



# SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES



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## TOOLKIT FOR A DEMOCRATIC AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

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# Introduction

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## Diversity and discrimination

The Council of Europe actively supports the integration of respect for diversity and the fight against discrimination in education through comprehensive strategies aimed at fostering human rights, democratic citizenship and inclusive education. Central to its efforts is the Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) programme, which embeds democratic values and human rights principles into educational systems. This initiative is supported by the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, providing educators with guidelines to develop learners' competences of respect, tolerance and cultural awareness, essential for active participation in democratic life. Additionally, the Council of Europe addresses educational segregation and supports vulnerable groups such as Roma children, LGBTQ+ learners, migrants and refugees, advocating policies that create welcoming environments for all learners. It also assists in refining national educational laws to align with European standards on non-discrimination and inclusion. Through targeted campaigns, awareness initiatives like the No Hate Speech Movement and comprehensive training programmes, the Council of Europe ensures that educational environments across Europe not only teach but actively promote social cohesion, respect for diversity and the elimination of discrimination, ensuring that education systems are truly inclusive of all societal groups. The Council of Europe also promotes capacity building to help education systems and schools successfully manage diverse learner populations in inclusive classrooms. All stakeholders, including learners themselves, need to be enabled to actively participate in democratic life, promote intercultural communication, value human dignity and understand different perspectives.

Managing diversity also requires managing a wide variety of opinions, needs, cultures, languages and values. The Council of Europe has addressed these challenges as part of its broader mission to promote human rights, democratic citizenship and social cohesion across the member states. Different dimensions of diversity are referenced across its frameworks and programmes, including cultural diversity, ethnic or racial diversity, linguistic diversity, religious diversity and gender diversity. The Council of Europe advocates inclusive education policies that ensure all learners, regardless of their background or abilities, can access quality education without discrimination. The appreciation of the benefits of diversity in school life and the classroom is crucial for the development of democratic societies. Schools should not only accommodate but also celebrate diversity in all its forms. The Council of Europe views inclusion and diversity as foundational elements that contribute to peace, stability and democracy. Promoting inclusive education helps to ensure that every learner has the opportunity to learn in an environment that respects their individuality while also preparing them to participate actively and responsibly in a pluralistic world.

## Focus on disability

Disability is often understood as one of the many dimensions of diversity, but there are key differences between "disability" compared, for example, to "gender" or "ethnicity", differences which also highlight the merits of focusing on disability discrimination and exclusion. While "gender" or "ethnicity" are rather stable characteristics of a person, "disability" is the result of the interaction between impairments or functional limitations of a person and their environment, including societal attitudes, physical obstacles and systemic structures that prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. A relational definition of disability emphasises that disability is not solely a characteristic of an individual but is significantly shaped by the relationship between a person's physical, cognitive or sensory attributes and the societal environment in which they live. In other words, environments like schools or classrooms have a part in creating disabilities. The Council of Europe promotes a view of disability that acknowledges the critical role of societal structures and attitudes in either enabling or disabling individuals, which is

fundamental to the relational perspective. By framing disability through the lens of interactions between the individual and their environment, this definition shifts the focus from individual impairments to societal structures, attitudes and policies that create barriers for people with disabilities. The relational definition of disability enriches the understanding of discrimination by highlighting how societal structures and attitudes, rather than individual deficiencies, often underpin exclusionary practices. This framework advocates a proactive approach to designing and implementing inclusive systems that respect and accommodate all people, fundamentally aiming to reduce discrimination by transforming society's approach to disability.

Focusing on disability in the context of inclusive education and tackling discrimination stems from multiple compelling reasons. Historically, children with disabilities faced significant exclusion and discrimination, marking them as one of the earliest groups recognised as needing specific adaptation and support within educational systems. Most countries have well-established legislation, support systems and specialist professionals to respond to discrimination based on disability. However, the allocation of additional resources to assist children with disabilities sometimes paradoxically leads to further discrimination, presenting a complex challenge to achieving equity. The adoption of a human rights-based approach, exemplified by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), offers a robust framework not only for addressing the needs of disabled children but also for understanding and supporting other vulnerable groups. This approach, alongside established principles of justice and non-discrimination, highlights the importance of fostering a welcoming and safe environment for all learners, particularly those at heightened risk of discrimination.

Also, disability intersects with other dimensions of diversity. The Council of Europe recognises the importance of intersectionality – the concept that various forms of inequality and discrimination (such as those based on “race”, gender, disability and other identities) often combine and overlap, particularly in the context of human rights and social inclusion (Council of Europe 2017a).<sup>1</sup> This understanding is integral to its approach to combating discrimination and promoting equality across all dimensions of diversity. Intersectionality in the context of disability involves understanding how various social identities and factors, such as “race”, gender, socio-economic status and more, intersect and compound to create unique experiences of discrimination as well as privilege for individuals with disabilities. Disability and intersectionality highlight the interconnected nature of social identities and how overlapping factors can compound the experiences of discrimination and exclusion for individuals with disabilities. Intersectionality recognises that people with disabilities are not a homogeneous group and that their experiences are shaped by multiple layers of identity, creating unique challenges and opportunities.

Learners in vulnerable situations, such as those in marginalised situations or facing socio-economic challenges, are sometimes mistakenly labelled as disabled due to biases or misinterpretations of their behaviour or academic performance. This mislabelling can lead to stigmatisation, inappropriate educational placements and missed opportunities to address the root causes of their struggles, such as trauma, language barriers or lack of resources. Recognising the distinction between disability and vulnerability is essential to providing the right support and providing equitable educational opportunities.

Deaf people are part of a linguistic minority and a group facing disabilities. To ensure their right to education, advocating respect for and integration of sign language into regular education is essential. Deaf learners face unique forms of discrimination in educational settings, primarily due to communication barriers and a lack of resources tailored to their needs. The absence of sign language interpreters or teachers skilled in sign language can limit their access to the curriculum and impede meaningful participation in classroom discussions. Additionally, misunderstandings about deaf culture can lead to social isolation and a sense of alienation, as their cultural identity and language preferences are not adequately recognised or integrated into the school environment. The Council of Europe advocates recognising deaf individuals as a linguistic and cultural minority, emphasising the importance of incorporating sign language and deaf culture into educational frameworks to promote inclusivity and equity (Council of Europe 2022a).

Inclusive school culture is a prerequisite for welcoming students with disabilities, including those with more severe impairments. A school culture that emphasises inclusivity and accessibility ensures that

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1. Since all human beings belong to the same species, the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) rejects theories based on the existence of different “races”. However, ECRI uses this term in order to ensure that those persons who are generally and erroneously perceived as belonging to “another race” are not excluded from the protection provided for by the legislation. The term “race” is used with quote marks to signal its problematic nature.

physical spaces, resources and instructional methods accommodate all students, creating an environment where students with disabilities can thrive academically and socially. Attitudes and expectations within this culture play a critical role; supportive and respectful attitudes from teachers and peers encourage high expectations and promote the engagement and development of students with disabilities. Additionally, comprehensive policies and practices that enforce anti-discrimination, support reasonable accommodations to specific needs and advocate for universal design in learning reflect a commitment to these students' success. Furthermore, a culture that values professional development in inclusive education equips teachers with the necessary tools to meet a range of different needs effectively. Ultimately, a positive school culture that promotes understanding and co-operation among students encourages social inclusion, reducing isolation and enhancing the overall school experience for students with disabilities.

### **Problem-solving approach to managing diversity with a focus on disability**

Including children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms while at the same time avoiding direct and indirect discrimination raises unique challenges compared to addressing other dimensions of diversity, such as age, gender or ethnic or linguistic background. Teachers and school leaders are confronted with conflicting requirements that need to be addressed and balanced, like balancing resource allocation, meeting diverse educational needs, adhering to policies and guidelines or managing the expectations of the different stakeholder groups. There is no specific single strategy that schools can adopt or teachers can implement in their classrooms to address the challenges of ensuring inclusive, high-quality and non-discriminatory education to children with disabilities. Therefore, a focus on "disability" serves as a good example for the complexities of addressing discrimination and exclusion. It requires a coherent multi-level approach, combined with a systematic problem-solving process engaging all stakeholders from the beginning.

The Council of Europe's Tool to upgrade teacher education practices for inclusive education (Council of Europe 2015a) is designed to enhance teacher professionalism and support the implementation of inclusive education across a range of educational settings. Developed under the European Union/Council of Europe Joint Project Regional Support for Inclusive Education in South-East Europe, this tool serves multiple stakeholders, including individual educators, schools and teacher training institutions. The tool aims to upgrade teacher education practices for inclusive education and can be used as an overall framework to understand how to transform practices.

The tool incorporates the problem-solving cycle as a foundational approach to addressing challenges to creating inclusive educational environments. This cycle involves identifying issues, analysing their root causes, implementing solutions and evaluating their impact. By embedding the problem-solving cycle, the tool ensures that teacher education programmes are not only responsive to existing challenges but also proactive in fostering environments where all learners feel valued and supported. This aligns with the Council of Europe's vision for equitable and democratic education systems. It includes the following steps: problem identification, needs assessment, goals and vision, strategies and methods (plan), implementation, evaluation and feedback as an exemplary use of the problem-solving cycle. In addition, a framework for inclusive practices, which can also be used as a self-reflection tool for teachers to see whether they are inclusive practitioners, is included. The framework focuses on practices, facilitates dialogue, for example between schools and teacher educators, helps identify the need for capacity building in education systems, for example by encouraging self-reflection to identify the learning needs of teachers. As such, the framework can be used as a procedure for school-based planning and programming to tackling discrimination.

The problem-solving cycle is used as an underlying structure to introduce the different tools that can be used to combat discrimination and the exclusion of students in vulnerable situations and especially of students with disabilities. It starts with understanding issues – carrying out a situation analysis – and being equipped with the tools for a situation analysis, followed by visions that could guide change processes and strategies to prevent disability discrimination and exclusion. It is a guide to transforming practices to create inclusive education, providing a framework and a step-by-step guide, based on the Tool to upgrade teacher education practices for inclusive education (Council of Europe 2015a).



# Understanding the issues related to disability discrimination

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## Discrimination and exclusion in the context of disability

Ensuring non-discrimination and equality of rights for learners with disabilities requires a comprehensive approach involving and affecting all stakeholders and all levels of the education system. Addressing the diversity of abilities, functional limitations, talents and behaviour patterns without discrimination touches a wide range of issues in all spheres of teaching and learning that need to be analysed, understood and addressed. The interplay between diverse educational and curricular needs, resource and service allocation, legal requirements, educational standards and stakeholder expectations is complex and sometimes contradictory.

In most countries, specific legal frameworks mandate accommodations for learners with disabilities, some placing a legal obligation on institutions to provide individualised education plans (IEPs) and the necessary accessibility adaptations. These legal requirements, while ensuring rights are upheld, also present challenges in their practical implementation due to potential conflicts with inclusive policies that aim for total inclusion without any segregation.

There are also emotional, social and cultural considerations to be considered. The stigma associated with disabilities can lead to social isolation and impact students' self-esteem and mental health, necessitating an educational environment that supports not only academic but also emotional well-being. Teachers face the challenge of integrating students with diverse abilities into mainstream classrooms, which often requires ongoing support from a broader team, including special education professionals, therapists and families. Schools also have to take the unique linguistic and cultural needs of deaf students into account.

Systemic issues persist in the form of insufficient resources, inadequate teacher training and curriculum rigidity, all of which hinder the effective inclusion of students with disabilities. Many schools still lack accessible facilities, and standardised assessments may not accurately reflect the abilities of students with disabilities, affecting their academic progression and future opportunities. Furthermore, lowered expectations and insufficient adherence to policies compound these challenges, leading to pervasive exclusion and underachievement.

Addressing these complex issues involves more than just policy changes or awareness training; it requires concrete changes in teaching practices and curriculum design to ensure that students with disabilities have equal opportunities to learn and succeed. This entails acknowledging the intersectionality of discrimination and respecting diversity as integral components of an inclusive educational framework. The following domains need to be considered and analysed to help identify and address discrimination based on disability in schools.

- 1. Lack of accessible facilities.** Many educational institutions still lack proper accessibility in terms of physical structures, such as classrooms, libraries, restrooms and playgrounds, which are not equipped with the necessary modifications like ramps, lifts or adaptive equipment. This physical barrier directly excludes students with disabilities from fully participating in school activities.
- 2. Inadequate resources and support services.** Schools often do not have sufficient resources such as assistive technologies, specialised learning materials or adequately trained support staff. This lack of resources can hinder the academic progress of students with disabilities and restrict their access to a comprehensive education.

3. **Insufficient teacher training.** Many teachers receive limited training on how to work with students who have disabilities. This lack of training can lead to ineffective teaching practices, which do not meet the diverse needs of these students, potentially exacerbating feelings of exclusion and underachievement.
4. **Curriculum rigidity.** The curriculum in many schools is not designed to be flexible or inclusive, which can exclude students with disabilities from fully engaging with the content. Without adaptations or modifications, the curriculum may not be accessible to all students, particularly those with learning, intellectual or physical disabilities.
5. **Social isolation and bullying.** Students with disabilities are at a higher risk of being socially isolated and bullied by their peers. This social exclusion can have profound emotional and psychological effects, further impeding their educational experience and personal development.
6. **Lowered expectations.** There is often a pervasive issue of lowered expectations by educators and administrative staff towards students with disabilities. This attitude can limit the opportunities these students are given to excel and can impact their motivation and self-esteem.
7. **Legal and policy non-compliance.** Despite existing laws and policies designed to prevent discrimination and promote inclusion, schools may fail to fully implement these measures due to lack of awareness, resources or commitment. This non-compliance can lead to systemic discrimination and exclusion.
8. **Assessment and evaluation challenges.** Standardised testing and evaluation methods may not always be adaptable or fair to students with disabilities, potentially misrepresenting their abilities and achievements. This can affect their grades, progression and even future educational opportunities.

### Taking a situational approach to understanding disability

Historically, approaches to disability have been dominated by the medical model, which focuses on an individual's impairments as problems to be fixed. This model often leads to segregated educational practices that isolate learners with disabilities and perpetuate stereotypes about their capabilities. In contrast, the social model of disability shifts the focus to the societal and environmental barriers that restrict participation. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) endorses a bio-psycho-social model of disability. This model combines multiple perspectives to understand and address disability: it recognises the biological aspects of disabilities, the individual's psychological condition and the social context in which they live. The CRPD's model shifts focus from a purely medical perspective of disability to one that considers the social barriers and environmental factors that contribute to the experience of disability. This approach emphasises that disability arises from the interaction between a person's health condition and the multiple barriers they may encounter in their environment, advocating societal changes to remove these barriers to improve the lives of disabled individuals. The Council of Europe recognises the significance of the CRPD and has integrated its principles into its own strategic frameworks and policies. If disability is not a stable phenomenon and needs to be understood as the result of the interaction between a person's functional limitations and the environment, it is important to focus on situations when children with disabilities are discriminated against or excluded. A situational approach helps to understand that disabilities can disappear if barriers in a specific life situation are removed. For example, if deaf students are provided with a sign language interpreter, communication barriers in inclusive classrooms disappear.

Adopting a relational and situational approach to understanding disability provides a new understanding of the fact that the impact of institutional policies, school practices, community norms and individual characteristics can significantly differ, depending on the characteristics of the child and family, the attitudes of professionals and peers or the quality of the relationship between teachers and specialists, creating unique and complex dynamics that affect students' learning, participation and well-being. A situational approach ensures that interventions are tailored to the specific needs and challenges faced by students with disabilities, promoting the adaptation of strategies to the evolving conditions and contexts of each school. By focusing on transforming environments and systems rather than "fixing" individuals, this approach leads to more equitable and inclusive educational environments. It highlights the diversity within disability and promotes a more just educational system that values all learners equally. This nuanced understanding aids policy makers to draw up precise, informed policies that enhance educational outcomes and ensure compliance with human rights principles. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), provides a framework

for conceptualising disability in this way, emphasising a holistic, contextual understanding. Using the ICF helps to understand the challenges faced by learners with disabilities, including deaf learners, to accessing education, participating in learning environments and overcoming barriers to learning.

In conclusion, there is no simple approach to assessing the varied and interconnected sources of discrimination unless the specific situation of a learner is taken into account. For example, deaf learners face unique challenges and opportunities in educational settings, stemming from their communication needs, cultural identity and often limited access to inclusive resources. Unlike other disabilities, deafness is closely tied to language and communication barriers, which can impact a student's ability to access information, participate fully in classroom discussions and engage with peers. Many deaf learners use sign language as their primary mode of communication, which requires schools to provide qualified interpreters, sign language-friendly materials and teachers trained in deaf education to ensure equal learning opportunities. Additionally, deaf learners often experience social isolation if their unique needs are not understood or supported by their peers and educators. Beyond accessibility, deafness is also a cultural identity for many, connected to a vibrant deaf community with its own languages and traditions. Recognising and respecting this cultural identity within schools not only enriches diversity but also fosters a more inclusive environment where deaf learners can thrive academically and socially. Educational institutions must balance accessibility, cultural recognition and tailored support to fully meet the needs of deaf learners, aligning with the principles of the CRPD. The Council of Europe has a website on disability and disabilism (Council of Europe 2025), highlighting the importance of the CRPD and the ICF and explaining the position of the Council of Europe's rights-based approach.



# Tools for situation analysis

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## Policy analysis tool

Designing a policy analysis tool focused on inclusive education and discrimination against learners with disabilities involves creating a comprehensive framework that evaluates existing policies, identifies gaps and suggests improvements. As part of the joint programme Regional Support for Inclusive Education, the Inclusive PolicyNet helped to encourage policy makers to consider incorporating inclusive education approaches into their policies and systems based on the experiences and best practices from a pilot school (Council of Europe 2015b). The following tool can help policy makers to better understand the situation of learners in vulnerable situations, especially students with disabilities and special needs, and to identify priorities.

### Definition of objectives

Define clear objectives for the analysis, such as: assessing the compliance of educational policies with international standards like the CRPD; identifying discriminatory practices and barriers in the education system; evaluating the effectiveness of support measures for learners with disabilities.

### Development of key domains

Establish key domains for analysis that are critical to inclusive education, as follows.

- ▶ **Legislation and policy compliance:** review of existing laws and policies to ensure they align with the CRPD and other relevant conventions.
- ▶ **Accessibility:** assessment of physical, digital and curriculum accessibility in schools.
- ▶ **Support services:** evaluation of the availability and quality of support services, including resources for teachers and support staff.
- ▶ **Awareness and training:** analyse initiatives for training educators in inclusive practices and disability awareness.
- ▶ **Participation and engagement:** investigate the extent to which learners with disabilities and their families are involved in decision-making processes.

### Creation of indicators

For each domain, develop specific indicators that will be used to measure and assess policies. Examples include the following.

- ▶ **Compliance indicator:** the extent to which national education laws incorporate CRPD principles.
- ▶ **Accessibility indicator:** the availability of accessible educational materials and environments.
- ▶ **Support services indicator:** the ratio of special education professionals to learners.
- ▶ **Training indicator:** the percentage of teachers trained in inclusive education practices annually.
- ▶ **Engagement indicator:** mechanisms for feedback from learners with disabilities and their families.

## Data-collection methods

Outline the methods for data collection.

- ▶ **Document analysis:** review of policy documents, laws and guidelines.
- ▶ **Surveys and interviews:** conduct surveys or interviews with stakeholders such as educators, learners, parents and policy makers.
- ▶ **Observations:** on-site visits to schools to observe the implementation of policies and practices.

## Analysis framework

Create a matrix or grid to record findings against each indicator for systematic analysis: each cell in the grid corresponds to an indicator within a domain for a particular region or school type. Include sections for notes on best practices, areas for improvement and recommendations.

## Reporting and recommendations

Formulate a reporting structure that summarises key findings and trends across all domains; highlights exemplary practices and major areas of concern; provides actionable recommendations based on identified gaps.

## Review and update mechanism

Establish a process for periodic review and updating of the analysis tool to incorporate changes in international norms and national policies; refine indicators and methods based on previous rounds of analysis; ensure ongoing relevance and accuracy in tracking progress towards inclusive education.

Such a tool could be piloted in a range of educational settings, from urban to rural schools, to gather a range of data on the inclusivity of education systems. Results from this pilot project could then inform national or regional educational reform initiatives aimed at reducing discrimination and enhancing the educational experience for students with disabilities. By following these steps, the designed policy analysis tool will provide a robust mechanism for evaluating and advancing inclusive education policies, with a specific focus on the needs and rights of learners with disabilities. As a general framework for policy analysis, within the project Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education developed an Analysis Framework for Mapping Inclusive Education Policies, which supports an examination of quality in inclusive education for policy makers and aligns recommendations with international conventions such as the CRPD (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2018). These projects and tools are critical for promoting systematic changes and enhancing educational practices to better include and support learners with disabilities.

## Assessing the preparedness and specific needs of schools

“How inclusive are our schools?” was one of the key questions asked by the Inclusive SchoolNet (Council of Europe 2015c). Similarly, the questions of preparedness and specific needs of schools were addressed in the project INCLUDE, where a needs assessment was conducted for upper secondary education (Council of Europe 2022b). The following needs assessment is designed to evaluate the preparedness and specific needs of educational institutions at various levels to effectively accommodate students with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. Such an assessment could be part of an overarching plan to enhance the capacity of educational systems to provide accessible and quality education, thereby meeting the needs of students with SEN and disabilities.

**Objectives:** to assess the current situation of inclusion and support for students with SEN and disabilities across a range of educational institutions. Identify specific institutional needs to better support these students. Develop actionable recommendations for educational authorities to facilitate capacity building towards improved inclusivity and support.

**Beneficiaries:** students with SEN and disabilities, educational institutions (including primary, secondary and vocational schools), educators and administrators, educational authorities at various governmental levels.

**Assessment criteria:** criteria for this assessment are measurable, evidence-based and designed for systematic evaluation of: awareness and acceptance of SEN and disability needs; institutional commitment to inclusivity; accessibility of facilities and resources; leadership in inclusive education initiatives; educator knowledge and skills regarding SEN; availability of specialised resources and support services; environment conducive to learning for all learners; curriculum differentiation and teaching adaptability; community engagement, including learner and parental participation.

**Methods:** a mixed-methods approach is used, combining quantitative and qualitative instruments such as online questionnaires for educators and students to gather broad-based data and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders such as school principals, educational officials and other relevant personnel.

**Data collection and analysis:** data collection involves online tools to maximise reach and efficiency, with in-person interviews used selectively to deepen insights into specific areas. Institutions participating in the assessment are selected to represent a diverse array of educational settings, ensuring findings are broadly applicable.

**Interviews and questionnaires:** structured online surveys to assess widespread perceptions and experiences among teachers and students; semi-structured interviews with institutional leaders to explore in-depth challenges and best practices; interviews with parents to obtain additional perspectives on the support needs and experiences of students with SEN.

**Conclusion and next steps:** the findings from this needs assessment will guide strategic planning and interventions by educational authorities to strengthen support structures and inclusive practices within the educational system. This initiative is aimed at fostering equitable educational opportunities and enhancing the integration of learners with SEN and disabilities across all educational levels.

## Tool for mapping inclusive education training programmes

The methodology used for mapping different training programmes focuses on an activity-based approach that can be generalised to map any curriculum across various educational settings. The methodology was developed and applied within the Regional Support for Inclusive Education Joint Programme of the Council of Europe and the European Union (Council of Europe 2017b). The activity aimed to map existing quality inclusive education training programmes within the region, as a first step towards upgrading to innovative modules and programmes to be implemented across the region. The main tasks included identifying quality training programmes, collecting data relevant for the mapping process and presenting these data to facilitate their future upgrading and implementation.

To develop and implement a tool similar to the one used in the TeacherNet initiative (Council of Europe 2017c) for assessing and enhancing teacher education for inclusive education, the following step-by-step instructions based on the methodology of the project could be used.

**Objective setting:** define the purpose of the mapping exercise, such as identifying gaps, assessing quality or preparing for updates to the curriculum.

**Conceptual framework:** adopt a framework to guide the mapping. This involves viewing the curriculum as a dynamic interaction of various elements like subject matter, educational tools, participants and outcomes within a specific educational context.

**Data collection:** engage in field visits, online surveys and interviews with key stakeholders such as curriculum developers, teachers and administrators. Collect data on the curriculum components, teaching methods, educational tools and the intended outcomes of the curriculum.

**Mapping process:** map out the interactions between the curriculum components.

- ▶ **Subject:** Who is delivering the curriculum?
- ▶ **Tools:** What educational materials and methods are used?
- ▶ **Objective:** What competences or learning outcomes are targeted?
- ▶ **Rules:** What regulations or standards guide the curriculum?

- ▶ **Community:** Who are the stakeholders involved (e.g. educators, students, educational authorities)?
- ▶ **Division of labour:** How are responsibilities distributed among the participants?
- ▶ **Outcome:** What are the expected educational results?

**Analysis:** analyse the collected data to understand how well the curriculum components interact and align with the educational goals. Identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement in the curriculum.

**Validation and feedback:** conduct workshops or focus groups with stakeholders to validate the findings and gather additional insights. Refine the curriculum mapping based on feedback.

**Reporting:** compile the findings into a comprehensive report that outlines the current state of the curriculum, provides an analysis of its effectiveness and offers recommendations for future development.

**Implementation:** based on the mapping and subsequent analyses, develop strategies for curriculum enhancement or development. Plan for the implementation of recommended changes and prepare for ongoing evaluation.

This generalised methodology allows for a thorough examination of any curriculum by understanding its components and the dynamics of how it functions within the educational environment, leading to informed decisions about curriculum development and enhancement.

# Vision of disability inclusion in the context of diverse schools

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**U**nderstanding and implementing inclusive education in the context of disability is not just about compliance with laws or the adaptation of physical spaces – it is about cultivating a culture of acceptance, respect and high expectations for all learners. It is a dynamic and continuous process aimed at ensuring that all children can benefit from their educational experiences in a supportive and nurturing environment. The Council of Europe encourages its member states to provide education that fosters a sense of belonging and actively includes all learners in quality educational practices. This involves supporting diverse educational needs to ensure that no one is excluded or marginalised from accessing education because of disabilities or other differences. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines inclusive education as a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It advocates a strategic approach where general education systems adapt to include children with varied needs and backgrounds, rather than making learners adapt to pre-existing structures. The goal is to enable all learners to achieve their potential in an inclusive environment.

The vision of an inclusive education system is incorporated into the Council of Europe's Education Strategy 2024-2030 (Council of Europe 2023d). The strategy is based on three priority pillars: renewing the democratic and civic mission of education; enhancing the social responsibility and responsiveness of education; and advancing education through a human rights-based digital transformation. Pillar two aims specifically at enhancing the social dimension of education by promoting inclusion, equity and diversity across all education levels. The five underpinning principles are the inclusion and participation of all learners, flexible learning environments, adaptable curricula and study programmes, development opportunities for education professionals and participatory education governance.

## **Inclusion and participation of all learners**

Access to education for learners with disabilities goes beyond physical accessibility. While an accessible infrastructure, such as ramps and lifts, is critical, access also includes having appropriate learning materials, assistive technologies and adapted curricula. Without these measures, many learners with disabilities are excluded from fully engaging in classroom activities, assessments and extracurricular opportunities. The CRPD highlights the importance of creating inclusive environments where learners with disabilities can learn alongside their peers in mainstream schools, rather than being segregated into specialised institutions.

Participation is another critical dimension. Learners with disabilities often face social exclusion, bullying and low expectations from teachers and peers, which hinder their ability to actively participate in school life. True participation means not only being physically present but also being included in all aspects of education – academic, social and extracurricular. The CRPD emphasises the need to foster environments where learners with disabilities are empowered to express their views and contribute to decisions affecting their education, promoting a sense of belonging and agency.

Achieving equitable outcomes for learners with disabilities requires addressing the disparities that arise from systemic discrimination. Without inclusive policies and practices, these learners are often left behind in terms of academic progress and overall achievement. Inclusive education systems focus on personalised learning approaches, IEPs and adequate support to ensure that learners with disabilities can reach their potential. Achievement in this context is not limited to academic success but also encompasses personal growth, social skills and preparation for meaningful participation in society.

Social inclusion – beyond academic success, inclusive education also focuses on the social integration of learners with disabilities. This involves fostering an accepting school culture, encouraging friendships and promoting interaction among all learners through group activities and collaborative learning projects.

## Flexible curriculum and learning environments

### A curriculum for all

A prerequisite for the successful inclusion of diverse learner populations is a competence-based curriculum that focuses on teaching the child rather than teaching the curriculum content. Most countries have by now implemented competence-based curricula to allow for more flexibility. A curriculum for all is therefore an important vision that countries and schools should aim to achieve.

### Curricular modifications and support services

Teachers in inclusive classrooms often use a variety of teaching methods to cater to a wide range of learning needs. This might include modified assignments, the use of assistive technology or the integration of special education services within the classroom. The aim is to ensure that learners with disabilities receive personalised support that aligns with the general education curriculum.

### Inclusive learning environments

Understanding inclusive education in the context of disability involves recognising and implementing educational strategies that accommodate learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms alongside their peers. The goal is to create a learning environment where every student, regardless of their abilities, can participate fully, receive appropriate support and achieve their potential. Inclusive education ensures that school buildings, classrooms and other facilities are physically accessible to learners with disabilities. This includes features like ramps, lifts and accessible restrooms, as well as accessible transportation services to and from school.

### Universal design for learning (UDL)

This is a framework for designing educational environments that accommodate individual learning differences. UDL proposes that curriculum and instruction should be accessible and challenging to all learners and it emphasises flexible approaches that can be adjusted for each learner's strengths and needs.

## Participatory education governance

Discrimination against learners with disabilities is a complex issue rooted in systemic, attitudinal and structural barriers that limit their access to education, participation in school activities and ability to achieve their full potential. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted in 2006, provides a critical framework for addressing these challenges. It emphasises that education systems must transition from exclusionary practices to fully inclusive models, ensuring that learners with disabilities enjoy their right to education on an equal basis with others. The CRPD mandates the removal of barriers and the provision of reasonable accommodation to guarantee equitable access and meaningful participation for all learners.

Parent and community participation is a key issue in supporting inclusion in schools. The success of creating inclusive education as a key to establishing inclusive societies depends on agreement among all relevant partners on a common vision. The following needs have been identified by the inclusive education policy mapping (Council of Europe 2014) as part of the project Regional Support for Inclusive Education: to harmonise the context of inclusive education at beneficiary level in accordance with international conventions and building consensus around the concepts of inclusive and quality education, including defining the role of special schools in an inclusive education system; to develop a policy framework promoted and enforced through concrete results-oriented budgeted action plans – results should show clearly what needs to be achieved; to develop monitoring systems to track how progress and achievement will be measured, including ways to measure the impact of inclusive and quality education; to continue mobilising public opinion on the right to education for everybody; to support local capacity building to promote development towards inclusive education; to develop school- and community-based mechanisms to identify children who are not in school and find ways to help them enter school and remain there; to help teachers to understand their role in education and that of inclusion of diversity in the classroom.

Inclusive education requires a collaborative approach, where special education teachers, general educators, therapists and support staff work together to plan and implement educational strategies that benefit all learners. In addition, successful inclusive education programmes actively involve parents and guardians in their children's education process. Schools may provide resources and support to families of children with disabilities and engage with local communities to foster broader acceptance and support. This requires the necessary communication and collaboration skills as addressed in the project "INCLUDE – Building capacity for inclusion in education" (Council of Europe 2023a).

### **Development opportunities for education professionals**

Effective inclusive education requires that mainstream teachers are trained in special education techniques and are aware of various disabilities and their implications for learning. Ongoing professional development helps teachers adapt their teaching strategies to meet the needs of all learners.

The "INCLUDE – Building capacity for inclusion in education" project aimed to improve access to quality education for students from disadvantaged groups in pre-primary, primary and secondary education and, more specifically, the capacity of the Kosovo<sup>2\*</sup> education system to improve participation and support services for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children and for children with special needs in pre-primary, primary and secondary education.

The modules "Disability and inclusive education" and "Enabling learning for all", developed within the "INCLUDE" project, as well as the Tool to upgrade teacher education practices for inclusive education, developed within an earlier project, are based on the Profile of Inclusive Teachers developed by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, which provides a useful vision of the competences that teachers require to become professionals able to manage diverse classrooms.

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2. \*All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.



# Strategies to prevent disability discrimination and exclusion

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This is a collection of ideas from different resources that can be used by school leaders, teachers and teacher educators to make schools more inclusive and more effective in managing diversity. They include some background documents about key concepts and issues, instruments useful for the assessment of the situation in the school and for engaging with colleagues in a sustainable and democratic school development process, as well as suggestions for educational activities that can be used with learners of various ages or with fellow teachers. These resources should be seen not as recipes to reproduce but as a source of inspiration for the production of locally adapted materials based on experience and on the needs identified in schools.

## Comprehensive guide for schools and teachers

A comprehensive guide for schools and teachers on how to include and support learners with SEN and disabilities in mainstream upper secondary schools has been developed within the framework of the joint European Union and Council of Europe project “INCLUDE – Building capacity for inclusion in education”. Key components of the guide include the following (see Chapter 6 of the Framework for including students with special educational needs and disabilities in upper secondary schools (Council of Europe 2022b)).

### Preparations in the school (6.1)

Schools are instructed to prepare for the arrival of learners with SEN by adapting the physical environment. This includes ensuring accessibility through ramps, adjusted furniture and suitable lighting. Schools should also prepare by collecting detailed information on each student’s educational history, specific needs and required support through interviews and document reviews.

### Identification of special educational needs (6.2)

The document recommends that the identification of SEN should be proactive, ideally occurring before students’ transition to upper secondary education. This allows schools to have support in place from the beginning. Identification involves reviewing educational records, health information and existing IEPs.

### Accommodations and modifications (6.3)

Guidelines are provided on adapting educational content and teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students with SEN and disabilities. This includes modifying teaching materials and assessments and ensuring that learning objectives are achievable and tailored to individual capabilities. It emphasises the use of assistive technologies and alternative communication methods where necessary.

### Guides for teachers to meet the needs of students with SEN and disabilities (6.4)

This section provides specific strategies for teachers to support inclusive education. Teachers are encouraged to use flexible teaching methods and to be sensitive to the varied learning styles and needs of students with SEN. Teachers are also guided on how to modify their instructional approaches and classroom management techniques to create a more inclusive learning environment.

## Practical tips for managing an inclusive classroom (6.5)

Practical advice is offered to help teachers manage a classroom that includes learners with SEN. This includes strategies for fostering an inclusive classroom culture that supports all learners. Tips cover how to encourage peer support, use of inclusive teaching practices and how to communicate effectively with learners with diverse needs.

## How to support learners with SEN and disabilities (6.6)

Definitions and characteristics of all types of impairments covering learners with specific learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments, including blindness, physical impairments, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and those experiencing emotional problems. Each category includes specific practical tips for teachers to effectively support these learners, ensuring they can participate fully in classroom activities and achieve their educational goals.

### Inclusive school policies

Schools should have clear anti-discrimination policies that include disabilities, based on international and national conventions, legislation, policies, action plans and recommendations. These policies need to be well communicated to everyone in the school community and effectively implemented. Procedures should also be in place for reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination. When discrimination is tackled at an institutional level, it leads to the development of more inclusive policies and practices. Schools begin to make modifications and introduce flexible curricula and inclusive teaching methods that are tailored to the diverse needs of all learners. These policies not only support equity but also create a culture where all learners can succeed, fostering a sense of belonging.

### Disability policy

There is a need for legislation that mandates inclusive education, ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, have access to quality education. Examples of policy recommendations and a road map have been developed for Bosnia and Herzegovina (Council of Europe 2020).

### Clear non-discrimination policy

Establish and communicate a clear anti-discrimination policy that explicitly covers disability. This policy should outline procedures for reporting discrimination and include steps for addressing violations promptly and effectively.

### Include disability in education development strategies

Fostering a democratic school culture in Serbia: recommendations to education policy makers (Council of Europe 2018a) provides an example of a comprehensive approach to integrating the disability dimension into promoting democratic culture in schools.

The Inclusive PolicyNet (Council of Europe 2015d) developed policy recommendations based on a baseline study on inclusive policies and practices within the project Regional Support for Inclusive Education. The network also developed a policy-mapping document (Council of Europe 2014). The document explores the legislative and practical aspects of inclusive education in the participating countries, including a review of educational laws that aim to provide free and accessible education to all children, with a focus on integrating learners with disabilities into regular schools. Despite supportive policies, the report highlights inconsistencies in law enforcement and a narrow interpretation of inclusion that mostly centres on children with developmental difficulties. The report also looks at specific policies related to educational access, emphasising the need for supportive measures for children with disabilities and transitional policies for learners moving between educational levels. It points out gaps in policy implementation, particularly at the secondary education level. The mapping report concludes that, although policies exist to ensure educational equality, practical barriers still prevent full inclusivity. The need for clearer regulations and a unified understanding of inclusive education is emphasised to effectively remove these barriers and achieve genuine inclusivity, especially for children with special educational needs.

## Bullying prevention policy

Implement anti-bullying programmes that include components on disability-related bullying. Provide clear consequences for discriminatory behaviour and create support systems for learners who may be targets of bullying.

## Align policies with ICF

Schools should adopt the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to better understand and address disability, thereby fostering an inclusive educational environment. Using the ICF framework helps educational institutions to see disability through a bio-psycho-social lens, recognising not only the medical aspects but also the social and personal factors that influence learning abilities and participation. This comprehensive understanding is crucial for developing tailored educational practices that accommodate individual needs, reduce barriers to learning and prevent discrimination. By aligning policies with the ICF, schools can ensure they meet legal and ethical obligations to support all learners equitably, promoting an inclusive culture that values diversity and inclusivity.

## Involve learners with disabilities in the decisions that affect them

This can be done through leadership roles in student organisations, participation in school boards or inclusion in feedback processes about school policies and practices.

### Awareness raising – Building respect and empathy

**Fostering empathy and understanding.** Educating learners, staff and administrators about disabilities and the challenges that individuals with disabilities face is fundamental. This includes understanding the range of disabilities (physical, learning, sensory, mental health-related) and promoting empathy and respect through the curriculum and activities. Tools to raise awareness in general can be used by selecting disability as a dimension relevant for a human rights-based approach (see for example, *Fostering a democratic school culture: recommendations for policy makers* (Council of Europe 2018a)). A panel discussion entitled “The status of students with developmental disabilities in the education system” can help to raise awareness about the role of the community and institutions in securing quality education and the growth and development of learners with developmental disabilities; in promoting equal rights and fairness; and in developing empathy and eliminating prejudices (see *How to achieve a democratic culture in schools* (Council of Europe 2018b)). By prioritising language and cultural competences, multiperspectivity in history, gender equality and respect for diversity, schools can tackle discrimination and foster an inclusive environment where all learners, regardless of their abilities, can thrive.

The online *Manual for human rights education with young people* (Council of Europe 2023b) includes the activity “See the ability!”, which encourages a practical approach to fostering empathy towards people with disabilities. It includes activities designed to raise awareness about the daily challenges faced by individuals with disabilities and to promote the skills to effectively respond to their needs. The activities aim to cultivate a sense of empathy and solidarity among participants. Participants engage in various activities such as blindfold walks and wheelchair races to simulate the experiences of those with disabilities, enhancing understanding and empathy. The manual also provides detailed instructions and materials for each activity, ensuring participants can engage thoughtfully and safely in these simulations. The activities end with a discussion that encourages participants to reflect on their experiences and the broader societal implications of disability rights as human rights. The publication “*Democratic culture in the digital environment. A handbook for schools*” (Council of Europe 2021) includes the extracurricular activity “Let’s learn about children’s rights”.

Addressing discrimination and prejudice in schools is needed to allow for equal participation in decision-making processes, a key aspect of both equity and democracy. When all learners, including those from marginalised groups, are encouraged to participate in classroom discussions, leadership roles and school governance, it mirrors the democratic principle of inclusion and representation. Tackling discrimination helps cultivate a school environment based on mutual respect, empathy and understanding. This shift in school culture encourages inclusivity, where differences are celebrated rather than seen as barriers. Students learn to value different perspectives, which enhances collaboration and peer relationships. Such an environment reflects the principles of democracy, as everyone’s voice and experience are respected.

Implementing ongoing anti-bias training for students and staff can help address unconscious biases and stereotypes about disabilities. This fosters a more inclusive environment where all learners are encouraged to examine their behaviours and attitudes.

An example of how this can be done is the lesson entitled “AntiDiscriMedia”, which is designed to address anti-discrimination through interactive and media-based education (Council of Europe 2015e). It centres on fostering acceptance, tolerance, empathy and equality among students by promoting anti-discriminatory practices and the acceptance of diversity. The lesson utilises a variety of instructional materials, including internet-connected computers, stationery and video cameras, to help learners develop skills in visual literacy, information retrieval and social media engagement. Starting with classroom discussions about discrimination, students use films, texts and legal documents to understand different forms of discrimination and the media’s role in discrimination contexts. They then create a blog or web page called “AntiDiscriMedia” where they work in groups to focus on different social groups at risk of discrimination, gathering and analysing information and creating resources to educate others. The project, which can span a term or the whole academic year, culminates in students presenting their work beyond the classroom to enhance community engagement and awareness, effectively using the internet to reach a broader audience. Through this process, students not only learn about discrimination but also become advocates and media specialists actively combating discrimination in their communities (see “How to develop the ability of students to assess information from media and social networks?” (Council of Europe 2015e)).

### **Promoting the creative work of students for raising awareness of the local community and general public for understanding persons with developmental disabilities (Council of Europe 2018b)**

The result of the joint work with the students is the play “Alone”, which deals with the problems faced by persons with developmental disabilities. The performance is primarily intended for children and young people and has a clear message that we need to understand and accept otherness and that we are all equal. The play was developed in the form of a shadow theatre and pantomime. The second drama project “A different kind of awake” is conceived as a sequel to the story that began in the play “Alone” and which deals with the wishes and dreams about the future of a young man – a person with a disability. The play uses ultraviolet light and shadows, while selected poetic materials are accompanied by music and movement. The play is primarily intended for young people and has a clear message that all people are equal, that otherness should be understood and accepted, that everyone should fight for their dreams, be persistent and pursue their goals. In 2018, the 12th performance of this play won the award for the best actress and for special effects in Skopje, where the Fifth International Festival for Persons with and without Disabilities was held.

### **Inclusive language and language acquisition**

Encourage the use of inclusive, respectful language among students and staff. Provide training on avoiding harmful stereotypes, ableism and microaggressions related to disability. Module 1 on education of deaf people, developed within the framework of the “INCLUDE” project, identifies bilingual teaching strategies specifically tailored for deaf and hard-of-hearing learners, integrating both sign language and spoken language into the curriculum. It adopts a holistic approach, emphasising sociocultural methods that facilitate an engaging and interactive learning environment. These methods prioritise the use of visual and multimodal communication tools to enhance language learning, aiming to transform deaf education by recognising and utilising the unique linguistic resources of deaf learners.

### **Learning sign language together as an extracurricular activity**

This activity aims to educate students about sign language, focusing on enhancing their understanding of and empathy towards individuals with hearing impairments. By learning about the characteristics of sign language and the challenges faced by those with hearing impairments in daily life and educational settings, learners gain valuable insights. The activity involves teaching students basic sign language terms useful in everyday interactions, such as greetings, introductions and expressing emotions and terms related to family and school contexts. This education not only aids socialisation but also promotes active participation of students with hearing impairments in society (Council of Europe 2021).

## Ensuring accessibility

The Council of Europe advocates inclusive education by ensuring that all educational environments are fully accessible, promoting an approach that respects the diverse needs and identities of all learners, particularly those with disabilities. This vision encompasses a transformation of educational culture, policy and practice, focusing on removing barriers that prevent learners from participating fully and effectively. The Council of Europe encourages the implementation of practical measures like the adaptation of physical environments, the use of appropriate technologies and the provision of resources in accessible formats such as Braille, sign language and alternative communication methods.

Ensuring physical accessibility in school buildings is a legal requirement, but accessibility extends beyond ramps and lifts. Classrooms, libraries, restrooms and online resources should be accessible to everyone. This includes providing assistive technologies and making sure that digital platforms are compatible with various aids like screen readers. The policy-mapping activity carried out as part of the project Regional Support for Inclusive Education emphasises that while laws and policies are in place to support accessibility, actual implementation often falls short. Physical access to school buildings and facilities, including adaptations for students with visual and hearing impairments, is noted as a significant challenge. Many schools lack the necessary infrastructure to support physically disabled students fully (Council of Europe 2014).

Accessibility to the curriculum ensures that all learners, including those with disabilities, can fully engage with and benefit from educational content. This involves adapting teaching materials, methods and assessments to accommodate different learning needs, such as providing Braille or large print texts, sign language interpretation or assistive technologies. Inclusive curricular design emphasises flexibility and universal access, enabling all learners to participate equitably. By removing barriers and fostering inclusive practices, accessible curricula uphold the principles of equity and inclusion, ensuring every learner has the opportunity to succeed. The Council of Europe has supported Kosovo\* in aligning the document “Teaching in the fields of activities” with the National Framework Curriculum of Kosovo and the five domains of the ICF. It was developed in co-operation with teachers from resource centres and endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation in 2022. Access to the curriculum is also discussed in the publication “Study on the level of academic achievements of students with hearing impairment in the resource centre Nena Tereze in Prizren” (Council of Europe 2023c).

## Support at school level and community level

Support at school and community levels is essential for inclusive education, ensuring that all learners’ needs are met by fostering a supportive and adaptive learning environment through community involvement. It extends beyond the classroom to include families, local support systems and social services, enhancing the educational experience for all and promoting societal acceptance of diversity. Such collaboration enriches the learning environment and helps develop a more inclusive society.

### Support services

Schools need to offer a range of support services, including counselling, speech therapy, occupational therapy and special education services, as necessary. Support should be tailored to meet the unique needs of each learner with a disability. It is important to clarify duties for educators, administrators and support staff to ensure a co-ordinated approach to inclusion.

### Resource centres

The transformation of special schools into resource centres as hubs for specialised resources and expertise has been an important process in many countries towards inclusive education. Resource centres are meant to provide support at the community level (for assessment and counselling, for instance), for schools by supporting teachers, teaching assistants and students in regular schools and often also by providing services to learners with specific needs in the resource centre itself. These centres often provide a range of services that include professional development for educators, access to specialised instructional materials and support for students with diverse learning needs. They can facilitate the assessment and implementation of educational accommodations and modifications, helping schools tailor their approaches to meet

individual learner needs. Within the “INCLUDE” project, for example, the Council of Europe has supported this transformation and helped build the necessary competences and expertise in the resource centres to provide services to regular schools.

## **Partnership and collaboration**

Collaboration with families and communities is essential to ensure that the needs of learners with disabilities are met both within and outside the classroom. By engaging various community resources, schools can offer more personalised and effective support, making education more accessible and equitable. This co-operative approach also promotes a culture of acceptance and respect, encouraging learners to appreciate diversity, which is a core principle of inclusive education. Through such collaborative networks, schools become better equipped to handle the complexities of inclusive education, adapting more effectively to the challenges that may arise. Collaborative efforts ensure that various stakeholders – such as teachers, parents, community organisations and service providers – work together to create a learning environment that supports all learners, especially those who might otherwise be marginalised.

### **Creating an inclusive classroom**

This section includes practical tips for teachers (at upper secondary level) of students with specific impairments and disorders, including students with specific learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments including blindness, physical impairments, ADHD and ADD, Autism Spectrum Disorder and those experiencing emotional problems (Council of Europe 2022b).

Proactive and collaborative planning helps to anticipate potential barriers and design learning experiences that are inherently accessible, rather than retrofitting solutions. Incorporate feedback from students and staff to continuously improve the learning environment.

Linking activities to learning goals to ensure that every activity aligns with specific learning outcomes while being adaptable to different abilities and interests. Flexible approaches to curriculum should be used to meet curriculum standards without compromising accessibility. Teachers are encouraged to adopt collaborative teaching methods that promote peer learning and teamwork, allowing students with disabilities to actively participate in group activities.

## **Inclusive and enabling learning environment**

A school free from discrimination promotes a safer, more supportive learning environment. Learners feel more comfortable and confident knowing they are respected and valued. This positive environment promotes academic success and social-emotional growth and in the long term helps students become more active, democratic citizens. It is important to foster a classroom culture where diversity is celebrated and all students feel included and respected, as well as to create opportunities for collaboration and peer learning to build social and academic skills.

## **Universal design for learning**

Multiple means of representation: information and content should be presented in various ways to cater to diverse sensory and cognitive needs (visual, auditory, tactile, etc.), including with the help of visual aids, audio materials, Braille and assistive technologies to ensure accessibility. Multiple means of engagement: flexible and engaging learning opportunities should be provided that cater to diverse interests and motivations. It is necessary to create environments where students feel safe and supported to take risks and explore learning actively. Multiple means of expression: various modalities for students to demonstrate their understanding (such as oral presentations, written assignments or visual projects) should be envisaged.

## **Flexible curriculum enactment**

As mentioned above, there is a need for a flexible curriculum that allows schools to adapt teaching methods and materials to meet the diverse learning needs of all students. Tailor activities and materials to meet individual needs, allowing learners to progress at their own pace. Competence descriptions help emphasise a goal orientation and allow for the promotion of a personalised learning approach. Strategies to personalise the curriculum include adaptation of learning objectives, methods, materials and assessments

to reduce barriers and enhance accessibility for all learners. Incorporate differentiated instruction that respects the diverse abilities and interests of students.

## Personalised education plans

Personalised learning plans (PLPs) are considered advantageous over individualised education plans (IEPs) because they cater to a broader learner base, not just those with special educational needs. PLPs offer flexibility and adaptability, allowing educational strategies to evolve alongside students' changing needs and interests. This approach fosters a holistic educational experience that integrates academic, social-emotional and career-oriented goals. PLPs enhance learner engagement and motivation by involving students in their learning process and tailoring education to their personal interests and future aspirations. PLPs consider the disability situation, the participation situation and the learning situation of students (Council of Europe 2023a). PLPs or IEPs should also be considered for upper secondary education; see "Framework for including students with special educational needs and disabilities in upper secondary schools" (Council of Europe 2022b), and "Needs assessment of special educational needs in upper secondary education" (Council of Europe 2022c).

## Integration of assistive technologies

Access to tools like screen readers, communication devices and hearing aids is a key component of ensuring participation for learners with disabilities. Utilise tools such as screen readers, voice-to-text software and adaptive devices to support learners with disabilities. Ensure that technology is seamlessly integrated into the learning environment to enhance accessibility. For example, the school Dušan Dugalić in Belgrade, Serbia, uses assistive technology and visual teaching materials for the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and competences (Council of Europe 2018b). The "Study on the level of academic achievements of students with hearing impairment in the resource centre Nena Tereze in Prizren" (Council of Europe 2023c) highlights the importance of assistive devices for teaching students with hearing impairments. The lack of these devices was identified as part of the Needs assessment of special educational needs in upper secondary education (Council of Europe 2022c) and the Framework for including students with special educational needs and disabilities in upper secondary schools (Council of Europe 2022b) includes assistive devices specific to certain impairments and problems.

## Assessment practices

Assessment practices are very important for creating an inclusive classroom. Assessments should be adaptable to accommodate diverse learning needs and abilities, allowing for modifications such as extended time, alternative formats or the use of assistive technology. It is crucial that assessments measure learners' understanding and skills accurately without being hindered by their physical, sensory or cognitive disabilities. Also, teachers should employ a variety of assessment methods to capture the full range of students' learning and competences. This includes formative assessments, which provide ongoing feedback during the learning process, and summative assessments, which evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional period. In addition, the assessment process should involve collaboration with specialists, such as special education teachers and school psychologists, to ensure that the methods and tools used are appropriate and effective. Finally, it is important to foster a positive assessment environment that emphasises growth and learning over performance, helping to reduce anxiety and encourage all learners to engage fully with their educational experiences. This comprehensive approach ensures that assessments contribute constructively to the educational outcomes of all learners, supporting the overarching goals of inclusivity and equity in education.

## Capacity building

Staff and educators should receive regular training on disability rights, inclusive education practices and how to implement accommodations to the needs of the students. Training should also cover unconscious bias and sensitivity to ensure that staff can recognise and address subtle forms of discrimination. The projects Regional Support for Inclusive Education and INCLUDE had a strong focus on capacity building. TeacherNet discussed innovative approaches to initial teacher education, continuing professional development of teachers and coaching teacher educators and trainers. A tool for mapping inclusive education training programmes (see the chapter "Tools for situation analysis" above) was used within the above mentioned projects to identify good practice examples.

## Mentoring and peer learning for teachers

Provision of practical advice and strategies for teachers to effectively manage inclusive classrooms and support diverse learners. Peer learning between professionals is a very effective way of capacity building directly linked to one's own practice. Peer learning and peer mentoring have been identified as most effective in the context of the work done as part of the Regional Support for Inclusive Education project (Council of Europe 2015a).

## Training teachers and specialists to use the ICF

As part of the project "INCLUDE", teachers, school leaders and other professionals received basic training on the philosophy of the ICF, and the first module included the following activities.

Unit 1 of the capacity-building programme, entitled "Development of a common language for disability", focuses on establishing a shared understanding and language around disability within educational settings. It begins with Activity 1.1, where participants develop a common language for discussing disability, using the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) as a guiding framework. In Activity 1.2, the session moves on to disentangle various disability categories, linking them to their functional properties as defined by the ICF. Activity 1.3 adopts a situational approach to understanding how different environments affect participation, highlighting the dynamic nature of disability. Finally, Activity 1.4 shifts the focus towards understanding how different types of information, such as assessment data or educational planning details, are used for a range of purposes, further enhancing the participants' ability to address disability comprehensively in educational contexts.

Unit 2 of the capacity-building programme, entitled "Assessment practices in the context of disability", explores assessment practices designed to understand and address the participation and educational needs of children with disabilities. The unit begins with Activity 2.1, which introduces a professional problem-solving cycle aimed at enhancing current assessment practices. Next, Activity 2.2 shifts the focus to assessing activities and participation, emphasising the tools and strategies needed to evaluate how children engage with their environments effectively. Activity 2.3 involves assessing environmental factors that influence participation, employing tools that consider physical, social and attitudinal barriers. Last, Activity 2.4 deals with implementing situational assessments that take into account personal factors, environmental conditions and the child's activities and participation, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and facilitators to their involvement in life activities.

Unit 3, entitled "Ensuring active engagement of children with disabilities", focuses on translating assessments into effective interventions aimed at improving participation and educational outcomes for children with disabilities. It starts with Activity 3.1, where participants analyse factors contributing to participation restrictions and develop strategies to enhance engagement. Activity 3.2 involves developing specific participation goals, taking into account the dynamic interplay between expectations, motivations and actual participation. In Activity 3.3, the emphasis is on improving participation through environmental changes, highlighting the need for adaptable learning environments that can accommodate diverse needs. The unit concludes with Activity 3.4, which uses the World Café method to facilitate collaborative problem-solving strategies. This method is designed to be applied in resource centres and regular schools to enhance inclusivity.

## Training teachers and specialists to enable learning for all

The second module's overarching goal is to foster a growth mindset among educators, encourage reflective practice regarding educational planning and emphasise the development of a coherent vision of what children with disabilities can achieve, aiming for inclusivity in educational practices. The second module includes the following activities.

Unit 1, entitled "Sense-making and vision building" introduces a long-term perspective linked to the CRPD's vision, emphasising the importance of understanding motivations and goal-setting. It challenges prejudices and low expectations through activities that help participants explore the role of motivation in learning and the importance of supportive situational conditions.

Unit 2, entitled "Working with the fields of activities – Developing a curricular perspective", highlights the interconnections between the Kosovo\* National Curriculum Framework, the fields of activities used

for children with multiple disabilities and the life domains of the ICF. It focuses on reflecting current IEP practices and their alignment with broader educational goals, facilitating a unified approach to education.

Unit 3, entitled “Enacting the personalised learning plan”, highlights translating personal learning plans into practice, creating enriched learning opportunities that are contextualised and meaningful. It includes strategies for enhancing learning environments, using Universal Design for Learning principles and improving interactions between teachers and students through constructive dialogue and formative assessments.

## Training teachers and specialists working with deaf learners

The specific situation of children with different impairments or functional limitations and tips on how to address their needs in the classroom are addressed in several publications from the project “INCLUDE”, including special modules on teaching deaf children (Council of Europe 2023a). The resources include the following topics.

- ▶ **Linguistic and cultural identity:** deafness is not solely a disability but also a cultural and linguistic identity, shaped by the use of sign language and community belonging. Sign language is vital for the inclusion and empowerment of deaf learners, serving as a primary mode of communication and learning.
- ▶ **Bilingual and multimodal education:** bilingual approaches using sign language and written/spoken languages are essential for fostering literacy and effective communication in deaf learners. Multimodal strategies, including visual, tactile and gestural resources, support diverse learning needs.
- ▶ **Challenges in deaf education:** the lack of trained teachers proficient in sign language is a significant barrier. Limited resources and support for deaf education hinder inclusive practices in Kosovo\*.
- ▶ **Inclusive practices:** schools should provide environments that value the cultural identity of deaf learners while fostering their participation and learning. Collaborative approaches involving families, teachers and specialists are critical for addressing educational needs.
- ▶ **Early literacy development:** early intervention is crucial for developing foundational literacy skills through visual and signed resources. Strategies like fingerspelling, chaining and using visual aids enhance early language and literacy acquisition.
- ▶ **Inclusive learning environments:** classrooms should support bilingualism and promote interaction among deaf and hearing learners to foster inclusivity. Teachers must create a safe, respectful space where deaf learners feel valued and understood.
- ▶ **Collaboration and capacity building:** collaborative work between educators, families and communities enhances the educational outcomes of deaf learners. Training programmes for teachers should focus on developing their skills in sign language, bilingual teaching and UDL implementation.
- ▶ **Culturally relevant pedagogy:** recognising and integrating the cultural identity of deaf learners enriches the educational experience and promotes belonging. Sign Language should be actively incorporated into all aspects of the curriculum.
- ▶ **Barriers to access:** the lack of accessible teaching materials and limited teacher training programmes remain significant obstacles to inclusion. Advocacy for policy changes and resource development is needed to improve access for deaf learners.

## Ensuring high achievements

The “Study on the level of academic achievements of learners with hearing impairment in the resource centre Nena Tereze in Prizren” (Council of Europe 2023c) includes examples of how a school can assess the literacy skills and reading skills, demonstrating the consequences of lack of use of sign language in a special school.



# Guide to transforming practices to ensure inclusive education

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**A**s part of Regional Support for Inclusive Education, a tool was developed to guide schools and policy makers through the process of transforming policies and practices to ensure their coherence and alignment with the vision of inclusive education. The tool itself focuses on upgrading teacher education activities but includes a more general framework for inclusive practices that can be used for transformative processes in schools.

The tool for upgrading teacher education activities is organised as a comprehensive guide to assist users in enhancing existing programmes or creating new ones that promote inclusive practices. It starts with an introduction and overview, explaining the tool's structure, which includes a series of sequential activities aimed at increasing transparency and involving diverse stakeholders. This is followed by a practical focus, emphasising the real-world application of the tool in educational settings to foster inclusivity. An analytical framework through the activity model is introduced, helping to identify and understand the integration of educational components such as subject, object, outcomes, tools and context – important for effective planning and evaluation of educational practices. The tool also incorporates a systematic problem-solving cycle, guiding users through identifying issues, assessing needs, setting goals, selecting strategies and implementing and evaluating changes. Additionally, it outlines a robust framework for inclusive practices, detailing necessary competences across four domains – learner, curriculum, context and teacher – that educators need to develop throughout their careers. Supplementary guidance supports the application of this tool, providing strategies for stakeholder engagement, customisation to local contexts and utilising additional resources such as case studies and templates. The section on monitoring and evaluation emphasises the importance of continuous assessment to ensure the effectiveness of the changes implemented, recommending methods for feedback collection and programme adjustment to continually support optimal teaching and learning environments.

The problem-solving cycle is used to highlight the necessary steps for transforming teacher education practices. Each step of the problem-solving cycle includes three activities. For each activity, an overview is provided using the components of the activity model.

## **Problem identification: focus on practices for inclusive education**

- ▶ **Activity 1:** identifying the overall challenges and problems of professionals
- ▶ **Activity 2:** developing a broad vision of inclusive practices
- ▶ **Activity 3:** defining the overall need for change

## **Needs assessment: focus on professionals for inclusive education**

- ▶ **Activity 1:** assessing the needs from the perspective of a target group
- ▶ **Activity 2:** assessing the needs from your perspective
- ▶ **Activity 3:** defining the needs to be addressed in a specific teacher education activity

## **Goals and objectives: visualisation of new teacher education practice**

- ▶ **Activity 1:** visualising goals and outcomes
- ▶ **Activity 2:** visualising means and contexts
- ▶ **Activity 3:** developing new specifications

## **Strategies and methods: building the new teacher education practice**

- ▶ **Activity 1:** defining activities and objectives for the new component
- ▶ **Activity 2:** defining methods and settings
- ▶ **Activity 3:** putting it all together

## **Implementation, evaluation and feedback: realising the new teacher education practice**

- ▶ **Activity 1:** developing an implementation plan
- ▶ **Activity 2:** ensuring the necessary conditions
- ▶ **Activity 3:** administering, evaluating and getting feedback

## **Framework for understanding inclusive teacher practices**

The model of teacher activities at the core of the framework for inclusive practices emphasises a holistic approach to education that prioritises inclusivity through the integration of a curriculum, context and teacher engagement directly oriented towards optimising student learning outcomes. The following is a breakdown of how this model functions within inclusive educational settings.

### **Key components of the model**

#### **Agent/subject (teachers and educators)**

Teachers are seen as the primary agents whose roles are not just to impart knowledge but to facilitate learning experiences that are adaptive to the needs of all students. Educators' perceptions and beliefs about their students profoundly influence how they interact and engage with them, emphasising the importance of reflective practice and ongoing professional development to foster an inclusive mindset.

#### **Objective (learner-centric approach)**

The focus is consistently on the learner, with all teaching activities tailored to enhance learner engagement and participation. Educators strive to understand and respond to the diverse needs of their students, thereby ensuring that the educational practices are inclusive and equitable.

#### **Tool (curriculum)**

The curriculum serves as a versatile tool, encompassing the content, goals and strategies of teaching and learning that are flexible enough to adapt to diverse classroom scenarios. It is used to guide instruction and interactions in a way that aligns with the educational aspirations of each student, ensuring that the curriculum itself becomes a vehicle for promoting inclusivity.

#### **Context (educational environment)**

While the primary context is the classroom, the model extends to other school areas and community settings where learning takes place. This broad view of context acknowledges the importance of creating supportive learning environments throughout the school and community that facilitate educational accessibility and engagement for all learners.

### **Application of the model**

#### **In teacher education**

The activity model guides the training and development of educators, whether they are university professors, consultants or school-based mentors. Training programmes designed using this model focus on developing educators' competences to apply inclusive practices effectively within diverse educational settings.

#### **In school practices**

Teachers apply the model in day-to-day classroom activities, where they use the curriculum flexibly to meet the needs of all students. The model promotes an understanding that the teacher's role extends beyond content delivery to actively creating learning opportunities that are accessible and beneficial to all students.

## Goals of the model

### Promote inclusive practices

By integrating students' needs with effective curriculum strategies within conducive contexts, the model aims to enhance the educational experience for all students, particularly those who might otherwise be marginalised or underrepresented.

### Achieve positive educational outcomes

The ultimate purpose of this model is to ensure that all students receive quality education that is respectful of and responsive to their individual needs, thereby fostering their academic success and holistic development.

This comprehensive approach highlights the necessity of aligning educational practices with the principles of inclusivity and equity, ensuring that all elements – from teaching strategies to curriculum design and classroom management – work together to support every student's learning journey.

The framework for inclusive practices in schools delineates a comprehensive model for ensuring quality education for all, emphasising the need for holistic, inclusive approaches across various components of the educational environment. This framework integrates the activity model to offer a structured approach to teaching that benefits every student, focusing on the interconnection of teacher roles, student needs, curriculum design and the educational context.

## Four core components of the inclusive practices framework

### Learner: valuing learner diversity

This component stresses the importance of recognising and respecting the diverse backgrounds and needs of students. Inclusion here means viewing students as individuals with rights to education, which shapes how they are taught and supported in their learning journeys.

### Curriculum: supporting all learners

The curriculum is viewed not just as a set of academic content but as a dynamic tool that can be adapted to meet the learning needs of all students. This involves breaking down the curriculum into manageable parts that cater to the diverse abilities and learning styles within the classroom.

### Context: working with others

Building strong learning environments is crucial and involves collaboration and teamwork not just within the school but also with the wider community. This includes creating physical and social spaces that are welcoming and accessible to everyone, enhancing the overall learning experience.

### Teacher: personal professional development

Teachers are encouraged to view themselves as lifelong learners who continuously develop their skills and knowledge to better support inclusive education. This involves engaging in professional development opportunities and reflective practices that enhance their teaching effectiveness.

## Goals linked to the components

- ▶ **Learner goal:** ensuring that all learners have access to education, can participate fully in the learning process and achieve educational success, which sets the foundation for their future endeavours.
- ▶ **Curriculum goal:** transforming the learning capacity of students by using the curriculum flexibly and creatively to cater to individual needs.
- ▶ **Context goal:** creating enabling social and physical environments that support learning for all students, making the school a conducive place for education.

- ▶ **Teacher goal:** developing teachers into competent inclusive practitioners who are adept at meeting the diverse needs of their students.

**Implementation of the framework:** the practical application of this framework involves several strategies.

- ▶ **Evidence-based practices:** gathering and utilising research and case studies that demonstrate effective inclusive practices.
- ▶ **Professional development:** providing teachers with training and resources that support the development of skills necessary for implementing an inclusive curriculum and managing a diverse classroom.
- ▶ **Community engagement:** encouraging collaboration between schools, families and community organisations to create supportive networks for students.
- ▶ **Policy and governance:** advocating policies that support inclusivity and ensuring that school governance models facilitate the practical implementation of inclusive practices.

By adhering to this framework, schools can ensure that all aspects of education – from the classroom to the curriculum – are designed to support the diverse needs of all students, thereby promoting an inclusive culture that values and uplifts every member of the school community. This approach not only enhances the learning experiences of students but also contributes to a more equitable and just educational system.

The concept of developing inclusive practices through capacity building revolves around a holistic approach to educational reform and personal development within the educational sector. It recognises that true inclusivity in education is an ongoing process that extends beyond the individual level to include systemic changes and collaborative efforts across the entire educational ecosystem.

### Key aspects of capacity building for inclusive practices

- ▶ **Collaborative learning:** the process emphasises the importance of collective learning experiences rather than isolated training sessions. Teachers, administrators and other educational professionals benefit from working in teams, sharing insights and developing strategies together. This collective approach fosters a deeper understanding and implementation of inclusive practices.
- ▶ **Contextual implementation:** understanding the specific educational context is crucial. This means considering the unique characteristics of each school, district and community when designing and implementing inclusive practices. What works in one setting may not be effective in another, making flexibility and adaptability key components of any successful inclusivity strategy.
- ▶ **Comprehensive development:** capacity building should address all facets of educational practice – from curriculum development and teacher training to administrative policies and community engagement. This comprehensive approach ensures that all elements of the education system are aligned with inclusive principles.
- ▶ **Continuous improvement:** inclusive education is viewed as a dynamic, continuous process. Schools and educators are encouraged to constantly assess and improve their practices, ensuring that inclusivity is always being enhanced and adapted to meet evolving needs.

### Strategic focus areas in capacity building

- ▶ **Competent inclusive practitioners:** teachers' personal and professional development is prioritised to ensure they possess the necessary competences to support all students effectively.
- ▶ **Access, participation and learning achievement:** the framework aims to guarantee that all students have equal opportunities to access education, participate actively and achieve their potential, irrespective of their backgrounds or abilities.
- ▶ **Transforming learning capacity:** the curriculum is designed to be flexible and adaptive, allowing it to meet the varied needs of all students and to promote an inclusive learning environment.
- ▶ **Enabling social and physical environments:** the physical and social settings of schools are crucial. These environments should be designed to support the diverse needs of all learners, making the school a welcoming place for everyone.

## Tools and strategies for effective capacity building

- ▶ **Developing shared repertoires:** building common frameworks, language and tools among educators facilitates more effective communication and collaboration across different levels of the education system.
- ▶ **Personalising education:** adapting teaching methods and curricula to meet the unique needs of each student, ensuring that all students can benefit from educational opportunities.
- ▶ **Creating networks and partnerships:** establishing strong networks and partnerships with various stakeholders, including parents, community organisations and other educational institutions, to support inclusive practices.
- ▶ **Fostering a culture of professional learning:** encouraging a school-wide commitment to continuous learning and professional development, which supports the growth and adaptation of inclusive practices over time.

The framework for inclusive practices in schools serves not only as a guide for developing effective teaching strategies but also as a blueprint for systemic change within the educational sector. By focusing on these comprehensive and collaborative approaches, schools can move towards creating truly inclusive environments that support the success and well-being of all learners.

## PRACTICES RELATED TO PROFESSIONALISM

Inclusive practices related to professionalism emphasise the development of educators as competent, inclusive professionals. This approach highlights the importance of creating supportive, collaborative and continuously evolving educational environments where teachers can develop professionally and contribute to fostering inclusivity.

**Overview of competent inclusive professionals:** inclusive educators are expected to engage in ongoing personal and professional development to enhance their ability to work effectively in diverse educational settings. They play a critical role in fostering environments that value students' diversity and collaborative practices, focusing on areas listed below.

**Personal professional development:** inclusive practitioners recognise that their professional growth is a lifelong process. They use a variety of professional development methods, including workshops, mentoring and peer learning. This continuous learning is vital for adapting to diverse educational needs and contexts.

**Community of practice:** moving beyond individual learning, inclusive professionals engage in communities of practice. These communities encourage the sharing of experiences and collaborative problem-solving, enhancing the collective competence of educational staff. The goal is to create a shared understanding and approach to inclusive education within the school or educational organisation.

**Building a shared repertoire:** effective collaboration requires a common language and set of tools. Developing a shared repertoire includes creating and utilising consistent practices, tools and communication strategies to foster a coherent approach to education across different members of the educational community. This repertoire supports efficient teamwork and enhances the overall effectiveness of the educational practice.

**Culture of professional learning:** inclusive schools are seen as learning organisations where continuous professional development is embedded in the culture. These schools view mistakes as learning opportunities and promote a supportive environment where educators can experiment and innovate without fear of criticism. Leadership plays a crucial role in guiding and sustaining this culture, ensuring that educational practices evolve to meet the needs of all learners.

**Development of abilities to become competent inclusive professionals:** the journey to becoming a competent inclusive professional is structured across different stages of an educator's career:

**Initial teacher education:** focuses on helping educators assume the identity of an inclusive teacher, capable of understanding and valuing diversity.

**Continuing professional development:** builds on initial training by enhancing the ability to reflect on and develop inclusive practices further.

**Education for mentors, leaders and change agents:** at this advanced stage, the focus shifts to transforming practice and leading others in the adoption of inclusive strategies.

## *PRACTICES RELATED TO THE LEARNER*

**Key aspects of inclusive practices related to the learner:** inclusive practices should promote access, participation, learning and achievement for all learners within educational settings. This requires educators to value and embrace student diversity not merely as a challenge to overcome but as a resource to enrich the learning environment and achieve educational equity. The goal is to foster a comprehensive learning community where every student, regardless of their background, is respected, included and supported to achieve their fullest potential.

**Valuing learner diversity:** educators must recognise and respect the unique characteristics of each student, including their gender, language, socio-economic background and physical and mental abilities. Valuing diversity also involves appreciating the family backgrounds of learners and integrating this awareness into the educational process.

**Learning community:** schools must strive to be communities where differences are seen as strengths and where all learners are given the support needed to participate fully. Objectives and goals are set to facilitate an inclusive atmosphere where diversity is embraced and all learners feel valued.

**Personalising education:** personalised education tailors learning experiences to the individual characteristics, needs and aspirations of each student. Techniques such as mentoring, scaffolding and providing autonomy support are crucial in making education relevant and accessible to every student.

**Atmosphere of inclusion:** an inclusive atmosphere is one where everyone – learners, teachers and other staff – feels safe, respected and connected. Such an environment fosters collaboration and mutual respect, enabling all learners to thrive academically and socially.

**Development of abilities to value learner diversity:** the development of inclusive practices involves professional growth across various stages of an educator's career.

**Initial teacher education:** focuses on instilling the ability to recognise and value diversity in the classroom.

**Continuing professional development:** aims to deepen understanding and application of inclusive practices within the school setting.

**Education for mentors, leaders and change agents:** encourages leadership in promoting and transforming inclusive practices at broader community and institutional levels.

## *PRACTICES RELATED TO THE CURRICULUM*

**Key aspects of inclusive practices related to the curriculum:** inclusive education aims to transform the learning capacities of all students/learners ensuring they can fully participate and thrive in their educational environments. This requires a shift in curriculum design and teaching practices to accommodate and promote the unique abilities of every student, preparing them for a future that values adaptability and continuous learning.

**Supporting all learners:** inclusive educators are committed to supporting every student's learning journey, acknowledging their individual talents and aspirations. This involves understanding

and addressing diverse learning needs and ensuring that all students feel valued and are given opportunities to succeed.

**Inclusive and flexible curriculum:** the curriculum should be flexible enough to cater to the diverse needs of all learners, allowing for adaptations based on learners' interests and learning styles. Educators must see the curriculum not as a rigid set of requirements but as a tool to facilitate learning and personal growth.

**Enhancing learning:** effective instructional strategies are crucial in an inclusive classroom. These may include differentiated instruction, the use of multiple intelligences and the incorporation of technology to enhance learning. Educators should anticipate and plan for potential learning challenges, using appropriate assessments and feedback to guide and support students' learning.

**Creating opportunities to learn:** the learning environment should be accessible and inviting to all students, with flexible grouping and learning spaces that promote collaboration and interaction. The use of community resources, integration of parents and families and the adaptation of physical spaces are all part of creating an inclusive educational setting.

**Development of competences for supporting all learners:** the progression of educational practices from initial teacher education through to leadership roles involves deepening the understanding and implementation of inclusive practices:

**Initial teacher education:** educators learn to apply basic principles of an inclusive curriculum and begin to understand how to support all learners.

**Continuing professional development:** educators expand their skills in developing and implementing school-based practices that enhance learning for all learners.

**Leadership and change management:** educators influence systemic change, creating and transforming curricula and learning environments to fully support inclusive education.

## **PRACTICES RELATED TO CONTEXT**

**Key aspects of inclusive practices related to context:** inclusive practices related to the context focus on creating environments that support learning and interaction among all learners, teachers and community members. These practices aim to establish not only physical accessibility but also a socially and emotionally supportive atmosphere conducive to learning for all. By fostering strong relationships and networks, inclusive schools promote a culture of respect, collaboration and shared learning.

**Working with others:** inclusive educators work collaboratively with colleagues, families and community members to enhance the educational experience. Collaboration extends beyond the classroom, involving various stakeholders in the planning and execution of educational activities, creating a more comprehensive and supportive environment for students.

**Respectful relationships:** building respectful and trusting relationships is central to creating an inclusive environment. These relationships enable the sharing of resources, ideas and support among students, teachers and the wider community. Respectful interactions foster a school culture where diversity is valued and all members feel they belong and can contribute to the school community.

**Creating networks and partnerships:** Establishing networks and partnerships with local businesses, other schools and organisations can provide additional resources and opportunities for learners and teachers. These partnerships can enhance the educational offerings and provide real-world connections that enrich students' learning experiences and prepare them for future opportunities.

**Educational governance:** inclusive education requires adaptive and responsive governance that supports the diverse needs of all learners. Schools need to work within existing policies while advocating changes that support inclusivity. This may involve engaging with local authorities to ensure that educational policies support the creation and maintenance of inclusive environments.

**Development of practice related to working with others:** advancing inclusive practices involves professional development at various stages of an educator’s career:

**Initial teacher education:** educators learn foundational skills in collaboration and building relationships within the school community.

**Continuing professional development:** educators improve their skills to create and maintain effective partnerships and networks.

**Leadership and change management:** experienced educators and leaders develop strategies to transform school culture and governance to support ongoing inclusivity.

## Step-by-step guide

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The framework described above serves as a shared vision and provides orientation in the complex process of transforming school-based and classroom-based practices in a coherent and co-ordinated way. The framework can be used at each step of the problem-solving process as a reference document to clarify the variety of understandings and positions.

### Problem identification: focus on professionals for inclusive education

#### Step 1 – Identifying the overall challenges and problems of professionals

This activity aims to achieve a deep understanding of the challenges and problems that teachers face in their daily school environments before modifying teacher education to address inclusive education issues. John Dewey's adage, "A problem well put is a problem half solved" underscores the importance of defining problems clearly to facilitate easier solutions. The focus is not to view teachers as problems but to address the challenges they encounter in their work.

The process can start ad hoc without extensive preparation but requires a fundamental understanding of inclusive education principles and how teachers can use these practices effectively. The activity may also reveal significant discrepancies in understanding inclusive education among participants, necessitating a more extensive review and possibly longer-term interventions. Users might consider gathering detailed information through interviews, surveys or data analysis from various stakeholders.

Included in this tool is a basic model for teacher activities that serves as a reference point for organising brainstorming results. This model emphasises the orientation of inclusive practices towards learners rather than strictly the curriculum. It incorporates the social and physical contexts in which these educational strategies are applied. For instance, issues like teachers' awareness of disabilities can be identified as gaps in practice if they manifest as challenges in the educational setting. Further resources such as the "Profile of inclusive teachers" (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2012) and UNICEF's "Train the Trainers module on inclusive education" (UNICEF 2015) provide additional insights into the competences required across the domains of professionalism, valuing diversity, supporting all students and collaboration.

This activity encourages a comprehensive brainstorming session where results are mapped using the inclusive practice model. This model helps to categorise feedback into themes such as beliefs about diversity, curriculum flexibility, student diversity and the creation of an accepting learning environment. It serves to clarify and identify gaps in current practices, fostering a targeted approach to addressing the identified issues.

#### Step 2 – Developing a broad vision of inclusive practice

Simply identifying challenges is insufficient for transformative change in teacher education aimed at inclusive practices. This activity emphasises developing a broad, actionable vision for the future. Visualising an ideal situation helps direct the problem-solving process by establishing clear goals and preventing concentrating on inconsequential details.

It is more challenging to envisage the integration of attitudes, beliefs, skills, knowledge and competences into the daily practice of inclusive education than to simply identify them. This involves conceptualising how teachers engage with diverse learner needs within specific school and community contexts. The "thinking practice" approach requires considering not just what teachers should know but also how they apply this knowledge in practice – what they focus on, their intentions, the methods they use and the

environments in which they operate. The activity model facilitates this by structuring thoughts around practical applications rather than isolated competences.

This visualisation process involves organising thoughts using the activity model to ensure ideas connect meaningfully, addressing challenges holistically rather than in isolation. It is recommended that this activity is undertaken collaboratively with stakeholders to enrich the vision with diverse perspectives, thereby enhancing the completeness and applicability of the envisaged practices.

Step 2 involves synthesising various ideas into a coherent vision of ideal inclusive practices. After gathering a multitude of perspectives, it is crucial to prioritise and structure these ideas to craft a comprehensive vision. Utilise the activity model to question and align these thoughts:

- ▶ **Who?** Define the attributes and competences needed by educators.
- ▶ **What?** Specify the focus areas for inclusive practitioners.
- ▶ **Why/what for?** Identify the intended outcomes and goals.
- ▶ **How?** Describe the methods and tools to be employed.
- ▶ **Where?** Determine the environment in which these practices will be executed.

This activity might include using visual aids like flipcharts or projectors to organise and visualise ideas collectively. Documenting this process through photos of the templates can be useful for future reference and sharing the developed vision.

### Step 3 – Defining the overall need for change

This activity, a critical component of the problem-solving cycle, involves a gap analysis to delineate the discrepancy between the current state of teacher practices and the envisaged inclusive practices developed in Step 2. Understanding these gaps is crucial as it highlights specific areas where teacher education and professional development need to focus on bridging the divide between existing conditions and the ideal state of inclusivity. This phase does not concentrate on what teachers need to learn at different stages of their careers but rather addresses the broader requirements needed across the profession to foster inclusive educational environments.

This part of the process involves documenting the identified needs for change, which are critical for advancing towards the envisaged inclusive practices. These needs are categorised into four main domains reflecting different aspects of inclusive education.

- ▶ Professional development for inclusive practitioners recognises the need for ongoing training and capacity building in inclusive strategies and approaches.
- ▶ Valuing student diversity to promote access, participation, learning and achievement highlights the importance of appreciating and leveraging diversity within the educational process to enhance outcomes for all students.
- ▶ Supporting all students to facilitate access to the curriculum focuses on adapting and modifying teaching methods and materials to ensure all learners can engage with the curriculum effectively.
- ▶ Working with others to create enabling environments emphasises the role of collaboration among educators, staff, families and the community in creating supportive and inclusive educational settings.

## Needs assessment: focus on practices for inclusive education

### Step 1 – Assessing the needs from the perspective of your target group

Following the identification of overarching needs for change across all professionals in inclusive education, this activity delves deeper into the specific needs of your particular target group. This step is critical for tailoring teacher education activities to the precise requirements of different segments within the educational community, such as teacher students, novice teachers, experienced teachers and expert teachers, who each have unique needs at various stages of their professional development.

It is crucial to consider a wide array of potential participants to ensure that no future contributors to

inclusive education are overlooked. This could mean expanding the scope of your teacher education programmes to encompass a broader demographic, including individuals at various stages of their careers and from different educational or community backgrounds.

In this activity, you will: evaluate the specific needs of your target group, considering their current competence and ability to implement inclusive practices effectively; identify critical areas where your target group requires additional preparation to meet the demands of an inclusive educational environment.

The key practices to focus on include the following.

- ▶ **Professional development for inclusive practitioners:** ensuring continuous learning and updating of skills to handle diverse educational needs.
- ▶ **Valuing student diversity to promote access, participation, learning and achievement:** emphasising the importance of recognising and appreciating diversity as a strength in the educational process.
- ▶ **Supporting all learners to facilitate access to the curriculum:** adapting teaching methods and materials to ensure all learners can engage with and benefit from the curriculum.
- ▶ **Working with others to create enabling environments:** fostering collaboration among educators, families and community members to support inclusive education.

## Step 2 – Assessing the needs from your perspective

This activity shifts focus to your personal perspective as an educator or educational leader who is directly involved in the implementation of inclusive education. It explores how you can personally contribute to the realisation of inclusive practices through teacher education, whether in academic settings, community workshops or school-based sessions. It is essential to reflect on how your educational activities can adapt to better support inclusive principles such as active learning, respect for diversity and personal development.

### Description of the activity

This stage involves a critical self-assessment of how your current teacher education practices align with the needs of inclusive education and identifying potential areas for improvement. The key steps include the following.

- ▶ **Reviewing current contributions:** analyse which needs of your target group are currently being met by your practices, which needs could be addressed in the future and which are beyond your current capacity.
- ▶ **Identifying gaps:** determine which components of your educational activities address specific needs and identify any gaps where changes in your approach could enhance the effectiveness of your practices.
- ▶ **Preparing for change:** evaluate how well prepared you are to address these identified needs and consider necessary changes to your practice to better support inclusive education.

By systematically analysing your contributions and preparing for necessary changes, you can ensure that your teacher education activities are effectively aligned with the goals of inclusive education, making a meaningful impact on the development of inclusive practitioners.

## Step 3 – Defining the needs to be addressed in a specific teacher education activity

**Information for users:** Step 3 helps align specific teacher education activities with the broader objectives of inclusive education. It involves a detailed analysis to ensure that various programmes, courses, modules or workshops are collectively addressing the comprehensive needs of your target group as identified in earlier activities. This activity is crucial for tailoring specific educational offerings to the nuanced requirements of inclusivity, ensuring they are coherent and meet the diverse needs at different stages of educators' professional development.

### Description of the activity

- ▶ **Specification of needs:** first, refine the broad needs identified to suit the specific teacher education activities you are planning or revising. Determine which needs can realistically be met by your offerings and acknowledge any that cannot be addressed due to your resource limitations or scope.

- ▶ **Documenting unaddressed needs:** clearly document which needs will not be addressed by your programmes and why. This transparency is crucial for co-ordinating with other education providers who may have the capability or focus to address these gaps at different stages of professional development.
- ▶ **Long-term co-ordination:** engage with other providers to discuss overlapping needs and potential collaborations. This step helps ensure that the education sector collectively supports teacher development across all stages of their careers, facilitating a comprehensive approach to inclusive education.
- ▶ **Recognising legislative and curricular limitations:** identify any needs that might require systemic changes beyond the scope of individual teacher education activities, such as legislative amendments or curriculum reforms. Documenting these will help to promote the broader systemic changes necessary for the full realisation of inclusive education goals.
- ▶ **Development across the life cycle:** use insights from the “development of abilities across the life cycle” framework to further refine how your activities can support the continuous development of inclusive practices. This consideration ensures that your educational offerings contribute effectively to the evolving competences of educators as they progress through their careers.

This activity not only focuses on refining and specifying the immediate educational needs but also places these needs within a larger context that includes potential legislative and curricular reforms. By doing so, it prepares education providers to think strategically about long-term impacts and collaborations, enhancing the overall effectiveness and sustainability of inclusive education initiatives.

## Goals and components: visualisation of new teacher education practice

### Step 1 – Visualising goals and outcomes

After identifying specific needs in your teacher education activities, it is essential to transition from a needs-based perspective to a goal-oriented approach. This shift requires moving from diagnosing problems to conceptualising solutions and setting clear, actionable goals. Instead of addressing each problem in isolation, which can lead to ineffective solutions, this activity encourages you to think about how various educational goals can be integrated to effectively support inclusive practices.

The visualisation process is crucial because it sets the direction for future changes in your teacher education activities. By envisaging the desired outcomes, you can ensure that your efforts are cohesive and directly contribute to broader educational goals.

#### Description of the activity

- ▶ **Goal formulation:** start by defining what you aim to achieve with your teacher education activities. Consider the broader vision of inclusive education developed in earlier activities and how your specific goals align with this vision.
- ▶ **Integration of goals:** think about how you can integrate multiple learning objectives to maximise the impact of your educational efforts. For example, activities designed to increase awareness about disabilities should be directly linked to practical teaching strategies that participants can apply in their classrooms.
- ▶ **Practical application:** ensure that the goals you set are actionable and practically applicable within the constraints of your educational setting. This might involve designing activities that not only educate but also engage participants in real-world applications of inclusive practices.
- ▶ **Visual tools:** use visual aids, such as diagrams or flowcharts, to map out the relationship between different goals and the educational activities that will support them. This helps to maintain a clear focus on the end objectives throughout the development process.
- ▶ **Feedback and revision:** consider gathering input from stakeholders – such as fellow educators, learners or community members – to refine your goals. This feedback can provide critical insights into the practicality and relevance of your objectives, allowing for necessary adjustments.
- ▶ **Documentation:** document the finalised goals and the strategies planned to achieve them. This documentation should clearly outline the learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment strategies that will be used to realise the goals.

This activity not only helps in setting clear goals for teacher education activities but also ensures that these goals are realistically achievable within the given constraints and effectively contribute to the overarching objectives of inclusive education.

## Step 2 – Visualising means and contexts overview

Having developed the components of your teacher education practice, it is crucial to delve into the methods, tools and settings that will support these components. This stage involves a detailed consideration of the “how” and “where” aspects of your teacher education activities. Understanding these aspects enhances your ability to fully realise the envisaged goals and ensures that your practices are grounded in achievable and relevant contexts.

### Description of the activity

- ▶ **Method and tool selection:** identify the specific methods and tools that will be used to achieve the educational goals set out in the previous activities. This might include interactive workshops, online platforms, case studies or practical exercises, depending on the needs and learning styles of your target group.
- ▶ **Contextual considerations:** reflect on the settings in which these methods will be implemented. Consider factors such as the physical classroom environment, online interfaces, community settings or other venues that could impact the effectiveness of your teaching.
- ▶ **Integration of methods and contexts:** ensure that the chosen methods are appropriate for the contexts in which they will be used. For example, a method involving group collaboration might require a physical space that supports such interaction or an online tool might need to be accessible to users with different technological abilities.
- ▶ **Documentation:** clearly document each method and its corresponding context to provide a detailed blueprint for implementing the teacher education activities. This documentation should also outline any necessary resources, such as technological tools or physical materials and consider any constraints that might affect their use.

## Step 3 – Developing new specifications overview

The objective of this activity is to specify each component of your new teacher education practice, integrating insights from both the goals and means discussed in the activities above. Using the activity model facilitates a structured approach to this task, making the process more collaborative, visual and adaptable.

### Description of the activity

- ▶ **Use of the activity model:** employ the activity model to visually map out the specifications of each educational component. This model helps in detailing who will perform the activities, what the activities will entail, the intended outcomes, the tools required and the contexts in which these activities will occur.
- ▶ **Team collaboration:** engage your team in this process to maximise the variety of perspectives and expertise. This collaboration can help to refine the specifications to ensure they are comprehensive and practically applicable.
- ▶ **Assessing compatibility and feasibility:** once the activity model templates are filled out, review them to ensure that all parts of your teacher education activities align and support each other without overlaps or contradictions. Adjust as necessary to ensure each component is feasible within your operational and resource constraints.
- ▶ **Documentation and adjustment:** document the finalised specifications for each component. This documentation should be dynamic, allowing for adjustments as feedback is received or as conditions change.

### Step 1 – Defining activities and objectives for the components

With a vision of your future teacher education practice already conceptualised, the next step involves breaking down these broad goals into specific activities and linking them to clear objectives. These activities and objectives should contribute to achieving the overall inclusive educational outcomes. For example, rather than just aiming to raise awareness about disabilities, integrate this awareness into practical teaching skills that can be directly applied in the classroom.

#### Description of the activity

- ▶ **Detailing activities:** specify the exact activities that will form each component of your teacher education programme. Consider how these activities can be structured to address the various aspects of inclusive education effectively.
- ▶ **Setting objectives:** each activity should have a clear objective that aligns with the broader goals of your programme. Ensure these objectives are measurable and directly impact the participants' ability to practise inclusive education.
- ▶ **Integration and alignment:** ensure that the activities and objectives are cohesively integrated to form a comprehensive educational experience that addresses all identified needs from earlier assessments.

### Step 2 – Defining methods and settings

Following the definition of activities, the focus shifts to selecting the appropriate methods and settings that will best facilitate these activities. This step is crucial to ensure the practical application of what has been planned and aligns with the educational goals and the contexts of your target groups.

#### Description of the activity

- ▶ **Choosing methods:** decide on the teaching methods or educational techniques that will be used during the activities. Consider methods that promote engagement, interaction and practical application, such as workshops, simulations or project-based learning.
- ▶ **Selecting settings:** determine the most suitable settings for these methods. This could involve decisions about using online platforms, classroom environments, community centres or field settings, depending on the objectives of each activity.

### Step 3 – Putting it all together

This activity involves synthesising all the planned components, methods and settings into a cohesive teacher education practice. It is about ensuring that all the elements work together effectively to realise the envisioned goals.

#### Description of the activity

- ▶ **Comprehensive review:** go through all the planned components, methods and settings to ensure they are well aligned and capable of achieving the set objectives. Make adjustments where necessary to enhance coherence and effectiveness.
- ▶ **Resource allocation:** consider the resources required for each component, including materials, human resources and financial input. Plan for the efficient use of resources to maximise the impact of your educational activities.
- ▶ **Documentation:** document the entire plan in a detailed manner, outlining how each component will be implemented, the resources needed and the expected outcomes. This documentation will be crucial for guiding the actual implementation and for communicating the plan to stakeholders.

## Implementation, evaluation and feedback: realising the new teacher education practice

### Step 1 – Developing an implementation plan

With the teacher education activities fully planned, focus shifts to the practical aspects of implementation. This involves setting up a realistic timeline, ensuring all necessary resources are in place and integrating the new practices into the existing institutional frameworks.

#### Description of the activity

- ▶ **Timeline and milestones:** establish a clear timeline for the implementation of each component of your teacher education practice. Define key milestones and check-in points to monitor progress.
- ▶ **Securing resources:** ensure that all necessary resources, including staffing, materials and funding, are secured. This might involve obtaining approval from governing bodies, securing funding or arranging for the professional development of staff.
- ▶ **Institutional integration:** align the new teacher education activities with your organisation's strategic plans to ensure they receive necessary support and are sustainable over the long term.

### Step 2 – Ensuring the necessary conditions

For the successful and sustainable implementation of the new teacher education practices, it is crucial to ensure that they are supported at all levels – politically, professionally and financially.

#### Description of the activity

- ▶ **Political and legislative support:** ensure that the new activities comply with and are supported by existing educational policies and legislation. This may involve advocacy work or engaging with policy makers to explain the benefits and needs of your new practices.
- ▶ **Professional endorsement:** obtain support from professional bodies and educational institutions. This might involve presentations, discussions and the dissemination of information to key stakeholders to secure their backing and co-operation.
- ▶ **Financial planning:** develop a comprehensive financial plan that covers all aspects of the implementation, including potential costs for materials, human resources and other necessary expenditures.

By following these steps, you ensure that the new teacher education practices are not only well planned but also effectively implemented, evaluated and adjusted based on ongoing feedback from participants and stakeholders.

### Step 3 – Administer, evaluate and obtain feedback

An external evaluation should be carried out once you have fully implemented the new teacher education activity, but you will need to monitor the progression of your new teacher education activity already during implementation. It is important to establish a dialogue with the participants, but also with your target group in general to understand better what works or does not work and where there may be a need for revision or improvement. If you are upgrading or introducing a new master's programme or any other long-term training course, you may want to consider developing a monitoring and evaluation plan.



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