

EUROPEAN HEARING

LUXEMBOURG RECOMMENDATIONS



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1. CONTEXT

On 16 October 2015, in the context of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Luxembourg Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, together with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, organised a European Hearing entitled ‘Inclusive Education – Take Action!’

Seventy-two young people – both with and without special educational needs and from 28 countries – attended this event. The aim was to ‘give the floor’ to young people and to discuss how inclusive education is or is not being implemented in their schools. The main outcomes are summarised as the *Luxembourg Recommendations* and addressed to European Ministers of Education for their consideration and as a basis for possible further action.

2. OUTCOMES

The outcomes of the 2015 Hearing mainly echo and build upon the outcomes of the three previous European Hearings, held in Brussels (2003 and 2011) and in Lisbon (2007). The developments reported in these outcomes point to visible progress in inclusive education in European countries over that period.

Young people expressed their overall satisfaction regarding their education. However, they also highlighted some weaknesses and outlined a number of key messages, presented here in the form of recommendations in order to implement ‘inclusive education as the best option’ where the necessary conditions exist.

Messages

The recommendations are grouped around five important messages expressed by the young people during their discussions and presentation of results.

Everything about us, with us

The first message – *Everything about us, with us* – concerns their direct involvement in all decision-making concerning them:

- The voices of young people, as well as their families, should be heard and taken into account in any decision-making concerning them directly or indirectly.
- Young people should be asked what their needs are.
- Youth organisations should be involved systematically.

The young people clearly expressed that they and their families need to be actively involved and need to be listened to before decisions are made. In the same regard, they advocate for the positive role played by different organisations of young people and of people with disabilities. They see these organisations as being key in supporting them. Their schools' learners' councils have a different role. The young people's participation and involvement in these councils is perceived as an important way to be fully involved in school life and strongly encouraged.

Barrier-free schools

The second message – *Barrier-free schools* – relates to the elimination of all physical and technical barriers:

- Many barriers have already been overcome in schools, but all barriers should be removed in order to be physically able to reach local educational centres, easily access them and move around inside them.
- Educational buildings undergoing reconstruction or modernisation must respect accessibility principles, such as creating multi-function and/or quiet spaces in schools, as well as increasing the availability of flexible educational equipment.
- Suitable technical aids and educational materials should be made available in accordance with individual needs.

Issues discussed

The young people discussed four issues. First of all, how best to reach educational centres is still an issue. Using public transport is the preferred option, but this means that it needs to be adapted. Special transport is perceived as an alternative only when there is no other option. According to the young people, a lack of convenient transport seems to be one factor, among others, preventing learners from attending their local school.

Secondly, access to the schools seems to have improved, as it is now easier and better. The young people expressed clear satisfaction with how their schools have improved in terms of accessibility, both formally – through the installation of ramps and lifts – and ‘creatively’ – when schools and (mainly) classmates are willing to help in case of difficulties (when the lift is out of order, for example). Some improvements are needed to facilitate access to emergency exits or access to lifts when a key is required to open them. It is important to ensure the personal security and safety of all learners.

Thirdly, moving around within the school is being improved and facilitated. The young people reported the existence of wide corridors and the presence of Braille signs in required places. Quiet places and multi-function spaces in schools are perceived as a facilitator for all learners which needs to be implemented more often.

Finally, adapted technical aids and materials are increasingly available and constitute a requisite for inclusion.

Breaking down stereotypes

The third message – *Breaking down stereotypes* – is all about the concept of ‘normality’:

- Providing teachers, school staff, young people, families and support services with reliable information on learners’ different needs is key to fostering mutual respect and tolerance.
- Diversity must be perceived as a positive fact; a shared value must be ‘to see disability as normal’.
- Everybody is different and everybody must be accepted. Tolerance is based on understanding one another.
- The educational community needs to be more aware of, and more tolerant towards, people with disabilities.

If we accept that everybody is different, then who is ‘normal’? Good information is required to ensure this important idea is accepted. Relevant information needs to be addressed to teachers, school staff – including management – classmates, families and any services involved in the school.

The best result will be mutual respect and tolerance. Diversity is not a challenge, but a positive and normal situation; disability is not abnormal; tolerance is based on understanding each other.

Diversity is the mix, inclusion is what makes the mix work

The fourth message centres upon a slogan used by some young people –

Diversity is the mix, inclusion is what makes the mix work:

- Everyone should focus on what CAN be done, not on what cannot be done.
- Education must be fully accessible, respecting the needs of all learners as the basis for quality education for all.
- Co-operation among teachers and other professionals, as well as the provision of good training opportunities, are fundamental.
- Provision of the necessary human and/or technical support by teachers and classmates is crucial.

The young people raised the positive effect of implementation of educational measures, such as individual education plans, adapted programmes, the use of technical aids, support provided by support teachers or assistants, as well as the flexible organisation of examinations (written or oral examinations with, for example, extra time provided, etc.).

The main request from the young people was for teachers and other staff to always focus on what can be done, rather than what cannot be done. Paying attention to the needs of all learners involves reinforcing strengths and capacities, instead of focusing on weaknesses. Fully accessible education is the

basis for a quality education for all. The young people were aware that teachers as well as their classmates play a key part in supporting them. Teachers and classmates need more information and training, at different levels depending on their respective roles. The result will be better support and understanding of learning needs.

The young people also highlighted the need for better co-operation among teachers, not just to provide the required support but also to ensure better transition phases throughout their education.

Becoming full citizens

The fifth message – *Becoming full citizens* – relates to the impact of inclusive education in being fully included in society:

- It is essential to be included in mainstream schools, in order to be included in society.
- The aim is that all are able to find their place in society.

The young people considered that all learners need to learn together in order to live together. This entails not only their inclusion in educational programmes, but also their involvement in all leisure activities.

Conclusion

These five messages illustrate the young people's description of their education, as well as their suggestions for improvement. The messages describe – in a very concrete and practical way – some concepts raised in many studies on inclusive education. The young people were mainly describing what universal design means for them, and why peer tutoring, co-operative learning

and individualised programmes have a positive effect on their education. They also highlighted inclusive education as a human rights issue and placed key concepts such as normality, tolerance, respect and citizenship at the centre of their discussions.

3. REFERENCES

The purpose of the *Luxembourg Recommendations* mirrors that of previous relevant official European and international documents in the field of special needs and inclusive education, such as:

- the *Resolution of the Council and the Ministers for Education meeting within the Council of 31 May 1990 concerning integration of children and young people with disabilities into ordinary systems of education* (Council of the European Union, 1990);
- the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO, 1994);
- the *Charter of Luxembourg* (Helios Programme, 1996);
- the *Council resolution of 5 May 2003 on equal opportunities for pupils and students with disabilities in education and training* (Council of the European Union, 2003);
- the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006);
- the *Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on efficiency and equity in education and training* (Council of the European Union, 2006);
- the *Lisbon Declaration – Young People’s Views on Inclusive Education* (European Agency, 2007);

- the *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education* (UNESCO, 2009);
- the *Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training* (Council of the European Union, 2009);
- the *Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the social dimension of education and training* (Council of the European Union, 2010);
- the *Council conclusions on early childhood education and care: providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow* (Council of the European Union, 2011);
- the *World Summit on Education and the Sustainable Development Goals* (United Nations, 2015);
- the *Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education* (European Union Education Ministers, 2015).