



Evidence of the Link Between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion

Final Summary Report



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



EVIDENCE OF THE LINK BETWEEN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Final Summary Report



The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is an independent and self-governing organisation. The Agency is co-funded by the ministries of education in its member countries and by the European Commission via an operating grant within the European Union (EU) Erasmus+ education programme (2014-2020).



The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The views expressed by any individual in this document do not necessarily represent the official views of the Agency, its member countries or the Commission.

Editor: Simoni Symeonidou

Extracts from the document are permitted provided that a clear reference to the source is given. This report should be referenced as follows: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018. *Evidence of the Link Between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion: Final Summary Report*. (S. Symeonidou, ed.). Odense, Denmark

With a view to greater accessibility, this report is available in 25 languages and in accessible electronic format on the Agency's website: www.european-agency.org

ISBN: 978-87-7110-746-3 (Electronic)

ISBN 978-87-7110-745-6 (Printed)

© European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2018

Secretariat
Østre Stationsvej 33
DK-5000 Odense C Denmark
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20
secretariat@european-agency.org

Brussels Office
Rue Montoyer, 21
BE-1000 Brussels Belgium
Tel: +32 2 213 62 80
brussels.office@european-agency.org



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
FINDINGS	6
Education	7
Employment	8
Living in the community	9
KEY POLICY MESSAGES AND CONSIDERATIONS	10







INTRODUCTION

Academic literature frequently highlights the link between inclusive education and social inclusion as an important issue, within research exploring either inclusive education or social inclusion. Research examining the link between inclusive education and social inclusion also exists, although it is limited. This research is often conducted in disciplines other than inclusive education, such as sociology and psychology. This may prevent inclusive education stakeholders from being informed about and using research evidence for the benefit of people with disabilities.

In light of the above, a literature review was conducted to examine the link between inclusive education and the social inclusion of people with disabilities. In particular, two research questions guided the review:

- What is the link between inclusive education and social inclusion?
- What does current research say about inclusive education's potential as a tool for promoting social inclusion?

The review was concerned with both short-term (i.e. the period when children attend school) and long-term (i.e. when people with disabilities finish compulsory schooling) social inclusion. It focused on three areas – education, employment and living in the community – and sought to provide evidence from a dataset of studies to explain how inclusive education is linked with social inclusion. The background literature looks at inclusive education's impact upon social inclusion, by examining the areas of education, employment and living in the community. Reports published by international organisations, such as the United Nations, the European Union and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, and other organisations/networks also examine this.

What the review brings to the literature on inclusive education is a structured approach to examine a significant number of studies on the topic. Its main findings stem from a synthesis of research evidence. It sheds light on different aspects of the short-term and long-term social inclusion of people with disabilities in all three areas (education, employment and living in the community).

The review is expected to be useful to different education stakeholders and at different levels. In particular, a literature review demonstrating the evidence of inclusive



education's impact on social inclusion may be useful for policy-makers who wish to develop evidence-based policies in relation to inclusive education. At another level, the review is expected to contribute to the theory of inclusive education. It will do so by providing evidence that the link between inclusive education and social inclusion is relevant to the quality of inclusive education provision, transition structures and social policy (e.g. policies to support employment of people with disabilities, independent living policies, policies for accessibility in the built environment). The review also provides evidence to suggest further areas of research (especially in European countries).

This final summary report outlines the literature review's main findings and presents the key policy messages and considerations. The full literature review is available in print and in electronic format on the Agency's website.¹

FINDINGS

The review's findings suggest that there is a link between inclusive education and social inclusion in the areas of education, employment and living in the community. At the same time, other factors seem to promote or hinder social inclusion. These include the quality of inclusive practice, social policy, social structures and attitudes, individual life course, and so on. The research evidence presented in the review suggests that attending segregated settings minimises the opportunities for social inclusion both in the short term (while children with disabilities are at school) and the long term (after graduation from secondary education). Attending a special setting is correlated with poor academic and vocational qualifications, employment in sheltered workshops, financial dependence, fewer opportunities to live independently, and poor social networks after graduation. In this context, policy-makers could consider how to re-design the specialist provision that is available in many countries in order to support learning in inclusive education settings.

The literature review's main findings are summarised below. They are divided into three sub-sections: education, employment and living in the community.

¹ European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018. *Evidence of the Link Between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion: A Review of the Literature*. (S. Symeonidou, ed.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/evidence-literature-review



Education

The review's findings on the link between inclusive education and social inclusion in compulsory education and in higher education indicate that:

- **Inclusive education increases the opportunities for peer interactions and the formation of close friendships between learners with and without disabilities.**

Although social relationships are complex to measure, the social interactions taking place in inclusive settings are a prerequisite for the development of friendships, social and communication skills, support networks, a sense of belonging, and positive behavioural outcomes.

- **For social interactions and friendships to take place in inclusive settings, due consideration needs to be given to several elements that promote learners' participation (i.e. access, collaboration, recognition and acceptance).** Achieving the social inclusion of learners with disabilities in inclusive settings is about increasing participation in all areas, among all stakeholders (i.e. staff, learners and parents) and at all levels (i.e. school policy and practice, school culture). The social inclusion of learners with disabilities is not achieved when their participation is hindered because of negative attitudes towards disability and exclusionary school structures (e.g. limited accessibility, lack of flexibility, exemption from subjects that are believed to be 'difficult').

- **Learners with disabilities educated in inclusive settings may perform academically and socially better than learners educated in segregated settings.** Learners' academic and social achievement is promoted when truly inclusive policies and practices are in place, there is an inclusive school culture and teachers follow inclusive pedagogy.

- **Attending and receiving support within inclusive education settings increases the likelihood of enrolment in higher education.** The link between inclusive education and enrolment in higher education is dependent upon effective transition planning that begins from the secondary school and involves the community. A number of factors act as barriers to enrolment in higher education, for example: lack of money, inadequate help with applications, poor identification of needed accommodations, poor access to appropriate coursework, and low-quality transition plans.



Employment

The review's findings on the link between inclusive education and employment indicate that:

- **Attending an inclusive education setting is one of the factors that increase the likelihood of people with disabilities being employed.** Apart from education, employment opportunities for people with disabilities are influenced by a number of social factors, such as policy, local market, employment networks, employers' attitudes, and accessible employment structures.
- **The nature of the curriculum can either limit or increase opportunities for young people with disabilities to be employed.** Securing access in the curriculum leads to academic and vocational qualifications that increase employment opportunities. Forms of 'special' curriculum, adopted or designed exclusively for adolescents with disabilities, may limit employment opportunities.
- **High-quality transition programmes provided in secondary school may increase the likelihood of people with disabilities being employed.** Community-based transition programmes taking place in secondary schools are believed to be more effective for securing a job than school-based transition programmes. Transition programmes that are short and are implemented by specialist teachers without the involvement of mainstream class teachers limit opportunities for employment in the open labour market.
- **Being educated in an inclusive education setting can influence the type of employment (i.e. sheltered employment, supported employment, open employment and self-employment) of people with disabilities.** Being educated in a segregated setting is associated with securing employment in sheltered workshops (that arguably contributes to the isolation rather than the social inclusion of people with disabilities). Being educated in an inclusive setting leads to academic and vocational qualifications and skills that increase the likelihood of choosing other forms of employment, such as supported employment, open employment and self-employment.



Living in the community

For the purposes of the review, living in the community refers to independent living, being financially independent, having friendships and social networks, and participating in leisure activities. The review's findings on the link between inclusive education and living in the community indicate that:

- **Education and social welfare policies are two interlinked factors in achieving independent living.** Inclusive education is one of the factors that increase the opportunities for independent living. Poor education in the mainstream school, in combination with weak social welfare policies, decreases the likelihood of independent living.
- **Youngsters with disabilities attending inclusive education settings are more likely to be financially independent shortly after graduating from secondary education.** Inclusive education's impact on financial independence weakens as time from graduation increases because of a range of factors influencing a person's life course. This may lead to dependence on social security income.
- **Youngsters with disabilities attending segregated settings are less likely to have friendships and social networks in their adult life.** Over the years, the social networks of people with disabilities change due to individual preferences and different life course trajectories, and the negative impact of special classes is less evident.
- **Being educated in an inclusive setting is one of the factors that increase the opportunities for participation in leisure activities. Being educated in a segregated setting acts as a barrier to participation.** However, the participation of people with disabilities in leisure activities needs to be interpreted with caution, as sometimes leisure is equated with physical presence or therapy, and it does not lead to the people's satisfaction.



KEY POLICY MESSAGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

In light of the review's main findings, policy-makers could consider the development of evidence-based policies aiming to enhance the social inclusion of people with disabilities over their life course. This section presents the key policy messages and considerations stemming from the review.

- Apart from the European and international advocacy for moving towards inclusive education systems, the review provides policy-makers with research evidence on the positive impact of inclusive education on social inclusion. What's more, the review highlights that policies that view inclusive education as mere placement in the mainstream school hinder the participation of learners with disabilities, and thus do not lead to social inclusion. For inclusive education to have an impact on social inclusion, it is necessary to ensure, through policy and practice, that learners with disabilities participate on equal terms with learners without disabilities in all aspects of schooling (e.g. learning, playing, having access to all school areas and activities, etc.). Furthermore, policy, subsequent regulations and quality assurance standards need to make clear that, in inclusive education systems, both academic and social achievement are of interest.





- Policy-makers should consider how policy could best regulate the transitions from one system to another, and from one life period to another in order to maintain or increase social inclusion opportunities. For example, the review suggested that inclusive education increases the likelihood of enrolment in higher education. However, at the same time, other variables, such as lack of guidance and transition plans, may act as barriers. Similarly, the review suggested that inclusive education increases the likelihood of securing a paid job in the open labour market. Nevertheless, other factors, such as policy and inaccessible employment settings, act as barriers. In these and other cases, policy-makers need to consider how to ensure the investment made in inclusive education is appreciated by other policies affecting people with disabilities as they grow older.

- Another issue for consideration in relation to policy is how to prolong the positive impact of inclusive education. The review suggested that, although inclusive education has a positive effect on employment and financial independence shortly after graduation from secondary school, the impact weakens as time from graduation increases. It is argued that this is the outcome of different personal factors, such as a person's life trajectory, possible accidents and illness, family conditions, and so on. However, policy could consider how to further promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities through employment as they grow older and become an at-risk group.

- Policy-makers could consider how to re-design the specialist provision that is available in many countries in order to support learning in inclusive education settings. The research evidence presented in the review suggests that attending segregated settings minimises the opportunities for social inclusion both in the short term (while children with disabilities are at school) and the long term (after graduation from secondary education). Attending a special setting is correlated with poor academic and vocational qualifications, employment in sheltered workshops, financial dependence, fewer opportunities to live independently, and poor social networks after graduation.

Future research could further explore the experiences of learners throughout their school life in different contexts, school policy and practice, structures/programmes securing the transition from education to employment and living in the community. Such research would shed light on the variables that make social inclusion possible. Longitudinal studies are also important in addressing the link between inclusive education and social inclusion in all three areas (education, employment, and living in the community). Such studies could further highlight how inclusive education policy and other policies (e.g. social policy, employment policy) promote or hinder social inclusion in different contexts.



Secretariat:

Østre Stationsvej 33
DK-5000
Odense C
Denmark
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20
secretariat@european-agency.org

Brussels Office:

Rue Montoyer 21
BE-1000
Brussels
Belgium
Tel: +32 2 213 62 80
brussels.office@european-agency.org



www.european-agency.org