IV-3.en.pdf) (Last accessed June 2022)

United Nations, 1989. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child (Last accessed March 2024)

United Nations, 2006. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities (Last accessed March 2024)

United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999. *General Comment No. 13: The Right to Education (Article 13)*. www.ohchr.org/en/resources/educators/human-rights-education-training/d-general-comment-no-13-right-education-article-13-1999 (Last accessed March 2024)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021. *Horizontal and vertical integration are more necessary than ever for COVID-19 recovery and SDG implementation*. Future of the World Policy Brief No. 115. doi.org/10.18356/27081990-115 (Last accessed October 2023)

Varsik, S. and Goročovskij, J., 2023. 'Intersectionality in education: Rationale and practices to address the needs of students' intersecting identities', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 302. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/dbb1e821-en (Last accessed March 2024)

Vincent-Lancrin, S., Cobo Romani, C. and Reimers, F. (eds.), 2022. *How Learning Continued during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Global Lessons from Initiatives to Support Learners and Teachers*. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/bbeca162-en (Last accessed June 2022)

Watkins, A., Donnelly, V.J. and Meijer, C.J.W., 2023. 'Paying for inclusion and exclusion', in R.J. Tierney, F. Rizvi and K. Ercikan (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education (Fourth Edition)*, volume 9. Elsevier. dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.12031-7 (Last accessed March 2024)