

[INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES]

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT | 16 NOVEMBER 2016
14.00-16.00 | JÓZSEF ANTALL BUILDING - ROOM JAN6Q2

Organised by **Ádám KÓSA** MEP, Co-chair of the Disability Inter-Group
in co-operation with:

Helga **STEVENS** MEP, Co-chair of the Disability Inter-group,
Silvia **COSTA** MEP, Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education

and

the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

Seminar on

[INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES]

European Parliament | 16 November 2016

Sixty years ago, on a cold November day in 1956, Helen Keller delivered a remarkable speech on education. Even though there was an audience, she did not see or hear anybody in front of her. Because she was deaf-blind. A deaf-blind person who wrote 12 books on disability and education and was later awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, one of the United States' two highest civilian honours. On this specific day, she remarked that:

Civilization and justice demand that the exiles of the silent night who are teachable be rescued from soul-destroying isolation and morbid tendencies. Therefore I shall watch with thrilling interest your endeavors to start a new attitude in those you train to be eyes and ears to the loneliest of human beings on earth (delivered before Perkins School for the Blind, Boston, Massachusetts, 14 November 1956).

Education has come a long way since the time Helen Keller was strongly advocating against isolation and in favour of changing attitudes. All actors involved in education are aware of and support the positive changes taking place, but they are also conscious that there are still many gaps, needs and challenges.

Young people and their families play an essential role. They permanently remind professionals of their rights to be respected and to receive a quality education, as well as equity and their rights concerning their social and working lives. Respect, tolerance and mutual understanding are their key messages:

I believe that society needs to accept everyone, the way they are. Not only with their disability, but also with their gender, with their race, with their hobbies. I believe we are at a quite good level of tolerance. Nonetheless, there is still some work to do. The best instrument to fight against discrimination is tolerance. We need to raise awareness about the differences about us (Young participant at the European Hearing for young people with and without disabilities, October 2015).

The research and educational community in general support empowerment and learners' central role as an essential part of the learning process:

Without motivation, there is no push to learn; without engagement, there is no way to learn; and without voice, there is no authenticity in the learning (Toshalis and Nakkula, researchers, 2012).

The Paris Declaration, adopted in March 2015 by the European ministries of education, called for strengthening education's role in promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination. It acknowledged education's major role in tackling violent radicalisation and promoting inclusion and ownership of Europe's fundamental values in order to help children and young people become responsible, open-minded members of our diverse society. We need to be aware that disabilities will become more relevant as European society ages.

The European Union joined the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD – 2006) as a regional organisation in 2011. Article 24 of the Convention recognises the right of persons with disabilities to education, with a view to realising this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. States parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels of education. In addition, the UNCRPD Committee also adopted its 4th General Comment dealing with inclusive education this September.

All European countries are committed to working towards ensuring more inclusive education systems. They do so in different ways, depending on their past and current contexts and histories. Inclusive education systems are seen as a vital component with the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies that all countries align themselves with, both ethically and politically.

Inclusive education implies a systemic change in education involving all stakeholders: learners, their parents and families, education professionals, community representatives and decision-makers (European Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems, 2015).

A new element is now entering the picture: technology. This seminar organised in the European Parliament will provide some responses and guidelines from decision-makers and the technology industry to learners with disabilities and/or special needs as far as educational changes are concerned.

Today, with this conference as a historical turning point, the IT industry representatives (Apple, Microsoft, Samsung) that develop accessible and assistive technologies have also become important players in formulating inclusive education.

The different panels organised for this event will present the situation regarding inclusion from different perspectives:

- Progress and support at European and international levels
- How countries are implementing inclusive policies
- To which extent technology provides valuable technical support.

As Helen Keller said, several decades ago when technology did not play such an important role in our lives:

No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new heaven to the human spirit.

[PROGRAMME]

[13.30 – 14.00]

Arrival of participants

[14.00 – 14.40]

First panel

How European and International Policies are Supporting Inclusive Education

Moderator: MEP Ádám Kósa

Opening of the seminar by Ádám Kósa MEP

Keynote speaker: Tibor Navracsics, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

Silvia Costa MEP

Helga Stevens MEP

László G. Lovász, UNCRPD, member of the Committee

Yannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum

Per Ch Gunnvall, Chair of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive education

[14.40 – 15.20]

Second panel

Examples of Implementation of Inclusive Policies at National Level

Moderator: Cor J.W. Meijer, Director of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Raffaele Ciambrone, Ministry of Education, Italy

Tiina Kivirand, Ministry of Education, Estonia

Mary Hoey, Ministry of Education, Scotland

Questions

[15.20 – 15.55]

Third panel

How the Technology Industry Supports Inclusive Education

Moderator: László G. Lovász

Sarah Herrlinger, Senior Manager for Accessibility Policy, Apple

Hector Minto, Accessible Technology Senior expert, Microsoft

Wouter van Tol, Director of Sustainability and Citizenship, Samsung

Questions

[15.55]

Closing of the Seminar by Members of the European Parliament