

# Inclusive Education in Europe: Putting theory into practice

International Conference - 18 November 2013 Brussels

First Results



Inclusive Education in Europe



**EUROPEAN AGENCY**  
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EUROPE:  
PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE – 18 NOVEMBER 2013**

**First Results**

**European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education**



The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency; formerly known as the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education) is an independent and self-governing organisation, supported by Agency member countries and the European Institutions (Commission and Parliament).



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## PREAMBLE

The International Conference organised by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) in November 2013 enabled an open debate on inclusive education. The debate involved all relevant stakeholders: decision makers, researchers, practitioners, people with disabilities and their families.

During the conference, Diane Richler presented inclusive education from a human rights perspective. This is the starting point for inclusive education. At the core of inclusive education is the human right to education, stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949. Equally important is the right of children not to be discriminated against, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). As a result, all children have the right to receive an education that does not discriminate against them based on disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender and so on.

While there are important human, economic and social reasons for inclusive education, inclusion is also a means for building relationships among individuals, groups and society as a whole.

Talking about inclusive education implies talking about differences: how to deal with differences in schools, in classrooms and in the curriculum in general. The current debate is no longer about what inclusion is and why it is needed. The key question is how it is to be done: how to make progress at national level, how to implement the right policy measures at regional and local level, how teachers can best cope with differences in the classroom – these were the key issues during the conference.

The present document presents the relevant messages and statements from the invited stakeholders and keynote speakers at the conference.

The key messages delivered by two relevant stakeholders are followed by the key messages and statements presented by the participants in the two panels organised in the framework of the conference. The first panel involved researchers and the second, decision makers.

The members of the first panel presented key statements and results from the discussions organised in five different groups. The purposes of the different groups are summarised below, together with the presentations from researchers.

The members of the second panel had an open discussion about progress made so far at national and European policy level.

The Agency wishes to express its gratitude to all of them for their participation, contribution and commitment to this important debate.

Per Ch Gunnvall

Cor J. W. Meijer

Chair

Director



## MESSAGES FROM KEY STAKEHOLDERS



**Stakeholders' panel (from left to right): Frédéric Storme, member of the European Commission's Disability Support Group, founder and president of the 'I See' Foundation; László Gábor Lovász, member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**





***Ninety percent of disabled children are born to non-disabled parents. Most parents – even the most educated ones – are not in a position to recognise, measure or deal with their own child’s disability at the beginning. Only recognised and developed children with disabilities may have a better chance. This is why placing disabled children into normal, mainstream schooling is so important within the framework of inclusive education.***

***László Gábor Lovászy, member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities***

Let me begin by introducing myself: I am László Lovászy. Today, I am here representing the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as its first hearing-impaired member. I wish to thank everybody taking part in providing reasonable accommodation here.

Before we get down to business, let me recommend some relevant material for this conference today. From the point of view of the United Nations, the United Nations International Emergency Children's Fund (UNICEF) recently launched its publication on children with disabilities. The European Parliament also recently published a new and comprehensive study on member states’ policies for children with disabilities. Both of them are useful for dealing with the rights of disabled children.

Regarding Europe, disability as a social aspect lies within the so-called supporting competency of the European Union (EU) and this has also been true when talking about education – especially inclusive education – because there is no explicit EU competency on children with disabilities. However, as regards combatting disability-based discrimination, the EU framework contains certain provisions recognising the EU’s role in promoting the protection of the rights of the child based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (Articles 21 and 24). In addition, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union does indeed have a legal base to combat discrimination (Article 19). However, the requirement of unanimity applied to the Council's decision-making may prevent the EU from taking a stronger and more efficient position in this field. That is why the Agency's mission and vision is of utmost importance.

The European Council approved the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on 26 November 2009 as a regional organisation, in contrast to the case of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the EU is not a State Party. With regard to education, a European Union action may be required in close co-ordination with member states. The EU has been preparing its first so-called ‘country report’ to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and this



report will definitely have to touch upon this issue, since the Convention deals with the rights of children with disabilities (Article 7, 24).

Before moving on, remember that 90% of disabled children are born to non-disabled parents. It follows that most parents are not in a position to recognise, understand, measure or deal with their own child's disability at the beginning.

I will now explain my experiences with some personal remarks. Sometimes, or rather quite often, parents find it difficult to believe that their children (at birth) have disabilities at all, since they themselves do not have any. Sometimes, these parents later tend to blame each other based on their families' medical history, but never openly, which is in fact the worst scenario: they do not help each other to bear the consequences, therefore they are unable to find a joint and sustainable solution.

In many cases, fathers (not mine!) chose to leave their families and disabled children and were eager to find a new woman with the possibility of having a healthy baby. However, in the future they would be mistaken – in recent decades the quality of male reproductive ability and sperm quality has been decreasing, in contrast to that of female eggs, save for the fact that the features of the menopause have not changed and the period of fertility has not been prolonged.

Some believe that having a disabled child is a tragedy, and it can be seen as such in some cases. However, many non-disabled children become drug-addicts, alcoholics, gamblers and suffer from depression, frittering away the family wealth amassed during previous generations, which ends in tragedy, too.

Based on my own case, even the most educated parents – mine are lawyers – should be educated in terms of dealing with disability. Not to mention the parents (or single mothers) living in much poorer conditions or with lower incomes.

When I was born in the '70s, practically no-one – either in the extended family or in the neighbourhood – knew what to do. In other words, there was indeed a lack of highly qualified professionals. All family members had to learn and relearn each and every day everything about disability as I was growing up. Sometimes even in the best families, fierce arguments can break out since no-one has real experience with disabilities, but all of them long to help their beloved family member with a disability. That is why comprehensive and detailed help and manuals are of utmost importance for every family member regarding their opportunities and responsibilities. So, support systems and funding mechanisms are of utmost importance as well.

It was not a coincidence that there were no reliable data or statistics on children with disabilities, therefore the decision makers were unable to measure importance and merits in this field. It took my parents and extended family months or even



years to fully understand my needs and support me. It also meant that they had to get accustomed to my disability even if they were busy or occupied with their work. However, they could not survive without grandparents, either. So, early recognition should be as early as possible.

Only recognised and developed children with disabilities may have a better chance. That is why placing disabled children into normal, mainstream schooling is so important within the framework of inclusive education. This will have to be aligned with the UN notion of universal design, too.

To wrap up, why are disabled children so important? Because by 2050 in the EU more than 50 million people from today's active working population will be retired, with a decreasing young population creating a very ageing Europe never seen before in history and we therefore will need each and every person – with or without disabilities – to be active and remain active.

Do not forget, those retired people who will definitely have one or more disabilities due to ageing will be us, my generation, people around 35 and 45 without disabilities today. Disability will be an everyday experience and part of the normal way of living.

So, we are not talking about strangers or ill-fated people but ourselves. Let's act before it is too late. As the late US President John F. Kennedy once said: 'Things do not happen. Things are made to happen.'



László Gábor Lovászy is a member of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRC).

He is a scientific advisor to MEP Ádám Kósa.

He is a lecturer at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences at the University of Pécs and guest lecturer at the ELTE University of Budapest.

He has a PhD in Law and Political Sciences from the University of Szeged (Hungary).

He worked at the Ministry of National Development as well as at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in Hungary prior to 2009.



***It is very important for parents to understand that they have to treat the child who has an impairment the same way as they treat their sisters or brothers. Our role is to make the people who are not impaired feel at ease with us. This comes from our behaviour, but also from education. We must certainly train all the teachers in the world, but first of all we have to convince them to accept a person with a disability in the classroom.***

***Frédéric Storme, member of the European Commission's Disability Support Group. Founder and president of the 'I See' Foundation***

I would like to raise some key elements to prepare persons who are disabled to enter normal life with people who are not impaired.

That is my job today, because I have been blind since I was born.

A first key element is the child's education from the beginning. We are working to help parents understand that they have to treat the child who has an impairment the same as they treat their sisters or brothers; that is very important. We want to be treated in the same way as others. It will help us all to integrate into normal life.

When parents understand this, we accompany the young child to be integrated into the mainstream school.

Secondly, if we want to be accepted by people who are not visually impaired, the way we behave is very important. We have to behave and act as the others do in order to be integrated into the mainstream school. We work with children on this issue before they go to the mainstream school. We work with them in order to understand that the visually impaired are always a minority. So, our rule is to be accepted by persons who are not visually impaired.

My role, and the role now of these children, is to make the people who are not impaired feel at ease with us. This comes from our behaviour, but also from education. That is important. It is a kind of fighting spirit. We have to prove that we also have competences from our impairments. We have to make the others feel at ease by explaining what we need and not expecting people to find out what we need. This is very important for inclusion and integration in mainstream schools.

To give you an example: when I am here in front of you I cannot see you. Yet I let you believe that I can see you, by moving my head from one side to the other side of the audience. One more element: how to be dressed. You know that in schools, adolescents are not always 'sympathetic' if you do not adapt to the look of your peers in the classroom.

Another key element: we must certainly train all the teachers in the world, but first of all we have to convince them. As soon as they are convinced about accepting a



person with a disability in a classroom, it will be a win-win situation. It will be an added value for the others to feel at ease with a person with a disability. For me, this is a project for all schools. When a pupil with a disability arrives at the school, she or he may be feeling alone, isolated from the other classmates. We have to inform all the people in the school, the teachers and all the pupils. When I go to schools, I go to the classrooms. I inform them: be careful, there is a pupil who is visually impaired; I explain how to feel at ease when we encounter her or him in the corridor or the canteen. It is very important to involve all the people in the school.

Frédéric Storme is a member of the European Commission's Disability Support Group.

He is founder and president of the 'I See' Foundation. He has a degree in Business Administration from the European University of Brussels.





## MESSAGES FROM RESEARCHERS



**Researchers' panel (from left to right): Per Skoglund, National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (Sweden); Susan McKenney, Twente University (Netherlands); Diane Richler, Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation, International Fellow, Human Rights Advisory Board member of the Open Society Foundations; Cor J. W. Meijer, Director of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education; Gerardo Echeita, Autonomous University of Madrid (Spain); Tom Parrish, American Institutes for Research (United States); Lani Florian, University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom)**



Five key messages were discussed during the conference. These were:

### **‘As early as possible’**

There is no doubt that the key message ‘As early as possible’ first of all concerns intervention at an early stage in a child’s life. However, it also covers many other relevant elements, such as intervening as soon as the need is detected, putting in place an early assessment, providing the required support as early as possible, and preparing and planning transition phases from one educational phase to the next and to employment.

### **‘Inclusive education benefits all’**

There is increasing recognition across Europe and more widely at international level that a move towards inclusive policy and practice in education is imperative. The debate about inclusion has, therefore, broadened from one that used to focus on relocating children described as having special educational needs to mainstream schools, to one that seeks to provide high-quality education – and consequent benefits – for all learners.

As more countries move towards a wider definition of inclusive education, diversity is recognised as ‘natural’ in any group of learners and inclusive education can be seen as a means of raising achievement through the presence (access to education) participation (quality of the learning experience) and achievement (learning processes and outcomes) of all learners.

### **‘Highly qualified professionals’**

‘Highly qualified professionals’ concerns issues of initial and in-service training, the profile, values and competence of teachers, effective approaches to recruitment, and attitudes, as well as networking and co-ordination among all professionals.

Appropriate initial and in-service training for teachers and other professionals is considered a key factor for successful inclusive practices.

### **‘Support systems and funding mechanisms’**

The key message on support systems and funding mechanisms encompasses all levels of learning and therefore touches upon various issues. Moreover, limiting the issue to the educational field alone would be insufficient. In the framework of the Agency’s work, it was highlighted that children and young people will not be



successful in their learning if their basic health, social and emotional needs are not met. This may require support for families and communities and will need services such as health and social services to collaborate and ensure a holistic approach.

### **‘Reliable data’**

There is widespread awareness that evidence-based policy making is critical for the long-term development of systems of inclusive education.

Policy makers, data collection experts and researchers are aware of the need for data collection at national level that not only meets the requirements of international policy guidelines, but also works within a shared approach so as to promote a synergy of efforts at national and international levels. Agency work has shown that there are calls for wide-ranging information to be available to policy makers and a variety of complementary approaches to data collection to be taken by different organisations at both national and European levels. However, while the need for such data is clear, the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing it in the best ways is far less clear.

Key European and international researchers were invited to contribute to and debate these five key messages. The main results of the debates are summarised below.





***We need to prioritise goals that enable meaningful, positive activities to support child development, and family involvement, leading to quality of life improvements that are essential for some, but beneficial for all. Doing so requires the alignment of research, practice and policy – worlds that interact with each other, but often fail to collaborate in mutually beneficial ways.***

***Susan McKenney, Open University of the Netherlands and University of Twente (Netherlands)***

We need to prioritise goals that enable meaningful, positive activities to support child development, and family involvement and choice in their child's development, leading to quality of life improvements that are essential for some, but beneficial for all. We must also focus on goals leading to social inclusion, which not only benefit the immediate family and child involved, but also enrich society.

We talked a lot about the need for a co-ordinated approach and about the different groups: we talked about research, practice and policy intersections. Very often, these worlds interact with each other, but fail to collaborate in mutually beneficial ways. There is a more give-and-take situation. We wondered about the different kinds of groups within research, policy and practice; they can also interact more than is currently the case. We mean education, health, psychology and social services. We recognised that in the different groups you have different levels. There is a lot to take into account when we talk about the need for co-ordination. It requires a kind of system perspective that recognises the multiple levels and maps the system.

We need to understand that early intervention, which was our focus, is an on-going cycle, influenced by many factors. If we want to exert positive pressure on the activities in that cycle, we need to understand the systems at play, the various actors and the things that drive their decisions and their behaviours. That means understanding their values, their reward systems and the cultures of their discipline and being able to design and implement and study interventions for all these diverse fields. It also means that one day, hopefully, we will see an economic and political culture that supports this.

If we want to innovate we need to know a lot about innovation and changes. We need to be able to see the context in which innovation is taking place: the layers and the connecting pieces. We need to understand the actors and look at elements that change themselves. We talked about change, not just being for change but productive goods. Different kinds of innovations have different characteristics. We need to understand the added value of the things we are working on and make that concrete. It is important to make the justification for the claims of things having



added value transparent. All these elements can help us, as can commitments and actions from the kinds of people we need to carry things forward.

We would like to make some recommendations for the future. The first has to do with documenting successful examples, particularly how things work. How does it work? How does it relate to all the factors and actors and contexts that are involved? We need to do it in a way that shows what quality is. We need to show that this is a reality and look at the economic side of things: what is the financial investment, the societal investment? It must be done in a way that uses sound, robust quality indicators and tools in order to show that the work is credible. Furthermore, it needs to be documented in a transparent way.

Finally, my personal recommendation has to do with finding mechanisms and policies that support integrated work by decision makers, practitioners and researchers to develop it and make it successful.

Susan McKenney is Associate Professor in the Learning and Cognition Group at the Centre for Learning Sciences and Technologies (CELSTEC), Open University of the Netherlands and in the Department of Instructional Technology in the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences at the University of Twente (Netherlands).





***Inclusion benefits all; inclusion is about you and me. Teachers have to meet a lot of demands. We need to talk about a transformative change from the very top and a collaborative attitude at all levels. We need schools as supportive systems.***

***Per Skoglund, Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools***

Inclusion is about you and me.

During the working session we discussed teachers a great deal. Teachers have to meet a lot of demands and that is often impossible. We need more refined organisation. We were talking about the need for a transformative change that is to be done from the very top, systematically. Decision makers and heads of municipalities need to become deeply involved in the idea of inclusion, deeply involved in the strategy to be followed. Classic top-down or bottom-up changes are not enough; what is needed is ‘top-involvement-process-leadership’.

We also discussed how to support principals in challenging situations. Principals need to understand, have clear ideas and build up a strategy to support teachers. The core issue involves organising the school, that is to say, creating new schools. It is not about the teachers, but about the schools and the system.

We need schools as supportive systems. This includes various aspects. We were talking about context awareness. This also includes the lack of interaction between law and implementation. Perhaps it is better to avoid using the word ‘implementation’. We should talk about organising. How do we organise something as complex as schools? Nobody really knows.

We also need a lot more conceptual clarity in order to speak to each other; in order not to get stuck with words. We need to lay out concepts and define the qualities of inclusion, compared to the qualities of something else.

Finally, we need a common knowledge of qualities that we can explain to parents and others. What kind of qualities do we offer by school? It is important to try to look for practice-based evidence because research-based evidence is not enough. We need to know how to make changes and how to get things done.

Per Skoglund is the Research and Development Co-ordinator at the Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools.

He studied Political Sciences and Communication Sciences at the Universities of Örebro and Gothenburg (Sweden).





***The great challenge of inclusive education needs ‘new’ teachers, prepared to be teachers for all their pupils, regardless of their personal, social or ethnic background, gender, abilities or disabilities, mother tongue, etc., and in order to value diversity as a rich resource in our society.***

***To achieve these goals a systemic reform of teacher education (recruitment, induction and continuous professional development, ways of teaching, course organisation, content and pedagogy, models of practice schools, etc.) is needed because highly qualified professionals are a key factor in this process.***

***In the ‘knowledge society’ in which we are living, making learning accessible to all (being inclusive) is the most important way to achieve equity and the opportunities to learn are widespread. Therefore, the idea of lifelong learning is important, addressed to all different actors involved in the learning process.***

***There is a big barrier to inclusive education: fear of change. Change is a process that needs to be monitored carefully. It needs some pressure to begin and needs to be supported by collaborative work from/with all involved and by strong ethical principles and inclusive values.***

***Gerardo Echeita, Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM)***

During the discussions, we reflected on inclusion from different perspectives.

We thought about a ‘society of knowledge and learning’. There are many ‘teachers’, in schools and universities, as well as those involved in business and in vocational training. In this sense, we have to expand our idea of the profile of competence for inclusive teachers to those groups.

This connects very well with the idea of initial and lifelong learning. It is very important not to limit our reflections only to initial teacher education. The idea of lifelong learning and involving other actors in the process – teachers, educators, people working in the municipalities – is very important. In some countries, the latter plays a very important role.

Our colleagues have recognised a major barrier to more inclusive schools and a more inclusive society: fear of change. The bigger the change, the bigger the fear, so we must review and put the Agency’s knowledge and expertise into practice when thinking and reflecting and learning how to cope with this fear. There is fear in the teacher education institutions, in the European community, in the ministry and in schools – both mainstream and special schools.

We have to know that change is a process and we need to monitor the process more carefully to know what is to be achieved in terms of inclusion. It is not sufficient to say we have here our laws, our big targets. We have to monitor all



related activities more closely. This could possibly be one of the Agency's main activities in the future. We need more pressure to change. An example of this was raised; the 'European School' here in Brussels must be an example of an inclusive school. At the moment, it is not such a good example.

We also need support. This support is closely related to the idea of collaboration at all levels: collaboration with schoolteachers and among schools, as well as collaboration among countries – the Agency has a big role to play here. We also reflected on the central role of parents in this process. Support is not just a question of money. Money is very important, but values are more important.

We have to think about the initial education of those who work in the field of law and advocacy. They are very important future change agents when it comes to defending the right to inclusion.

We have to promote the opportunities for young people with disabilities to get degrees or postgraduate qualifications that allow them to become teachers. Afterwards, it would be unacceptable for the administration to restrict this possibility, as our colleague Pablo from Spain mentioned in our group.

Gerardo Echeita is a senior lecturer in Developmental and Educational Psychology at the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM).





***Financing policies should be designed to support inclusive education that features the full provision of necessary related services and inter-sector collaboration. They should be based on educational needs and promote the provision of flexible, effective and efficient services. The accountability provisions associated with these systems should primarily focus on efficiency and results for pupils with special educational needs. It would be useful to further investigate and summarise the extant literature on the costs and benefits associated with inclusive education, as opposed to those of failing to include pupils.***

***Tom Parrish, American Institutes for Research (United States)***

Our discussion has been broad-ranging. We did not limit ourselves to support systems and funding mechanisms.

It is not because this is an unimportant topic. We also talked about programme provision and indicators of success. This was by design, as according to my experience, one of the biggest problems is when we discuss finance in isolation. Finance is an extremely powerful policy lever. We know from experience that it is going to affect programme provision and results. It is critical that we think about programme goals and policy priorities first, and then design funding mechanisms to support them.

Accountability is a vital component of financing. Traditionally, special needs accountability has focused on procedural and fiscal measures. However, the most important measures relate to outcomes for pupils with disabilities in terms of academic, social and emotional skills.

The Agency hosted a meeting in 2011 and came up with four requirements about finance. This was very helpful in shaping this presentation, because there is a lot to cover across 30 countries. These requirements included statements that financing should fully support inclusive education; be fully based on educational needs; facilitate flexible, effective and efficient responses; and fully support related services and necessary inter-sector collaboration.

In summary, finance policies must align with policy goals to ensure that they support their realisation. Effective provision is important and efficiency (i.e. cost-effectiveness) is a major consideration. It has been shown that inclusion can be realised by re-directing rather than expanding funding and that this move has the potential to enhance academic and social outcomes for pupils with special educational needs. However, inclusion alone is not enough. When we look at the data we see that, on average, inclusion facilitates these measures. However, we also find examples where the opposite occurs. When inclusion is done poorly, we do not see the desired results.



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I wish to close with a recommendation: it would be useful to further investigate and summarise the extant literature on the costs and benefits associated with inclusive education, as opposed to those of failing to include pupils with special educational needs in mainstream education.

Thomas Parrish is managing director of the Education Program in the San Mateo office of the American Institutes for Research (AIR).

He has directed numerous projects in education reform, evaluation, cost analysis and finance.





***Disability and inclusive education are different things and generating data about them requires different kinds of information be collected. With regard to disability, it might be more useful to collect functional rather than categorical data. There are also important questions about what data to collect that will help with monitoring the quality of educational provision, rather than collecting information about disability characteristics and types. It is necessary to identify priorities, and to start at a place where everybody can agree; to take small steps while keeping our ambition for better quality educational provision as a priority.***

***Lani Florian, University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom)***

We had a wide-ranging discussion about a number of issues to do with quality data and the need for clarity about the kinds of data that are collected.

I think there was general agreement about the need for accurate and reliable data with respect to disability and inclusive education. It is important to note that these are two different things, and knowing more about them will require us to collect different kinds of information. There is a danger sometimes that we use data collected about children to answer questions about inclusive education. It is important to examine what that means.

There are data issues at the pupil level. There are data issues at the system level. Having said that, we know that there are difficulties in generating comparable data. Reliable data in one country may not be comparable with the data collected in another country because there are different definitions and systems of disability classification in different countries.

The problem of different definitions has led some to argue for a common language and common definitions of disability. However, others argue for ‘inter-sectionality’ in developing approaches to collecting and using data – that is to recognise that all people belong to more than one category. A suggestion is that we might consider how to collect functional data that takes account of this; how we can put in place measures that include data on well-being, for example. That kind of data would help to answer some of the quality questions around inclusive education. The challenge for us is bringing together all these different forms of data in a coherent way.

There are conceptual issues that remain a challenge, as we have heard from some of the other colleagues participating in the discussion. We had a useful reminder of the quote from Einstein: ‘Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts’. This reminds us of the need for clarity about the crucial question – is it about disabled pupils or inclusive education? How can we collect the data we need and what are the limitations of statistical data in helping us to answer the questions we agree are important? We need to find and draw upon multiple





sources of information. The question is how to monitor education systems, rather than simply collecting disability statistics. We need tools for this and we need to take account of the voices of disabled people as well as their families in developing these tools.

To sum up our discussion: it is necessary to identify priorities that will help us to produce quality data that can become information that is useful for informing provision and practice. We should start at a place where everybody can agree. Small steps should be taken, but we should try to keep our ambition large. We have to recognise the realities of where we are, and that we are all at different places. However, at the same time we should be working to enhance our capacity to answer important questions about the outcomes of our efforts to improve practice and provision.

Lani Florian is Bell Chair of Education at the University of Edinburgh and visiting professor at the University of Vienna.

She was a teacher in schools and worked as a legislative assistant in the United States Senate.





***When the United Nations was created, human rights were seen as a key to achieving peace in the world. One of the key rights included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the right to education. Education is the key to creating the kind of society that we want to leave for our children and grandchildren. Hopefully this is a world where everyone is included. Teachers and families in Kenya said: children who learn together, learn to live together. This is one of the most powerful messages of inclusive education. We need to prepare teachers who can teach everyone and the best teachers will be able to teach everyone.***

***Diane Richler, Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation International Fellow***

I will not try to do a summary of the summaries. I will just give you some reactions to things that I heard today.

I would like to go back to underline one of the points that I made this morning: about human rights being the basis of the founding of the United Nations. Human rights were seen as a key to achieving peace in the world.

In the same way, education is the key to creating the kind of society that we want to leave for our children and grandchildren.

Hopefully this is a world where everyone is included. I have worked with a group in Kenya who said: children who learn together, learn to live together. This is one of the most powerful messages of inclusive education.

I had the rare privilege a couple of months ago of being at the opening of the Clinton Global Initiative meeting in New York, hosted by former President Clinton.

He spoke at the opening and was quite shaken because a young nurse who worked for the initiative had just died in the bombings in Kenya. He was talking about the risks people take when they try to defend human rights. He also spoke about how the world can counter terrorism. I think his analysis is instructive for us. He said that, to him, there are two groups of people in the world. One group is trying to promote what we have in common, while the other group is trying to promote the differences. I think we can really use that as a way of measuring school systems too: whether they are trying to promote what we have in common or trying to create this impression that there are differences within our communities. President Clinton's analysis was: if the emphasis is on our differences, we will all be losers. That is something to focus on.

A couple of final thoughts based on what I heard today. We know people have kept repeating how the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities presents a new paradigm for thinking about disability. It is not at the individual level, but the



interaction between the individual and barriers in society. I often heard words like ‘disorder’ when referring to people with disabilities. That brought me back to my university days, when we called differences ‘abnormal psychology’. The new paradigm rejects that notion. Difference is diversity – not abnormality or disorder. Similarly, rather than talking about pupils failing in education, we should consider that it is the school system failing.

The representative from the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities made a comment regarding persons with disabilities. It was about the fact that families often do not know very much about disabilities when a child with a disability is born. Somehow, families adapt, learn and figure out whether they need assistive technology. They figure out if they need other people to help. Good teachers can do the same thing. I have confidence in teachers: a good teacher can teach anyone. I believe in the value of training and in the fact that we need specialists. I also think that we need to prepare teachers who can teach everyone and the best teachers will be able to teach everyone.

I will end with a word about the Agency’s role because, to me, there is a real question as to what is the best way to lead. I am happy to see the Agency consistently being a leader in promoting inclusion. Someone that I respect very much taught me about leadership: it is important to be ahead, but not so far ahead that you are not pulling everyone else behind. That is one of the challenges that you face now. It is how to keep everybody facing the same direction. Keep following those people who are in front, but keep pulling along those people who are at the back and they will catch up.

Diane Richler is the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation International Fellow.

She is the immediate past chair of the International Disability Alliance and past president of Inclusion International.

She served as a consultant to the Inter-American-Development Bank, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

She is a member of the Human Rights Advisory Board of the Open Society Foundations.





## MESSAGES FROM DECISION MAKERS



**Policy panel (from left to right): Per Ch Gunnvall, Chair of the Agency; Pierre Mairesse, Directorate General for Education and Culture, European Commission; Tadeusz Sławecki, Secretary of State, Poland; Pascal Smet, Minister of Education, Belgium; Genoveita Krasauskiene, Vice Minister of Education, Lithuania; Gaëlle Chapelle, Cabinet of Marie-Martine Schyns, Minister of Education, Belgium, French Speaking Community; Cor J. W. Meijer, Director of the Agency**



***If we want to build an inclusive school, it is not only a question of focusing on pupils with special needs, but much more on the system, on a systemic approach. This is a policy that we have had for the past four years.***

***Gaëlle Chapelle, Cabinet of Minister Marie-Martine Schyns (Belgium, French Speaking Community)***

If we have to choose from the conference's five key messages, I would like to highlight the one 'Highly qualified professionals', and explain some policy measures we have been leading in recent years.

We have been training almost one thousand people – this means one person in each school – in order for them to become qualified on the topic of pedagogical adjustments for pupils with learning disabilities. The aim of this training is to provide each school with qualified professionals who are able to convince the rest of the team to open up the school to pupils with special needs. This training has been very successful and brought about a lot of changes in practices. The interesting thing is that the training is voluntary. The question of fear, which we discussed earlier today, is tackled to some extent by trying to put the emphasis on the people who are not afraid and who want to move forward.

The second conference key message I can highlight is: 'Inclusive education benefits all'. This means putting in place policy measures that will not only address pupils with special needs, but that will also become effective for them.

As we have heard at the conference, if we want to build an inclusive school, it is not only a question of focusing on pupils with special needs, but much more on the system, on a systemic approach. This is a policy that we have had for the past four years.

It is also important to improve co-ordination between researchers, practitioners and policy makers. This is being done via the development of a community of practice called 'Décolâge!' in kindergarten and primary schools. This community of practice tries to build a more differentiated pedagogy in mainstream schools.

Tools, practices, interactive platforms and pedagogical counselling are proposed to a school all together and always in a collaborative way. It is also a discussion about collaboration – to be able to build inclusive schools. Again, schools engage in the 'Décolâge!' dynamic only if they want to, so it is voluntary.

Today, 300 schools have engaged in this process. That represents one school out of every six in our system, which is not so bad.

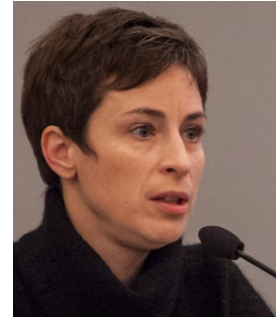


The Brussels-Wallonian Federation has submitted this policy measure to the innovative learning environments programme, led by the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), in order to receive expertise on pedagogical reforms so as to be able to move forward.

Ms Gaëlle Chapelle is a member of the Cabinet of Minister Marie-Martine Schyns, Ministry of Compulsory Education and Social Promotion of the French Community of Belgium.

She is also an invited professor at the University of Louvain.

She has completed studies in Education and Psychology at the University of Louvain.





***You might have heard this morning that we are on the brink of a parliamentary vote on a new law. Our educational system is one of the best in Europe, but also one of the most segregated. For a long period, since 1970, we have had a system of separate schools for learners with special needs, while all the other children go to mainstream schools.***

***Pascal Smet, Flemish Minister of Education, Youth, Equal Opportunities and Brussels Affairs (Belgium)***

You might have heard this morning that we are on the brink of a parliamentary vote on a new law. Our educational system is one of the best in Europe, but also one of the most segregated. For a long period, since 1970, we have had a system of separate schools for learners with special needs, while all the other children go to mainstream schools.

Of course, this situation is not only related to the children with special needs themselves, but also has to do with the mainstream school system. There is a tendency to refer children, after labelling them, to special schools and centres. We are now trying to change this situation, but it is not an easy task. Education systems are often reluctant to change. We have a good educational system and that is why people do not always understand why we want to change it. We are going to have this vote shortly. We will take a major step towards inclusive education. It is important to take the step, to make it clear to public opinion, but also to the parliament and to teachers.

We will not abolish our special schools. A certain group of learners needs protection in a certain environment. What we will do is to make inclusive education possible for learners who can follow the mainstream curriculum, as well as providing reasonable accommodations. Putting reasonable measures in place permits them to be involved in the mainstream system. This will be a major step forward. Today it is still a kind of favour a school gives to pupils. In the future it will be a right that can even be obtained through the court system.

The wonderful thing is that reasonable accommodation is an evolutionary concept. It is not something that is static. It can develop in the future. We are going to make a major step towards inclusive education. One of the factors for success is going step-by-step. And secondly, we recognise the difficulties for teachers. There is a lot of fear, also in the special schools. The people working there fear that teachers in the mainstream educational system will not have the competences needed to deal with children with special educational needs. At the same time, in the mainstream education system there is fear about not being able to cope with pupils with special needs. One frequently heard complaint is: 'We are not trained for that; we are



already under a lot of pressure with regular pupils and the change will add more problems’.

Therefore, 100 additional support persons will be made available to help teachers in mainstream schools to deal with these issues. It is also important to make clear that this is not a kind of budgetary economic measure. About 51,000 children attend the special education system, 16,000 of them out of more than 1 million in mainstream schools cost a lot. Sometimes people think that putting them in the mainstream system is for budgetary reasons. That is not the case. The money will be transferred from the special school system to the mainstream schools. It will stay in the educational system. Special teacher training is also a crucial issue. In the future we will change the teacher training programme too. Training programmes have to offer much more initial training to teach teachers to deal with children with special needs. A major change to the system is coming. I am aware that for some people it will be too little, too late. For other people it is too much, too soon. So, I think it is good. If everybody says something, you are moving in the right direction. It is important that we make this step and that we are able to change an education system that is segregated and exclusive in nature.

Mr Pascal Smet is the Flemish Minister for Education, Youth, Equal Opportunities and Brussels Affairs. He studied Law at the University of Antwerp.







***During our Presidency of the European Union, we have had some conferences about leadership in schools. I think it is very important to have the right leader in the school, who is mindful of all children.***

***Genoveita Krasauskiene, Vice-Minister of Education, in charge of General and Vocational Education (Lithuania)***

It is a great pleasure for me to be at this conference. It was very important for me to hear the ideas presented today. I was impressed by the two speakers who spoke on behalf of disabled people. They said they wanted one thing: they want us not to treat them differently from other people who do not have special needs.

They asked us to help parents and not to worry about them, but to help them to know what to do, they have to know who can help and support them and provide the right support.

They want to be in mainstream schools. They want to be in mainstream classes with other learners. They need to be in the school from the beginning, in the mainstream classes. It is a very good start for them to be integrated or included in society as a whole. I think it is a great job and a great task that we have in order to fulfil the things they have asked us to do.

I think that starting as early as possible is very important. The other thing is to provide the learners with special needs with qualified specialists and qualified teachers, as well as providing them with a qualified teaching process.

During our Presidency of the European Union in Lithuania, we have had some conferences about leadership in schools. I think it is very important to have the right leader in the school, who is mindful of all kinds of children and who is aware of all the kinds of needs that children might have. So, leadership is a very important key. The leader is the key player in solving this problem.

Regarding Lithuania, I think we have already done a lot. However, we still have to do much more in the future. Of course, we try to include pupils with special needs in the mainstream classes, but we have not yet fulfilled this task and we still have a lot to do.

I would like to present one of the kinds of support we are trying to provide for pupils with special needs and for the teachers who work with them.

We have three levels of support. The first level consists of child welfare commissions in schools. Teachers consult them on how to work in the school and in the classroom and how to work with families.



The other level is municipality level. We have special organisations in all municipalities. These are pedagogical psychological services which take care of schools. They also provide pupil assessment, consultation and support. They try to make schools move forward as much as they can.

Finally, the third level is the national centre for organising and co-ordinating support for pupils with special needs. The centre's main task is to participate, create and implement the strategies of the schools for all. I think we already have some practice in organising these models. It helps us to work better and to provide better teaching for pupils with special needs.

Ms Genoveita Krasauskiene is Vice-Minister of Education in charge of General and Vocational Education.

She studied Philology and English Language at Vilnius University and also received a Master's degree in Public Administration.





***The very first and most important problem is to overcome barriers that exist in society. We can have a perfect law, we can have enough money, but if there is no acceptance or awareness of inclusion's importance in society, our activities and actions will be ineffective.***

***Tadeusz Sławewski, Secretary of State Ministry of Education (Poland)***

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for the positive atmosphere during this conference.

What we have been doing in Poland was confirmed during this conference. I think that we face similar problems. In Poland we started by implementing the legal regulation and ratifying the Convention. Now we are working on the executive regulations in the Ministry of National Education.

The very first and most important problem is to overcome barriers that exist in society. We can have a perfect law, we can have enough money, but if there is no acceptance or awareness of inclusion's importance in society, our activities and actions will be ineffective.

There is also a need to overcome teachers' fears and concerns about dealing with pupils with disabilities.

In co-operation with the minister responsible for higher education, we introduced a law that stipulates an obligation to teach our future teachers skills and competences for working with pupils with disabilities. These regulations are now in place in our pedagogical universities all over Poland.

Another very important issue is to allocate funds to the schools and pupils that are really in need. Each local government in Poland that is responsible for running a school receives an education grant from the state budget. On top of this grant, we always add a specific sum allocated to children with disabilities. Unfortunately, this money is not always spent on organising provision for pupils with disabilities. Sometimes we allocate ten times more funds to multiple disabilities than to an average pupil in a mainstream class.

We would like to define a catalogue of services offered by schools. This will allow parents to know exactly what they can expect from a school and the local government if they have a child with a disability. It is also very important to provide opportunities to establish social dialogue. All stakeholders benefit when schools are supported by parents, so first of all we talk to parents' associations.



Another thing we try to do is to organise different competitions like sports games. It is important to show that pupils with disabilities have a variety of talents because it makes them feel adept.

Recently we organised mathematics and physics competitions in Warsaw. Competitors from Kazakhstan, the Czech Republic, Russia and Poland attended.

Another thing we have introduced this year was the change to regulations on school certificates. From this year on, if a child has followed a curriculum adapted to their needs, this is not indicated on the certificate.

Another very important issue is vocational education for pupils with disabilities. In the Ministry of National Education I am responsible for the provision of vocational education in Poland and I can assure you that this area is of great importance to us.

Just to sum up, it is extremely important to disseminate the Agency's recommendations among all member states.

I would like to thank all the Agency experts and the management board for your work in sharing your experience, projects and initiatives with other states.

Mr Tadeusz Sławewski is Secretary of State at the Ministry of Education in Poland.

He is a former member of the Polish Parliament.

He studied Agricultural Engineering at the University of Lublin and Chemistry and European Law at the Marie Curie Skłodowska University.





***We need to ensure that bridges are established between special schools and the rest of the system; this is a good investment. Today it is even more of a challenge: in the last two years, 16 member states have cut their budget for general education. We have to use European funding opportunities. There is a considerable amount of money for education under the structural funds. We need to reflect on the priorities in spending this money where special educational needs are concerned.***

***Pierre Mairesse, Directorate General for Education and Culture (European Commission), Director***

In Lithuania more than 12% of pupils are identified as having special needs. Other countries show a population of pupils with special needs of around 5 to 6%, while in Poland it is around 3%. The first matter I want to address is that we really have to think about the concept of special needs and ask ourselves the question: what is a child with special needs?

The second question relates to the difference between 'special' and 'mainstream' schools and, in particular, where a child should be enrolled. I am aware that children with severe impairments are enrolled in special schools. However it appears that, in some countries, young people are enrolled in such schools because they need personal attention and support, but to a lesser extent than those with severe impairments. The challenge is to identify which pupils should attend special schools and which pupils should follow mainstream education.

The third question is how best to help our children in the educational system: how to establish bridges between mainstream and special schools. If we decide to put a child with some special needs in mainstream education we need to support them. We need to coach them. Perhaps we need support from special schools incorporated into the mainstream education system.

Equally, we need to ensure that if a child is enrolled in a special school, bridges are established between these schools and the rest of the educational system. While we know that this is a good investment at the end of the day, we also know that it can be difficult and costly. Today it is even more of a challenge: in the last two years 16 member states have cut their budget for general education. So, as you can imagine, there is even less available now for schools with pupils with special needs.

This is my general reflection on the challenges we face. What can we do at the European level?

First of all, the European support to the Agency is essential in this context.



Secondly, we have to use European funding opportunities. We are currently defining the new priorities for structural funds. There is a considerable amount of money available for education and we need to reflect on the priorities in spending this money where special educational needs are concerned.

Thirdly, I would like to say a few words about the forthcoming Erasmus+ programme. This is a programme not only for the mobility of learners and teachers; it is also a programme for establishing strategic partnerships. It is an area in which we can establish strategic partnerships between schools, between vocational institutions, between countries, within civil society, with parents, with teachers and with business in order to deal with this issue. This idea of learning from research came from the research panel. We will use the Erasmus+ programme to financially support the Agency.

The research panel came up with the idea of learning not only from research, but also from experience. The Erasmus+ programme goes a step further in giving the opportunity to learn through practice. We are in the field of social experimentation. The idea is to experiment with ministries and stakeholders, with schools and with institutions. It is often the stakeholders who benefit from our programmes, but if we want to introduce change or influence national policies, we must involve the ministries in member states.

Finally, we firmly believe that the Agency is a useful and essential European tool which we need to continue to support. It is now time for the Agency to develop more specific support, advice and proposals for individual countries.

Mr Pierre Mairesse is Director at the Directorate General for Education and Culture in the European Commission.

He studied Engineering at the University of Lille (France) and Montreal (Canada) and is in charge of education for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth.





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## CONCLUSION

The International Conference achieved an important goal: to have an open debate among the key people involved as far as inclusive education is concerned. It is not easy to have true reflection and debate among practitioners, decision makers, researchers and end users. Some of the key issues at the core of the conference were: how to cope with differences; how to support learners, teachers and families; how to benefit from differences in education; how to implement the right measures; and how best to invest.

The first results presented in this document highlight clear messages from different perspectives and levels: practical, research and decision level. The Agency is preparing a report, which will present the results from the discussions in greater detail and include the full presentations from researchers involved in the conference.





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