

Why we care about education

Inclusion Europe position paper on inclusive education, 2021

Living in your own place. Having friends. Making your own choices.
Being good at something.
Belonging.

We all share these ambitions. For ourselves. For others.
Parents have them for their children.
Teachers have them for their students.

School is where these ambitions begin to take shape.
It is where children learn to know what we think is important.
It is where children learn to do what prepares them for life and work.
It is where children learn to play and to be with others.

School is where the future of our children starts.

"School is the manufactory of humanity."¹

We need schools where **all students are together**.
Because they learn to work and to be with one another.

¹ Comenius

To understand and respect various personalities and attitudes.

To look beyond “categories” and “backgrounds”.

We need schools that are about **relationships, and skills for life and work.**

Because it is what students bring from school to their future.

They learn to find answers and solutions to everyday problems.

They find what they are good at and how they can contribute to others at work, and in the community.

We need schools where **teachers have the time and skills to support the special ways of learning each child can have.**

Because one size does not fit all. It never did.

A good teacher always finds ways to bring up the best in every student.

Helps them to prepare for the future, and to realise their potential.

“Inclusion at school is good for my daughter because it teaches her social skills. She can cope in normal, fast environment and in contact with other people. She knows what kind of situations can come up, including the bad ones, and she learns to deal with them.”²

² Mother of a daughter with Down Syndrome

<https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10117034229-168-hodin/220452801100906/obsah/787656-ridic-autobusu>

There is progress

Our movement was created a long time ago, when there was nothing, trying to find solutions. We put a lot of work into securing education for children with intellectual disabilities.

Since then, progress was made.

Every child has the right to education. There are strong laws to protect this right³.

There are inclusive education policies.

Wide range of tools and methodologies for children with disabilities exist.

There are many schools, where children with and without disabilities benefit from learning together.⁴

There is a wide range of research and studies documenting how school inclusion works.

There is collaboration with those in and outside the education system who help students move from one education level to another, and from education to work.

There are some people with intellectual disabilities working as teachers or researchers.

³ The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination on Education, The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education of UNESCO, Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the Agenda 2030, The Protocol number 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), The European Social Charter, The Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023, the 2020 case G.L. v Italy, The European Semester, The European Disability Strategy, the European Pillar of Social Rights

⁴ In **England**, the local education authority of Newham started in the 1980's reviewing its educational policies towards full inclusion of people with disabilities.

In **Portugal** policies towards inclusive education started in the 1980's and involved a long and broad process of consultation that resulted in the "Inclusive Education Law" of 2018.

In **Italy**, inclusive education is required by law with 0,03% of students with disabilities in segregated educational settings.

This isn't enough

Thousands of children with intellectual disabilities do **not get any education at all**. They and their families are left on their own.⁵

Countless children with intellectual disabilities **do not learn together** with their non-disabled friends and peers.

This applies especially to students with complex support needs.⁶

Segregated schooling breaks natural relations between children, leads to limited job opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, and puts extra burden on students, parents, and society.⁷

Inclusive schools exist and are funded as random “good practice” examples; support to extending their know-how to the whole system is lacking.

There are multiple struggles for inclusive education going on, without recognising their common cause and joining forces.

Inclusive education policies and practice are not taken seriously enough to be put in place in mainstream education.

The world of **education is changing**. There is more focus on learning inter-personal skills, on being flexible and ready to deal with situations and problems (as opposed to the traditional learning of facts and figures).⁸ This trend is only going to accelerate.⁹

As the world changes, we need to adapt the way we promote and advocate for proper education for all.

⁵ In **Belgium**, the number of students in segregated education has steadily grown during the last ten years. In primary education, the percentage of students in segregated education has grown from 4.9% in 2008-2009 to 5.2% in 2017-2018. The percentage of children with disabilities attending segregated schools in the Flemish part of Belgium is very high (between 75% to 85%) and around 1000 would be exempt from compulsory schooling with no education at all.

In **the Netherlands**, 6300 children are not in school at all.

In **Spain**, 46.3% of students with intellectual disabilities reported difficulties to follow online classes, mainly to understand the teacher's explanations and assignments. 58.8% received support to continue their distance learning, but this support was mostly coming from their families, and residually from education centres.

In **Malta**, occupational centres closed during the pandemic, and students with disabilities were left behind as they lost their support.

⁶ How to include pupils with complex support needs in mainstream education <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/how-to-include-pupils-with-complex-support-needs-at-school/>

⁷ Several hours to go to school: what solutions? 2018 https://www.rtbf.be/info/societe/detail_plusieurs-heures-pour-se-rendre-a-l-ecole-quelles-solutions?id=9859542

⁸ See Ken Robinson's Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education

⁹ Perttu Pölönen at Europe in Action conference 2021: "Computers can do many jobs currently done by people (sitting in the office, typing on a keyboard) and people can do jobs more suitable to humans." "Education needs to adapt: Knowledge expires."

So, let's...

Let's make the next step, and **leave segregated education to history**.

Let's provide every student with a proper education.

Let's promote and enable schools where:

- All students share the same classroom,
- Education methods are adapted to every student,
- Teachers are equipped with skills, time, tools, and support to deliver proper education to all students.

Let's move the focus from examples of "good practices" to structural change of the education system.¹⁰

Let's ensure **proper funding and resources** for schools to include all children, to ensure accessibility, and quality teaching.

Let's work together with **other victims of exclusion**.

Segregation in schools does not only affect children with intellectual disabilities, but also many other children, for example girls, children with other types of disabilities, from migrant backgrounds, Roma children.¹⁰

Let's ensure education is inclusive **throughout all stages of life and at every age**, to include life-long learning.

Let's make sure that changes to education work for students with intellectual disabilities too. This applies especially to online tools and other methods of **distance learning**.¹¹

¹⁰ The **European Roma Grassroots Organisations** fights against the segregation of Roma children in the school context.

Gender and income inequalities: one additional school year can increase a woman's earnings by 10% to 20%. Education is a vital tool in the prevention of poverty and social isolation.

¹¹ **"The support structures need to be there first," he adds, "and then everything else will fall in place."** - Tomás Murphy https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/parenting/how-the-digital-world-has-given-some-people-voices-and-taken-others-away-1.4594195?mode=amp&_twitter_impression=true

Let's make sure education is not only about learning, **but also about teaching and research**. People with intellectual disabilities can shape education, and the future of others, by being teachers, education professionals, researchers.

Let's encourage and **accompany "special schools"** to prepare and support students for transition to inclusive mainstream schools. They have accumulated important knowledge, skills, and experience.

Let's ensure **everyone is heard and plays a role** in shaping and delivering education for all students:

- People with intellectual disabilities and their representative organisations.
- The parents who fight to show the potential of their children.
- People who went through inclusive education and know the benefits it brought them.
- Teachers, both from mainstream and special education, who want the best for the students and have experience in education.
- Other groups who share our vision for inclusion and belonging.

Let's get rid of **outdated vocabulary**:

- Every student has the same need for education and every student has their "special" ways of learning.¹² There is no reason to brand people with intellectual disabilities' needs as "special".
- There is no need to call inclusive education "alternative". The word can have negative connotations, and does not match the approach where inclusive education is the norm.

Let's **not misuse some concepts**:

- Integration is not inclusion.
- Inclusive education is not when a student is placed in a mainstream classroom, but without appropriate support or adaptations to the environment to allow for his/her full participation.
- Inclusive education is not when a student with disabilities is placed in a school, without any means of support.

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsjnHCZOfg8>

Inclusive	Segregated
<p>Children with disabilities go to the local school, close to their home.</p> <p>Children with disabilities are part of the classroom.</p>	<p>Children with disabilities go to separate schools only for and with people with disabilities.</p> <p>Students with disabilities may go to the local school close to home, but in a different classroom.</p>
<p>Adaptations in physical school environment.</p> <p>Flexible curriculum allows adaptations in the teaching and learning methods for different abilities, learning styles and requirements (including teaching material in easy-to-read).</p> <p>Valuing the different skills that people should acquire in school. Individualised plans and support adapted to every child.</p>	<p>Students with disabilities in mainstream classes without any structural changes such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child in a wheelchair excluded from science class because the laboratory is not accessible, • providing a deaf child with a sign language interpreter, but no teachers or children fluent in sign language to interact • not adapting the material, evaluation and activities. <p>Low expectations and a lack of ambitions for students with intellectual disabilities.</p>
<p>Forming skills for future life and work.</p> <p>Establishing social relations and inter-personal skills.</p>	<p>Acquiring amount of knowledge about things (that will be mostly obsolete when student leaves school).</p>

Location

Quality of education

Focus

Charlie needed an education that would allow him to be himself with everyone else. He was going to be dependent on other human beings for the rest of his life. That's why I wanted him to know how to decide whom he can trust, and how to have others respect him. And he learned that.

Did he pass a test? No.

Did he get a degree? No.

Did he learn how to be himself? Absolutely.

And isn't that what most of us go to school for? To find out what is it that we like, who we are and how to interact with others?¹³

¹³ Sue Swenson - "[Inclusive education paves the way to understand human rights](https://inclusion-europe.eu/)" - Inclusion Europe (inclusion-europe.eu)



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**20 million people with intellectual disabilities and their families
from 39 European countries.**



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