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Council conclusions on inclusive, learner-centred practices in early childhood education and care and school education

(C/2025/2796)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING the texts adopted within the Union on education and training and social questions for policy matters,

UNDERLINES that

1. The principles of inclusive education reflect fundamental rights for all learners, as enshrined in the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights.
2. The role of education and training is crucial in fostering inclusive and democratic societies and driving competitiveness and prosperity. An inclusive society, built on the foundation of equitable and high-quality education and training, providing accessible infrastructure, teaching materials and pedagogical approaches, ensures and improves opportunities, well-being and growth for all learners, regardless of their background, abilities or circumstances. Without inclusive education, the potential for innovation and sustainable progress is limited, and by harnessing the diverse talents and perspectives of all individuals, both social cohesion and competitiveness are enhanced.
3. Early childhood education and care and school education play a pivotal role by putting in place preventive measures to address social inequalities, while fostering long-term individual and societal well-being. Inclusive, learner-centred practices in early childhood education and care and in school education promote equal opportunities, social cohesion and the full participation of all children and learners in education and society, while contributing to their comprehensive personal, emotional and social development. They also ensure that education and training systems remain resilient, adaptable and equitable, providing everyone with opportunities to grow and realise their full potential.
4. The concept of inclusive education and its integration into Member States' education and training policy frameworks have evolved and continue to evolve. Inclusive education is now increasingly being viewed as a systemic approach that caters to all learners to ensure their universal right to education. The goal is to offer meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities and continuous support to every learner in line with the first and eleventh principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the first strategic priority of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond.

EMPHASISES that

5. For the purposes of these conclusions, the terms 'early childhood education and care' (ECEC) and 'school education' are to be understood in line with national law and the structure of each national education and training system.

ACKNOWLEDGES that

6. Education and training are undergoing significant transformation, driven by advances in technology, evolving innovative pedagogical approaches and changing societal needs. These shifts are reshaping teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation, with a growing emphasis on personalised, innovative, inclusive and flexible practices.
7. Recent crises, including natural disasters, armed conflicts such as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, economic instability and public health emergencies, and political and social upheavals that challenge respect for human dignity and the further advancement of human rights prevalent in the European Education Area, have a profound and often lasting impact on education and training systems across Europe. These factors may disrupt learning and limit access to resources, and therefore exacerbate inequalities.
8. The growing diversity of children and learners brings about challenges for ECEC settings and schools, emphasising the need to respond effectively to their diverse needs. These institutions should be more resilient, accessible and inclusive so as to promote equitable opportunities for learning and the holistic development of every child and learner, thereby contributing to social cohesion.

9. School leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff, including in ECEC, are critical for ensuring the success of inclusive education. However, the recruitment and retention of qualified professionals remains a significant challenge in many Member States, which could hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education.

RECOGNISES that

10. The early years of education, particularly in ECEC settings, are critical for laying the foundations of inclusive learning. Those years foster children's comprehensive personal, emotional and social development, shape their positive attitude towards learning, stimulate their curiosity and build self-esteem. Equitable access to high-quality education, early interventions and inclusive pedagogies can significantly improve the chances for all children to succeed in life.
11. Inclusive, learner-centred practices put each individual, with their own challenges, interests and talents, at the centre of the education process, and use flexible and adaptive methods to meet learners where they are and guide them towards developing their full potential and achieving school success, countering the constraints imposed by structural inequalities, harmful societal norms and stereotypes.
12. Through its inclusive dimension, non-formal education can contribute to the development and improvement of learners' soft skills. It is important to build bridges between formal education and non-formal education and to encourage joint initiatives and actions between them.
13. Evidence-informed research shows that inclusive education benefits all learners, in terms of both educational performance, personal, emotional and social development and overall well-being, and that when learners from diverse backgrounds and abilities are included together in mainstream classrooms and have their needs met through specific support measures, they are more likely to develop positive social relationships, greater self-esteem and stronger problem-solving skills, which are crucial for lifelong learning and active participation in society and the labour market.
14. Access to high-quality data on learner outcomes, inclusive practices and the barriers faced by learners with diverse and special educational needs is crucial for monitoring progress, evaluating the impact of inclusive education policies, and ensuring that school practices are continually adapted to meet the evolving needs of all learners.
15. Evidence-informed policies that incorporate data on the effectiveness of inclusive practices are essential to guide the design and implementation of inclusive education and training systems at all levels and to ensure that interventions are tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners while promoting high-quality and equitable education and training.
16. Effective and high-quality initial teacher education and continuous professional development, grounded in evidence and best practices as well as teachers' needs and expectations, are essential for equipping school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff, including in ECEC, with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and teaching strategies to facilitate inclusive education. This includes enabling them to use ethical and safe assistive technologies to support children and learners with diverse needs in mainstream groups in ECEC settings, classrooms and schools.
17. The integration of inclusive education principles into education and training systems requires a comprehensive, whole-school approach in which learning processes, teaching practices, assessment methods, the school environment and support services are aligned to provide a comprehensive educational experience and well-being for all learners, and where school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff reflect the diversity of society.

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT

18. The importance of inclusive education practices based on a learner-centred approach, which considers the diverse needs, interests and learning styles of each individual from ECEC to school education.
19. The importance of a diversified and qualified pool of teaching staff in improving learning outcomes for all learners and the contribution of such factors to social cohesion and the development of democratic societies.
20. The importance of communication and cooperation with all families, parents or legal guardians in order to ensure that decisions are taken in the best interest of the child.

21. The need to further develop and implement evidence-informed policies and practices in a systemic way in order to address the evolving and diverse needs of children and learners, both in ECEC and in school education, while ensuring that those approaches reflect the latest research relevant to the field of education and training.

POINTS OUT the need to

22. Ensure adequate and early identification of the diverse needs of learners with the objective of creating inclusive and safe learning environments which encourage the engagement of all learners in equitable, high-quality education and training while respecting diversity and common European values and promoting digital humanism.
23. Address the diverse needs of learners by providing adequate evidence-informed support measures, while equipping learners as well as school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to acknowledge and value diversity and foster social cohesion, equality, personal fulfilment and active citizenship.
24. Develop and strengthen research, robust data collection and enquiry systems within the field of inclusive ECEC and school education to guide the strategic choice of effective and efficient inclusive approaches.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO

25. Continue to develop, where relevant, and implement an integrated and comprehensive strategy towards school success and inclusive policies that promote the active participation of all children and learners, ensuring equitable access to high-quality ECEC and school education and removing barriers to learning.
26. Foster teaching and formative assessment approaches and strategies that are targeted, flexible, differentiated and personalised to accommodate the diverse needs of learners, so that educational environments support the full participation of every learner, regardless of their starting point.
27. Through a whole-school approach, further develop inclusive ECEC and school cultures and practices that respect and value diversity, promote respect for all individuals and role models from all walks of life and encourage collaborative approaches to learning, where children, learners, families, parents or legal guardians, school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff such as support and specialised staff, including in ECEC, work together to create supportive learning communities, where everyone's learning needs and well-being are addressed.
28. Ensure that efforts are made to incorporate all learners' views and opinions in educational matters concerning them with a view to strengthening their sense of agency and belonging while making them feel empowered, included and involved in democratic processes.
29. Encourage a broader involvement of families, parents or legal guardians in the life of ECEC settings and schools to support recognition of their children's needs and capabilities and their socio-economic and cultural background, while taking into account the best interests of the child.
30. Consider investing in initial teacher education and continuous professional development and support for school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff such as support and specialised staff, to ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to implement inclusive teaching and assessment practices, recognise and address the diverse needs of learners and foster supportive learning environments.
31. Building on existing structures to avoid additional administrative burdens, strengthen efforts to collect and analyse data on inclusive practices and learning outcomes for all learners, paying particular attention to those from underrepresented and marginalised backgrounds and those with special educational needs, whilst avoiding labelling and stigmatisation, to ensure that policies are informed by reliable, up-to-date evidence.
32. Support analysis of effective inclusive practices and the translation of research into practical strategies for inclusion, ensuring that those strategies are contextually relevant and adaptable to different educational settings.
33. Encourage, where appropriate, the ethical and safe use of assistive technologies and digital tools, taking advantage of the new opportunities that artificial intelligence can bring to enhance accessibility and improve learning outcomes for learners with diverse needs and promote equity of access to those technologies and tools.

34. Further promote collaboration between policymakers, researchers, young people, school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff, including in ECEC and other stakeholders to ensure that evidence-informed practices are shared, evaluated and implemented across education and training systems.
35. Promote cooperation between ECEC institutions, schools and higher education and research institutions for the development of innovative, evidence-informed, inclusive and learner-centred methods that support school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff, including in ECEC, in their work.
36. Strengthen partnerships between ECEC institutions, schools, social services, healthcare providers, youth organisations and community organisations to support the holistic development of children and learners, addressing both educational and socio-economic factors that influence their learning outcomes and well-being.
37. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive education policies and practices using a range of means, including feedback from learners, school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff, including in ECEC, and families, parents or legal guardians, making adjustments as needed to ensure continuous improvement.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO

38. Continue to offer support to Member States in their efforts to implement inclusive education practices through EU funding by all available means, without prejudice to the negotiations on the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and through the development of resources that promote evidence-informed inclusive policies, using among other things the expertise of the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks.
39. Continue to offer support to Member States in peer learning activities, which create opportunities to explore research evidence and to learn from experiences in promoting change and innovation across education and training systems.
40. Continue to develop a repository of research-based effective and efficient policies and practices on inclusive education, building on existing resources, such as the European School Education Platform, with the aim of supporting school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff, including in ECEC as well as local, regional and national policy in order to improve outcomes for all children and learners.
41. Further cooperate and seek synergies with international organisations, independent agencies and other relevant international stakeholders, such as the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, OECD, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), UNESCO, UNICEF and the European Statistical System to strengthen the evidence concerning inclusive education, while avoiding creating new structures.
42. Take these conclusions into account when preparing and implementing actions in the area of inclusive education while respecting the principle of subsidiarity.

INVITES THE COMMISSION AND MEMBER STATES TO

43. Continue to use the full potential of the Erasmus+ programme to support inclusive education through projects, practices and pedagogical tools across all its dimensions and actions, and make the most of the programme's inclusive approach to learning mobility so that it delivers real change across education and training systems.
44. Commit to ensuring that inclusive education remains a priority at EU level in the field of education and training, contributing to the full achievement of the European Education Area and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education).
45. Continue dialogue and cooperation between all stakeholders at local, regional, national, EU and international level in the education and training sector to create inclusive, equitable and learner-centred education and training systems that support the development of all learners.
