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## **The Background of the Study**

Inclusive education for all is still a challenge and an unrealised dream for many people with disabilities and their families. Education is the key to inclusion, social justice and equal citizenship. Education is a decisive factor in the life of every human being. The ability to organise education in an inclusive way requires commitment to the idea of inclusion and to the richness of diversity.

Inclusive education stands for a process of inclusion of all children in the mainstream education system. Education for all is closely connected to working towards equal rights of people with disabilities and against their social exclusion. Education is key to a society that is ready to welcome a wide diversity of different gifts and abilities. An inclusive school system is the most effective tool for developing essential skills and building solidarity among young people with special needs and their peers. It also creates a pathway to being better prepared for all kinds of work opportunities.

In this debate, it is crucial to be clear about the differences between integration and inclusion. Integration is based on minorities joining the classroom without adapting the rules of the existing system: it is the task of the pupil, for example with intellectual disability, to change accordingly. Integration thus does not involve the whole range of necessary changes in the awareness and organization of ordinary schools. Real inclusion is about changing awareness and the organization of school systems and environments, focusing on the diversity of learning needs and capabilities. The right of *all* children to education – including children with intellectual disabilities – has been increasingly recognised at international, European and national levels. The general right to education has long been

recognised within international documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The European Social Charter also contains a positive right to education in Article 17. States should take “all appropriate and necessary measures” to provide children and young people with “a free primary and secondary education as well as to encourage regular attendance at school”. At European Union level, there are numerous non-binding statements on the education of children with



*Photo: Inclusion International*

disabilities, but no requirement for Member States to have inclusive education. Technically, Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam allows for appropriate action to combat discrimination on a range of grounds, including age and disability.

While the right of all children to education has gained widespread recognition, the right to inclusive education has been legally less well established.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) has opened a new chapter of legal regulations, policy and practice in inclusive education. Its Article 24 goes much further than the Convention’s predecessors in

requiring States to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels. Although no definition of inclusive education is given in the text of the Convention, the obligations to States Parties are rather clear:

- States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels.
- States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability.
- States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.
- States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided.
- States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education.
- States Parties shall ensure that effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.



*Photo: Inclusion International*

The present study provides some indications for answers to these questions as a basis for future work and campaigning by Inclusion Europe and its members.

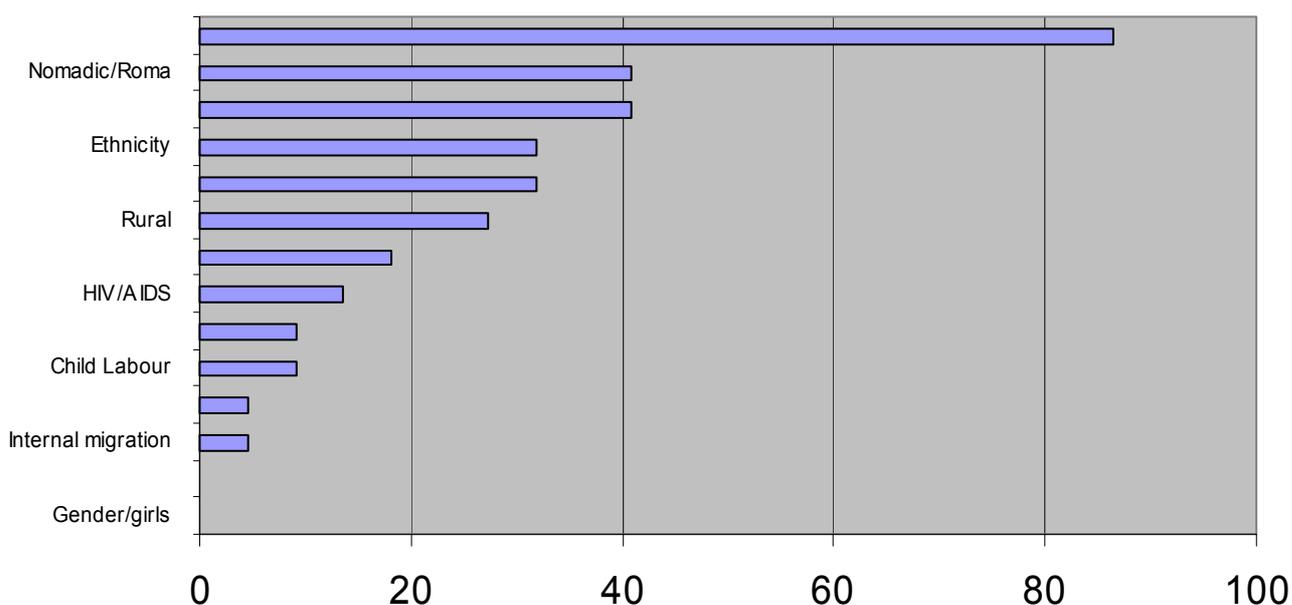
### **The Design of the Study**

The data analysed in this report originates from responses to a questionnaire to all members of Inclusion Europe in 2009. A total of 23 countries responded with detailed information: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The following pages provide a detailed analysis of the different sections of the questionnaire.

The objective of the present study was to evaluate, how far on Member States of the European Union are in their efforts to meet the above standards. Can European parents of children with intellectual disabilities really find educational opportunities in the mainstream system that provide the necessary effective individualized support measures in the communities where they live? Are schools, teachers and decision-makers really prepared to meet the challenge?

Attention has to be drawn to the fact that the data available at national level seems to be very incomplete and heterogeneous. While in all countries data is available about school enrolment ratios for different age groups, disaggregated information about the placement of pupils with disabilities is only available in about 50% of the responding countries. Even worse, for only two countries – Ireland and the Czech Republic – some more detailed information was available about schooling for pupils with intellectual disabilities.

## Reasons for Exclusion from Education



However, the general picture emerging from this study leads us to the conclusion that the educational mainstreaming and inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities will be significantly worse than the situation of children with other types of disabilities.

### The basic right to education

Not surprisingly, responses show that in all responding European countries, children have a right to education that is guaranteed by law. In some countries there are additional policy declarations. This right to education also covers children with disabilities, with the exception of Romania where no such right was reported.

The right of all children to education contrasts in some European states with the real number of children who complete at least primary school. Although the median value of 97% appears quite high, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Russia and Greece fall well short of that goal. For children with disabilities, this appears to be even worse: the median percentage of those completing primary school falls to 93% in the 11 countries for which information was available – in the other 12 countries, the data was not disaggregated by disability. The lowest reported percentage was 34% for Lithuania.

### The right to inclusive education

When asked if children with a disability have the right to attend their regular neighbourhood schools or the same school as their brothers and sisters, this was only the case in 81% of the responding countries. In Germany, Hungary, Russia and Switzerland there appears to be no such right.



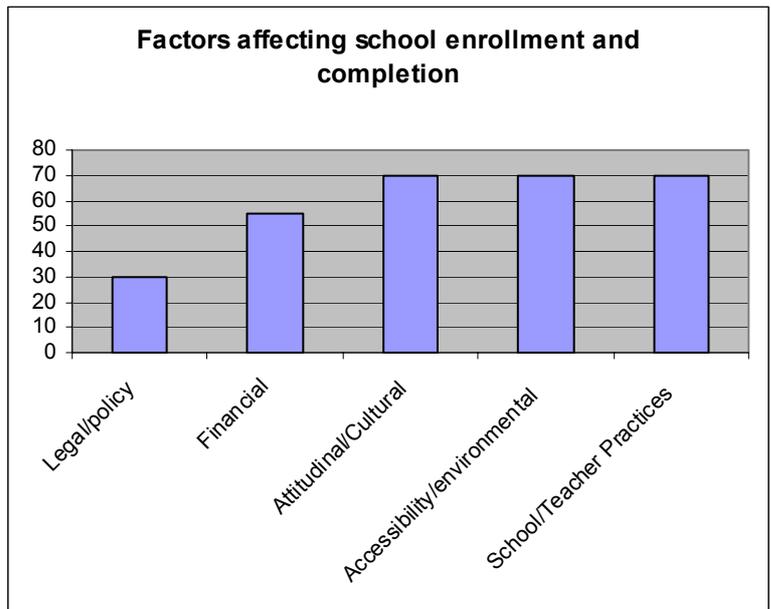
Photo: Inclusion International

Consequently, only 78% of the responding countries' governments have a political commitment to the inclusion of students with a disability in regular education and the concept of "inclusive education" was only clearly defined in national policies in 52% of cases.

If children with disabilities attend regular schools, they do so almost always with other children of the same age. There seems to be a different practice only in Romania. However, this inclusion seems to happen often without the necessary support. More than 30% of countries reported that in cases of inclusive education, the necessary support was not regularly provided.

On the contrary, when asked which groups of school age children were particularly vulnerable to exclusion from school, disability was cited by more than 80% of countries as making children especially vulnerable. This was more than twice the rate given for the two following reasons for exclusion, namely "Nomadic / Roma" and "Family income and location". Furthermore, it is easy to envisage that children who face two or more reasons for exclusion become even more vulnerable.

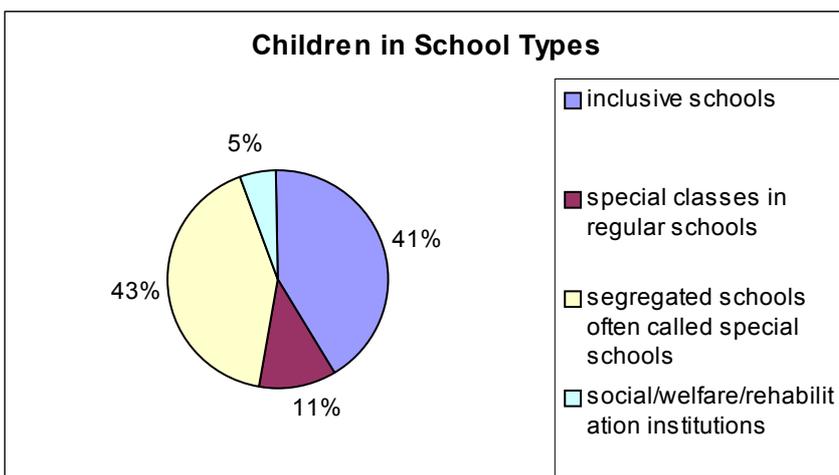
This exclusion leads to the fact that 57% of responding countries confirmed that there are school age children with a disability who do not attend educational institutions but who are cared for in special social, welfare, and/or health institutions. Unfortunately, a lack of



statistical data and information made it impossible to quantify the level of exclusion because of disability across a larger sample of countries.

However, three main factors stood out as affecting enrolment and completion by school age children with a disability in regular schools, namely attitudinal/cultural factors, accessibility and environmental factors, and school or teacher practices.

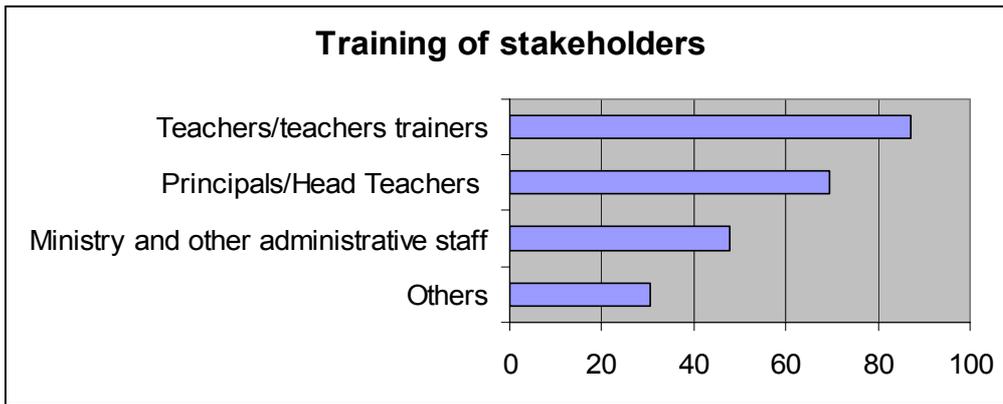
Of the children with a disability that attend educational programs, there seemed to be, however, a surprisingly high percentage placed in inclusive schools. Further research will be necessary to confirm this picture with more detailed data and information.



### The necessary support for successful inclusion in education

Training for different stakeholders on the provision of inclusive education is one important prerequisite for successfully implementing the concept of education for all. The chart above shows that many stakeholders receive some training on inclusion of children with disabilities in regular

### Training of stakeholders



schools in a country. Only 43 % of the respondents confirmed that most of the children with a disability attended regular schools (neighbourhood schools, schools attended by their siblings), with peers of their own age (who did not have a disability) and with the support

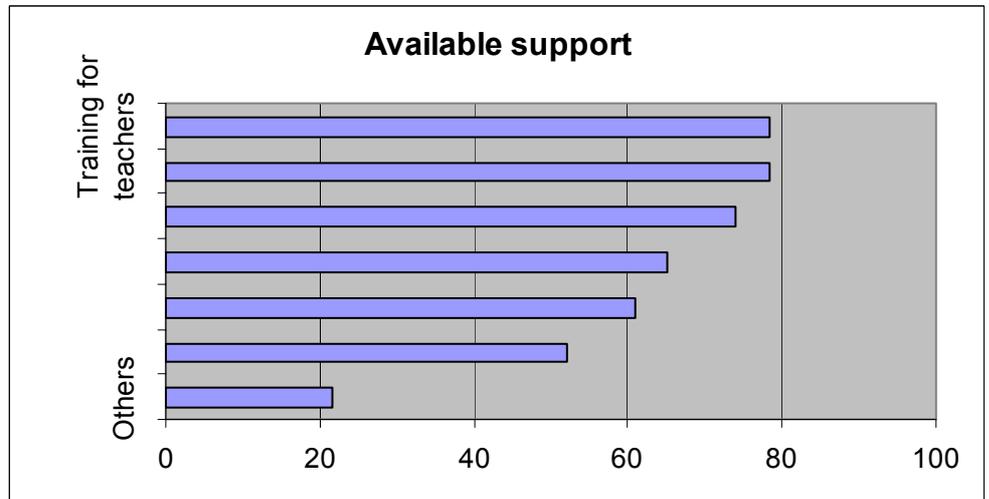
schools. However, it is surprising that front-line teachers do not receive this training in all countries and that an even larger number of head teachers do not receive it. The lack of training for policy decision-makers in more than 50% of the responding countries might provide some background reason for the slow pace of development of inclusive schools.

and accommodations they needed. Some of the necessary support seems to be provided by the special school system: in 78% of the responding countries there seems to be a structural support link between the special and mainstream school systems.

However, training does not seem to be available structurally for all teachers in a country, because in less than 20% of the responding countries the majority of teachers are prepared to address the needs of students with a disability at classroom level. Teachers seem to be better equipped to cater for general diversity in the classroom: in 55% of the responding countries, teachers plan and teach for diversity in the classroom, for example using a range of teaching approaches, instructional materials, classroom groupings, or multi-level instruction.

The mainstream school curriculum itself is still presented in some countries as rather rigid. In only 60% of the responding countries, it allowed for some adaptations to respond to the individual needs of students.

### Available support



When asked what local support is provided to schools to help them become more inclusive for school age children with a disability, additional support teachers and additional training for teachers were the most prevalent measures.

As the graphic shows, other measures also seem to be available in principle. However, the data available from the report cast doubt on the real availability of this support for all

To get some idea of the accessibility of the school system for pupils with different kinds of disabilities, respondents were asked to indicate if accommodations were available to support the inclusion of these children. In almost 50% of the responding countries there are still problems with the physical accessibility of schools, whereas a surprising 70% of the countries reported the availability of some accommodations for children with intellectual disabilities.

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## **The involvement of parents and families**

Almost 70% of the responding European countries reported that parents of children with a disability in principle have a choice of where their children get their education and how. This choice is, however, limited by the barriers to inclusive education identified above. Furthermore, more than 40% of the responding countries seemed not to involve and support parents of children with a disability as key partners to promote and progress equity and inclusion for their children. The availability of adequate support for parent associations to promote inclusive education was even lower: only 35% of the responding countries reported the availability of such support. The important resource of parents and family members to promote and advocate for inclusive education for all thus seems not to be used in the majority of countries.

## **Conclusions and Key Findings**

The data collected in the responding European countries has to be interpreted within the framework of the larger Global Study on inclusive education conducted in cooperation with Inclusion International. This Global Study draws on data from a wide range of countries, including profiles of legislation and policy, parent and teacher surveys, as well as focus groups in which participants shared many examples. As in other parts of the world covered by the Global Study, three key findings can be identified that characterize the present state of inclusive education also in Europe.

### **Inclusive Education Works, But Success Remains Ad Hoc**

The evidence gathered through this study confirms the findings of other research on inclusive education: Inclusive education works,

even for children with more complex or severe disabilities. This is demonstrated by many local examples, but is also subject to a number of conditions. All children can learn and develop in mainstream schools if

- schools welcome diversity;
- children are supported in school according to their individual needs and strengths;
- teachers are supported to teach to diversity; and if
- parents have high expectations for their children and become active.

Previous research has found that for inclusive education to be successful, inputs and efforts are required at three levels – the micro (classroom, school and local community),



*Photo: Inclusion International*

mezzo (education system), and macro (policy, legislation).

This study could identify some examples of good practice at each of these levels. However, there are only a few instances where classrooms and schools, communities, education systems, and macro planning and policy work together to make inclusive education a realistic option for all children with disabilities.



Photo: Inclusion International

Thus, the data and information collected by this study does not provide a homogeneous clear picture of the situation in Europe.

It appears rather that many countries have made some attempts to make their mainstream education systems more inclusive, but without achieving the necessary level of support to make inclusive education available to all children on their territory. Where there is success it is usually 'ad hoc', often achieved only by the dedication of a teacher or head teacher to make inclusion possible, and often without resources or support from the education system. The result is that only a minority of children with intellectual disabilities are included in regular education with the support they need.

Children with disabilities remain especially vulnerable to exclusion from education at all levels. This systemic failure is consigning people with intellectual disabilities to a lifetime of social exclusion. Local and/or regional examples of good practice demonstrate that inclusive education is possible and achievable in the specific national context, but it is clearly not a realistic option for the majority for children and young people with intellectual disabilities.

Further studies and research will be necessary to monitor the development of this situation in light of the demands of Article 24 of the UN

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Statistically reliable comparative studies will, however, depend on the Member States' collection of statistical data that provides a greater level of differentiation, for example by type of disability or educational institution.

## **A Growing Commitment to Inclusive Education**

Many European countries have passed or are going to pass new education legislation on children with disabilities, although there is considerable diversity regarding the support for fully inclusive education. Official policy tends to be pro-inclusion for children with disabilities, especially in those countries that have already ratified the UN Convention. Countries differ, however, in the extent of separate special educational provision. For example, Italy promotes a fully inclusive system, while France and Germany have a considerable network of special schools.

The divisions between mainstream and special schools are becoming less distinct in several countries, with specialist classes being located within mainstream settings and special schools being changed into resource centres for mainstream teaching. European countries differ considerably in their categorization (or not) of children with disabilities, the implications of such categorization for assessment, subsequent rights to support, and educational paths.



Photo: Inclusion International

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The various sources of data analysed for this study thus indicate that there is growing commitment to inclusive education at all levels.

Findings from parent and teacher surveys, while not comprehensive samples, indicate a solid base of commitment to inclusion of children with disabilities with their peers in regular classrooms. National data suggests that in over 60% of the responding countries there is a legislative and/or policy commitment to education of children with disabilities in regular education. In 50% of them, inclusive education is clearly defined in national or state-level policies for education.

Our review of secondary sources confirms our findings – whether from international and donor agencies or teachers themselves. The review of UNESCO’s Global Monitoring Reports points to increasing focus and recognition of the commitments to and value of inclusive education.



Photo: Inclusion International

## Addressing Systemic Barriers

In the framework of the analysis of responses, it is crucial to identify and address the systemic barriers that presently hinder further progress towards inclusive education for all children in the EU Member States. Together with Inclusion International, we could identify eight main barriers that seem to be prevalent in preventing further progress:

### 1. ***The lack of political leadership and accountability***

There is little, if any, political direction in most countries to make inclusive education a systemic response to the educational needs of all children.

### 2. ***Invisible children: not registered, not identified, not included***

Our review of demographic sources suggests conflicting estimates, due to a lack of definitions, research and statistics, leading to insufficient educational planning and policies.

### 3. ***Unsupported families: the vicious cycle of disability, poverty and educational exclusion***

Lack of access to education is one of the key factors that result in people with disabilities being denied opportunities later in life in education, training, jobs and decent incomes.

### 4. ***Lack of training, leadership, knowledge and support for teachers***

There is evidence of growing commitment to inclusive education among teachers in all European countries. However, they lack the teacher training, skills, classroom support, curriculum materials, leadership, and opportunities for teacher-to-teacher learning that make inclusive classrooms work.

### 5. ***Too little networking and mobilization of existing knowledge and experiences***

From the consultations for this study it was obvious that there is a large body of existing knowledge and experience on how to make inclusive education work in practice. However, many respondents indicated a lack of availability of and access to these resources for those who need them in practice.

**6. A lack of public awareness and negative attitudes**

Despite what appears to be growing support for those most directly engaged and affected by inclusive education – parents, teachers, governments, international and donor agencies – there remains a concerning and persistent lack of support among the general public; many other parents still seem to believe that children with disabilities do not belong in regular schools and that their presence would defeat learning opportunities for others.



*Photo: Inclusion International*

**7. Physical barriers, lack of transportation and school-based support**

In addition to negative public and community attitudes, our study found that inaccessible schools (both facilities themselves and lack of transportation to school), and a lack of school-based practices and supports for inclusion were the major obstacles to including children with intellectual disability and other types of disability.

**8. Systemic failure: the missing links of partnerships, mandated responsibility, policy, planning, financing, implementation and monitoring**

The obstacles outlined here are most often treated as isolated issues which are addressed by separate and often uncoordinated policies and actions. In only a few instances is inclusive education a focus and responsibility for national or state-level policy, planning and investment.

### Policy Recommendations

In all responding European countries, there seems to be ground on which to build a systemic response to the exclusion of children, young people and adults with intellectual and other disabilities from inclusive education and learning opportunities. There are examples, there is knowledge and there is growing commitment. This is reinforced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

To achieve full implementation of the provisions of its Article 24, Inclusion Europe and its members propose the following key actions to be taken by States Parties and to be supported by exchange, information and coordination measures of the European Commission:

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## **KEY ACTION 1**

### **Comprehensive educational planning and resource coordination as a systemic approach to the implementation of CRPD Article 24.**

Article 24 guarantees the right of children with disabilities to education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. This requires systemic planning and an approach that mitigates and structurally addresses the shortcomings identified above. All stakeholders concerned must be involved in order to achieve full implementation of Article 24 that is meaningful for all children with and without intellectual disabilities.

## **KEY ACTION 2**

### **Parallel special and regular school systems have to merge into one common inclusive school system**

The parallel co-existence of two complete school systems is expensive and preserves segregation, especially of students with intellectual and severe disabilities, even in countries where inclusive school laws are in place. When common education for all students is recognized as a value for all students (e.g. by making use of the methodology and didactical skills and the experience with diversity of special education teachers), inclusive education is no longer a

task concerning mainly social politicians, but for all policy-makers in the educational sector.

## **KEY ACTION 3**

### **The basis for inclusive education is inclusive teacher training**

In order to prepare teachers from the very beginning for inclusive educational settings, common obligatory study entry modules are required for both "special" and "regular" teachers. In the long run there should be no distinction anymore between teachers trained for "special" and for "regular" pupils until bachelor-level, although a specialisation at master-degree level should be still possible, for topics that might be related to disabilities. In addition teachers should receive training on team-teaching.

## **KEY ACTION 4**

### **Adequate support in the classroom is crucial for high-quality inclusive education**

Teachers need to make full use of all of their resources and to focus on their core capacities in order to provide the best education possible for their students both on an individual level and on a social-interactive group level. Therefore teachers have to be supported by resource and methodology centres providing advice, material and assistance in the classroom.



## **KEY ACTION 5**

### **Parent's involvement should be structurally enabled**

Parents of children with a disability are experts in many aspects of their children's lives and are usually interested in their children being part of mainstream society. Thus they are often natural promoters of inclusive education. This important role should be strengthened by giving parents the right to participate in important decisions on student, classroom, school and policy level.