POLICY REPORT ON INCLUSIVE SCHOOL EDUCATION

Lessons learnt from the

Inclusive Schools Project

INScool

November 2020

INTRODUCTION

What do we mean by inclusion?

Inclusion or inclusive education refers to education that is based on concepts, models and processes that focus on equitable access to and engagement in learning for all children, regardless of gender, ability, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or any other difference[1]. This means giving all students the access and opportunity to enjoy education alongside their peers, valuing diversity and promoting equal opportunities for all students. This in turn increases the presence, participation and achievement of all students and recognises and minimises barriers to learning and participation.

Schools can be considered as micro-societies that reflect what is happening on the macro-level. The education system operates within the context of wider social and structural factors and may reflect and reproduce environments that do not protect children and adolescents from exclusion. Going to school is not a guarantee of quality education; it is estimated that 250 million children worldwide are unable to read, write or count well, even if they have been to school. In order to address this global issue, the fourth UN Sustainable Development Goal focuses not just on access to education, but also on inclusive and equitable quality education. Quality education can be understood as the 'one that focuses on the whole child — the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location... A Quality Education is supported by three key pillars: ensuring access to quality teachers; providing use of quality learning tools and professional development; and the establishment of safe and supportive quality learning environments'[2].

Lower educational outcomes have a negative impact on social and economic inclusion and integration and increase a person's vulnerability to marginalisation. They increase a young person's risk of leaving school early and becoming a NEET[3]. Children and young people who have an adverse experience at school have fewer chances to succeed in life and are less likely to continue learning[4]. To counteract these risks, it is necessary to foster an educational process built on the principles of participatory learning and human rights. Such education should focus both on the involvement of all learners in the everyday life of schools and on families in the broader community.

The relationships teachers are able to build within and outside the school community are essential to democratise school governance and strengthen accountability to local communities. The process should also be fully sanctioned by schools and supported by education policy. Teachers will need to handle increasing diversity in their classrooms, as well as the expectations of parents and the communities. Therefore, there is a pressing need to elaborate on the notion of living together and shape respective inclusive approaches to education in order to create prosperity, stability and community cohesion[5].

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1   InScool project Educational Pack
2   Education International and ASCD: The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the Pursuit of Quality Education for All
3   LLLP and CEDEFOP (2019) - Implementing a holistic approach to lifelong learning: Community Lifelong Learning Centres as a gateway to multidisciplinary support teams
4   Eurostat: Adult learning statistics. Those who completed, at most, lower secondary education were the least likely to have participated in lifelong learning with 23.6%.
5   LLLP position paper (2019) - 21st Century Learning Environments

Background

The InScool project has been running since January 2019 and will end in January 2021. A strong partnership was formed led by a well-established organisation, with extensive experience in cooperating with schools around the world, the British Council. Each partner represented stakeholders necessary for the success of the project. These included:

- The civil society and NGO sector, both at local level to foster inclusion practices together with schools (Expedition Inside Culture, Scotdec, ACPP), and at EU level representing students in secondary schools (Obessu) and education stakeholders (LLLP)

- A public organisation affiliated to the Greek Ministry of Education conducting research in school education (IEP).

The diversity within the team ensured that the project responded to the target groups' needs and actively reached out to a range of education stakeholders.

The project implementation took place against the backdrop of important changes across Europe. At the start of the project, Europe was already experiencing social, political and economic turmoil leading to gradual segregation of society and bringing about inequality and limited access to fundamental human rights (such as access to education for all[6]). These issues have been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic increasing even more the threat of exclusion for the most fragile societal groups.

The project aimed to address these issues by aspiring to embed inclusive education principles into school management in Europe. It supported the emergence of a community of leaders who stand for inclusion consisting of school leaders, teachers, staff, and students. The long-term vision behind the project is a gradual transformation of school culture into an inclusive school ethos by fostering long-term inclusion strategies in schools and engaging school communities in action plans and collaborations that promote equality and value diversity.

Five partners were directly involved in piloting the educational material produced in the frame of the project: four at national levels (Poland, Spain, Greece, and Scotland) and one of them at EU level (OBESSU). This report focuses on those countries while also covering the EU level. It analyses the results of the activities implemented and relate to the wider political, social, legislative, and cultural contexts.

The implementation of the InScool activities proved the relevance of the project. Inclusion related issues emerged when educational practitioners had to digitalise teaching provisions for the pupils. It was obvious that initial conditions (IT infrastructure, equipment, experience regarding digital learning, competences of the staff) placed EU schools on an unequal footing to face the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic. In some cases, good practices were implemented whereas in others, vulnerable groups' access, inclusion, and participation in learning was proven even more challenging than in traditional face-to-face settings. Digitalisation is a more 'trendy' priority for policymakers than inclusion in general, but these two need to go hand in hand and

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6   Delineated in Article 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights

happen on a large scale in a comprehensive manner by practically addressing the need of basic digital skills for all. This means that despite the damage that the pandemic had on InScool planned activities, it has also brought a benefit in the sense that it increased its relevance in the eyes of policymakers. This was another opportunity for EU organisations representing school stakeholders to raise the inclusion issue[7].

Through this document we aim to share with educational practitioners and organisations working on inclusion the lessons learned through the InScool project, the main achievements as well as the points for improvement in order to support their work and practices. In addition, the document can be a tool for policymakers to support evidence-based inclusion policies in their jurisdictions. Finally, the document will serve as a basis for the drafting of policy recommendations for Ministries and authorities at regional and national levels as well as for EU policymakers.

POLICY EVALUATION AND INSIGHTS

Good practices

- *What is a good practice?* The project implementation showed the need among all stakeholders involved to agree on a common definition of what is a 'good practice'. There is a need for more guidance and the establishment of a set of criteria on inclusive good practices.

- *Peer education:* Peer education is proven to be a key success factor in inclusive education projects. The peer education activities can help students engage better with inclusion issues. Teachers also saw the benefits of this methodology and noticed how children were more at ease opening up with other children.

- *Empowerment means sustainability:* It is highly recommended to lift barriers in order to empower teachers to take actions towards improving inclusion at schools. The inclusion practices that InScool aims to embed in schools cannot be sustained unless they are accompanied by a strong motivation of involved stakeholders and administrative support that promotes them.

- *Community outreach:* Schools should take a look at the way they communicate towards and work with their communities. Good practices pointed out in InScool include the sharing of information in different languages with parents and carers, organising extra activities during different religious holidays and organising activities around children's rights.

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7   See: OBESSU reaction to the 'Impact of Covid-19 on General Secondary Education and Vocational Education'. ESHA report on 'The impacts and challenges of Covid-19 at the start of the new school year'. ECSWE manifesto '7 lessons learned from Covid-19'.

Response to challenges

- *Covid-19 and digitalisation:* Decision makers should take the effects of the pandemic into consideration in new policies on inclusive and digital education. Schools need to work on establishing communication channels with their communities in order to mitigate the issues that may arise during distance learning.

- *School level participation:* Participation of all, from teachers and students to parents and staff, should be ensured when designing inclusion protocols. All school areas should be thought of in the design, from the school's canteen to the sport clubs, to ensure a lifelong learning approach.

- *Multi-layered education systems:* Project partners need to be better prepared for navigating the various administrative layers rooted in each country's education system. This would avoid hindering the implementation of the project's activities.

- *National and regional policies:* Inclusion policies in partner countries need to improve in terms of their transversality between the social and educational scopes. In addition, it would be advantageous to shift from the top-down approach that often does not ensure that schools have the necessary resources to implement inclusive education policies.

- *Policy coherence at EU level:* It would be advantageous if the EU uses its position to achieve consensus in terms of the definition of inclusiveness and inclusive education in order to create understandable and unambiguous public policies across Europe.

- *Mainstream inclusion in all EU projects:* In addition to having calls for proposals specifically directed at inclusion, this aspect should be systematically integrated into all projects funded by the EU. These issues should be addressed during the implementation of the education package recently released and the upcoming post-ET2020 framework.

- *Stakeholder outreach and cooperation at EU level:* EU institutions should ensure the participation of all relevant stakeholders when elaborating policies on inclusion. The EU should work on closing the gap between the various levels of action. This includes recognising the role of civil society in supporting schools to achieve inclusive education goals. In addition, European partnerships, including the UK, add value for both project partners and beneficiaries. Participating organisations improve their practices, to the benefit of the school communities. These partnerships should be further encouraged and strengthened.

- *EU long-term vision:* EU funding schemes, notably Erasmus+, should provide funding opportunities to sustain the continuation of successful projects like InScool to ensure that expected changes are achieved, as two years is not sufficient time for producing long-lasting changes.

THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS PROJECT

The context

Before diving into the specifics of the project, we examine the current European and national contexts in which the project has been developed and rolled out:

European context

In January 2019 when the project started, Europe was already experiencing social, political and economic discontent. Society was becoming increasingly segregated, inequality increasing, and access to fundamental human rights becoming limited for growing sections of the population. The Covid-19 pandemic has further increased the threat of exclusion for the most fragile societal groups. Those groups were heavily impacted by the restriction measures, notably school closures and distance learning adaptations. School stakeholders including school heads, staff, teachers, pupils, and parents had to drastically change school and teaching practices to continue providing education in this situation.

Research has shown that physical attributes, special needs, race, socioeconomic and immigration status are just some factors that lead to a child being perceived as different and more likely to be bullied and excluded[8]. Considering that the number of refugees is growing rapidly worldwide, the need for inclusive education is more crucial than ever. Evidence shows that people with a refugee background are five times more likely not to be enrolled in education than their non-refugee peers[9]. At EU level, the gaps between children from disadvantaged homes and children from non-disadvantaged homes are remarkable. On average, children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE[10]) lag around 11 percentage points behind non-AROPE children[11].

The current European context calls for teachers and school leaders to develop their competences and to integrate school-level policy measures to promote inclusion and level out potential learning barriers[12]. At EU level, around 19 per cent of teachers work in schools where more than 30 per cent of students come from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes[13]. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen teacher capacity to support students who are at risk of exclusion. This year the European Commission has put forth a number of initiatives to tackle the aforementioned issues, including the Updated Skills Agenda[14], the new communication on the European Education Area[15] and the update of the Digital Education Action Plan.

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8   See: UK Department of Education (2015), Sweeting, H. and West, P. (2001), From Peer to Peer: European Schools Cooperating to be Bullying Free (2016), Downes P. and Cefai, C (2016).

9   UNESCO (2016).

10 Eurostat: AROPE corresponds to the sum of persons who are either at risk of poverty, or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. Persons are only counted once even if they are present in several sub-indicators. The AROPE rate, the share of the total population which is at risk of poverty or social exclusion, is the headline indicator to monitor the EU 2020 Strategy poverty target.

11   Education and Training Monitor (2019).

12   LLLP statement (2017) - Improving and Modernising Education: Weaving principles of inclusiveness throughout education systems.

13   Ibid.

14   LLLP statement (2020) - European Skills Agenda: a step further to true Lifelong Learning?

15   LLLP statement (2018) - LLLP Response to the second package of measures for creating a European Education Area - Lifelong learning and cross-sector cooperation are the key factors for success!

National contexts

Greece

The Greek Country Report[16] states that public spending on education is relatively low, accounting for 3.9 per cent of GDP in 2017, below the EU average of 4.6 per cent. The school education system is highly centralised and suffers from numerous deficiencies. Although the proportion of young people leaving school early is among the lowest in the EU (4.1 per cent), the share is much higher among the foreign-born population (17.9 per cent). A pupil's basic skills achievement is greatly influenced by their socioeconomic background; students from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds and migrant backgrounds are more likely to be underachievers.

For teachers, the level of continuing professional development has decreased significantly during the last decade and relies heavily on programmes co-financed by the European Social Funds. Teacher evaluation in Greece was abolished in 2014 and the system relies strongly on substitute teachers[17]. This has had an impact on the quality of education. In rural areas teachers often have to teach several subjects without having adequate credentials. Since 2015 the term inclusion has replaced integration in public discourse, as inclusion is a broader concept that takes into account every subject of the community including people with disabilities, refugees and the LGBTQI+ community.

Poland

The Polish Country Report[18] shows that recent development in the Polish school systems have affected working and learning conditions. The costs of local governments are growing more quickly than the corresponding ministerial subventions received for investment. Primary and secondary schools often operate on a shift schedule (e.g. one level in the morning and the other in the afternoon) and teachers often work in more than one school. Another issue is the growing shortage of teachers and the low attractiveness of the teaching profession due to salary conditions and lower societal recognition. Many teachers are leaving for other jobs. All this means that inequality of opportunities for pupils around the country is likely to increase. Inequality is further exacerbated by the additional costs that households must bear, such as internet access and technological devices, which put a heavy burden on poor families. At national level there is no relevant methodological guidance to help school stakeholders meet the needs of the increasing number of foreign-born students.

Participants in the project's activities highlighted that over the last five years the civic space has shrunk. This has hindered the implementation of rights-based, anti-discrimination and inclusive education initiatives[19]. In Poland, the definition of 'inclusion' or 'vulnerable groups'' is a sensitive issue because of the cultural and political context. It is important to note that the country's inclusion policy mostly addresses native-born pupils confronted with social exclusion (e.g. those with physical disabilities) and not some groups targeted by InScool, such as those from

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16 European Commission (2020): Country Report Greece.
17 Substitute teacher in Greece: teachers who are employed on temporary contracts.
18 European Commission (2020): Country Report Poland.
19   More information can be found in reports by Amnesty International Poland.

the LGBTQI+ community, foreign-born students and refugees. Recent structural reforms and changes to the school curriculum have removed regulations on anti-discrimination activities and comprehensive sexual education. These changes have affected the work of anti-discrimination educators, school leaders and civil society advocates. Although the Polish system assumes multiple alternative educational paths and demands that schools take an individual approach to every student, the current context makes this an almost impossible task.

Spain

Spain's latest Country Report[20] states that investment in education remains relatively low and it has stagnated since 2012 at around four per cent of GDP. Spain still has one of the highest rates of early leavers from education and training among EU countries. Despite recent allocations to programmes that support students from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds, the rates of early leaving for students with disabilities and non-EU-born students are particularly high. Parental educational level also influences pupil performance. This is reflected in the data of grade repetition, with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds four times more likely to repeat the year than students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. For teachers, job instability remains one of the main challenges. Around 29 per cent of teachers work on temporary contracts with large regional differences. The ageing teaching population also causes concern about upcoming shortages.

During the focus group organised as part of the project, participants referred to the inclusive education policies in the country as 'insufficient' or with 'scarce quality'. More positively, the actual nature of inclusion was described as 'necessary' and the management of public policies as 'advancing'.

Scotland

In Scotland[21], the government has started a process of empowering schools, parents and children by closely involving local authorities. Participants in the project activities highlighted that the discussion around inclusion is often linked to 'attainment' but not always 'achievement' (teachers mention how attainment and achievement are sometimes in opposition). Inclusion is talked about in relation to different ways of learning and learning environments (e.g. outdoor learning). Similarly, inclusion is often debated in connection with the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)[22], but teachers think that the SIMD can be deceiving. For example, some learners in high SIMD schools are young carers, or their parents are unemployed.

Referring to the difficulties in achieving inclusion in their schools, participants in the focus group highlighted differing levels of motivation from staff, the mismatch between staff diversity and pupil diversity, and availability of time and resources. There is also the issue of how to measure inclusion or exclusion and the weight of the sociocultural context in this measurement. Participants mentioned discussions about the ability of schools to tackle gender identity as part of inclusion and the way those issues manifest in a school, from social dynamics to provision of facilities.

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20 European Commission (2020): Country Report Spain.
21 European Commission (2020): Country Report United Kingdom
22 The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The project

The InScool project aimed to foster long-term inclusion strategies in schools across Europe, embedding inclusive education principles in school management and engaging school communities in action plans and collaborations that promote equality and value diversity. The project reached out to policymakers, staff of public authorities (ministries, regional and local authorities), as well as institutions and organisations with an education focus on the local and European levels.

The project has used participatory methods of involvement, including:

- a communication and awareness campaign reaching school communities across Europe; (focus groups, digital communication, teacher training)

- advocacy actions to open dialogue between school communities and policymakers on the issue of inclusion in schools. (policy dialogue events, advocacy, and recommendations)

The Educational Pack provided schools with a thorough methodology to understand and embrace the diversity of their school community, identify the needs of diverse groups and assess the impact of their activities and culture on these groups. This should all lead to an Inclusive School strategy and action plan. This methodology covers three main pillars: supporting schools to create their own inclusion strategies, providing schools and stakeholders with the tools to advocate for necessary education reforms, and capturing the progress and benefits to schools and their communities.

The methodology consists of five steps. These are implemented throughout the school year and serve as a basis for schools to develop their own inclusion strategies. Detailed planning of the school's strategy is decided by the school taking part, led by the school leader and other core groups with the assistance of a critical friend[23]. At the end of each phase, the previous phase is evaluated and the next one is planned.

Phase 1: Getting started.

One of the main tasks of this phase is the recruitment and development of a school lead and representative core group who will steer the project journey. The overall aim of phase one is to ensure school stakeholders are ready for phase two, when they will be asked to express their views about aspects of inclusion in the school and identify priority areas for action. At the end of phase one, the core group needs to plan together for phase one so that the rest of the school community can be prepared.

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23 A critical friend is someone who works with an individual or group and supports them to achieve the goals they are working towards. It is usually somebody external to the organisation. In the Inclusive Schools project, the critical friend is likely to be someone from the central team of trainers involved in the project. More information can be found in the InScool project Educational Pack.

Phase 2: Where are we now? An In-depth look at priorities.

Phase two involves asking school stakeholders for their views about the priority areas identified through workshops and classroom activities in phase one. These views are important for shaping the project action plan in phase three. They can be gathered through techniques such as interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. A summary report is developed, the core group starts looking at phase three.

Phase 3: Where are we going first? How will we get there?

The aim of this phase is to develop an action plan. As many people as possible should be involved to ensure all school stakeholders feel that they have ownership of the action plan. Once the action plan is agreed, the core group needs to turn their attention to phase four: the implementation period.

Phase 4: Making it happen.

The main tasks in phase four are to implement the project action plan and monitor its progress. During this phase, an inclusion week should take place consisting of inclusion-themed activities across the school. It is important to document the implementation of phase four in order to track the progress and impact of each area of the action plan, keep the profile of the project high and maintain momentum, and collect evidence which can be used to evaluate the overall impact of the project during the next phase.

Phase 5: Where have we got to? Where next?

The core group's main tasks in this phase are to plan for and implement evaluation activities with school stakeholders. They should develop a draft vision for inclusion in the school with suggested next steps, and this should be shared with stakeholders. In addition, the core group needs to put together a final report for stakeholders that summarises the journey so far and the school's next steps. The group should revisit the priority areas to find out what has changed and what has enabled or hindered change.

PROJECT RESULTS

Results were analysed using the project's activity reports and the focus groups organised by project partners. The focus groups gathered relevant stakeholders in each country to discuss implementation, strengths, weaknesses, and other obstacles encountered.

Activities implemented

Creating practical guidance: Educational resources were developed in the first semester of the project resulting in the [Educational Pack](). This pack received very positive feedback from internal and external stakeholders as a comprehensive and invaluable tool to support schools in embedding inclusion methodologies. It can be found, together with other resources, on the [InScool project website]().

Training trainers and teachers at local and international level: An international training for trainers took place in Athens in 2019. Project partners also organised training sessions for teachers in other EU and non-EU countries, for example OBESSU organised an international teacher training in Belgium, inclusion leader workshops in Bosnia and Spain, and teacher trainings in Austria, Romania, and Ireland.

Delivery of school workshops in schools in Europe, developing tools for screening inclusion in the school community and facilitating schools in developing their action plan and inclusion strategies: Workshops aimed to involve all stakeholders in shaping a common understanding of inclusion, providing tools and leaving flexibility for context-related approaches. In addition, multiplier events were organised in order to disseminate the project activities and results.

Workshops in schools were organised by the British Council in Greece (Athens, Thessaloniki, Kalamata), by ACPP in Spain (Aragon, Catalonia), by EiC in Poland (Krakow, Zabrze) and by Scotdec in the Scotland (Edinburgh, West and East Lothian). OBESSU, through their network, reached out to schools in other European countries (Belgium, Ireland, Romania and Finland) in order to get an EU-level picture of inclusive education. These workshops supported teachers and students in developing understanding of the importance of inclusive education, increased involvement in actions initiated in schools, and familiarised the school community with the project methodology. OBESSU, as a partner working at EU level, also conducted capacity building activities for students across their member organisations and promotion of the InScool project.

Focus groups in Greece, Spain, Scotland, Poland, and Belgium. Education stakeholders were gathered to exchange feedback on the educational methodology and implementation plan, as well as to share good practices and experiences from running, participating in and benefiting from initiatives related to inclusive education. To ensure sustainability beyond the project life span, the project partners (led by OBESSU) designed an online course of four modules based on the education content of the Inclusive Schools project.

Setting up an Inclusive Schools Network out of which best practices on inclusion will emerge: The lockdown measures did not allow us to set up a network in the planned format of a certification scheme. Instead, an informal network of social inclusion leaders was formed. These leaders participated in joint online webinars around classroom inclusion practices.

Advocacy: These activities communicated the project to European education stakeholders and policymakers to raise awareness of the topic of inclusive education. One of the main activities was the 'Inclusion at schools: from policy to practice' event, which was organised by LLLP with the support of InScool project partners and the European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB). During the event, insights were shared regarding how to build European inclusive schools' communities and develop and implement inclusive strategies within EU schools.

Strengths and weaknesses

Strong points

Cross-cutting nature and flexibility: Participants valued that it did not just focus on the occasional action of small groups, but rather allowed for the entire school community to participate at different levels. Participants in the training sessions praised the focus on rights. The project was considered flexible and well adapted to the work of the teaching staff. Participants of the teachers' and pupils' workshops and peer education[24] method said the activities helped them engage better with the issues and methodologies. Teachers and students were reported to be enthusiastic about the possibility of working differently.

Resources and activities: Participants in the focus groups highlighted that the educational proposal is highly assumable in daily work and the didactic materials were quickly and easily accessible by teachers. This allows teaching staff more autonomy and helps the materials become integrated in the curriculum, thereby guaranteeing continuity beyond assistance from the coordinating team. The programme activities were also easy to use in class and they helped to determine the degree and quality of the inclusion (such as whether some practices actually result in inclusion rather than just aiming for it). The flexibility of the materials meant they could be used for a range of inclusion topics (disability, gender, etc.), therefore adapting them to the reality of the school and its organisational dynamic.

Whole-school and community approach: The Inclusive Schools programme has proven a popular option among schools, with teachers' interest in the programme particularly high. This contributed to its success. Participants also underlined that the project helped them become more aware of the topic. They considered that families and professionals not directly linked to the execution of the project had been encouraged to take part, thereby creating a climate of care and trust.

Involvement of an EU-wide network of organisations: School student unions all over Europe were the main actors introducing the project in schools through peer education and student empowerment. Representatives of school student unions both at national and international level benefited from capacity building, both through the educational methodology and from being involved as leaders for inclusion to become ambassadors of the project.

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24 Peer education has been defined as sharing of information and experiences among individuals with something in common (Abdi and Simbar, 2013). In addition peer education is considered a method of information transference or role modelling where a particular type of behaviour is promoted or information transferred (Brammer and Walker, 1995 as cited in Council of Europe, 2004).

Programme sustainability: There was a positive assessment of future long-term work. As mentioned, the material and its adaptability were considered a strong point by the participants. Didactic materials can be integrated into the curriculum and replicated in various approaches to inclusion. Similarly, stable working groups were formed at various levels (such as management, teachers or families,), which will enhance inclusion practices beyond the project timeframe. Moreover, project partners considered that one of the main achievements was the establishment of meaningful relationships with teachers and particular groups in the participating schools.

Positive aspects

- One of the positive aspects of the project was its **cross-cutting and all-encompassing nature** as well as its **focus on rights.**

- The project was considered **flexible and well adapted** to the work of the teaching staff. The teachers' and pupils' workshops and the experience with **peer education** received particularly positive feedback from participants.

- The **material produced** was considered a strong point. The proposed educational activities were seen as highly assumable into daily work and the didactic materials were quickly and easily accessible for teachers.

- In terms of the **sustainability** of the programme, there was a positive assessment of future work over the long term. Didactic materials can be integrated in the curriculum and replicated over time from various approaches to inclusion.

- One of the main achievements throughout the implementation was establishing **meaningful relationships** with teachers and particular groups in the participating schools.

- The **transforming experience** of the schools involved may have planted a good seed for embedding inclusive education in their strategies.

- Another positive aspect of the project was the **involvement of an EU-wide network** of organisations, which allowed school student unions all over Europe to act as the main actors introducing the project in schools through peer education and through student empowerment.

Weak points

Implementing cooperation: Although cooperation (of all teachers, the school leadership, the school community) was perceived as a strong point that the programme was trying to foster, this aspect was considered by some participants as a weak point when it comes to implementation. It was noted that in some cases it was difficult to involve the whole school community.

Connection with teachers' trainers: It was also highlighted that in the makeup of the programme there was a low connection with trainers of future teaching staff. Working with the university and/or other teacher training institutions is an essential path if long-term change is to be generated.

Teachers' confidence: Participants reported that self-censorship by teachers was observed which led to the selection of so-called 'safe topics'. This situation arose either from lack of confidence to touch upon certain topics or external pressure from society or government.

Mismatch between project's ambitions and a realistic timescale: The project was at times perceived as too ambitious in the difficult task of transforming school cultures and ethos. Participants commented that programmes that aim to change as well as create attitudes require more implementation time. For some participants, the project was limited to a small group and was not taken advantage of by more schools. However, they considered that the transformative experience of the participating schools may have planted a good seed for future and further development of inclusive school strategies and practices.

Points for improvement

• Although **cooperation within the school community** was perceived as a strong point that the programme was trying to foster, this aspect was considered as a weak point in terms of implementation.

• The Inclusive School programme could have made a **stronger connection with trainers of future teaching staff**. Closer work with the university and/or other teacher training institutions is essential if long-term change is to be generated.

• The project was at times too ambitious regarding the difficult task of **transforming school culture**, which is more of a long-term process.

External obstacles

Education systems: One of the main issues noted by partners was the obstacles within their education systems, especially as InScool entailed external partners working with schools. For example, in Spain, the brakes put on by the education administration at all levels prevented the results from being scaled up. Even though there were highly active schools involved, inertia in the administration made it difficult to advance with the project and to obtain real effects. Change happened, but not at a structural level (organisation, curriculum, etc.) because there are still many obstacles within the system.

In the case of Scotland, obstacles were found at the level of school administration. Schools had leeway in identifying and determining priorities to work on during a specific period. This meant that enthusiastic teachers wishing to bring about change in their schools would find it very difficult to do so if inclusion has not been included among the priorities of their administration.

In certain countries, external pressure from society and the government hindered trust building between project partners and participants. More specifically, in Poland it was noticed that

there is a sense of fear of repercussions and low level of trust towards outsiders. This made it more difficult to create an open channel of communication during the implementation of activities. Some partners also pointed out how low previous and current presence of similar initiatives (such as NGOs working with schools on inclusion) could render the implementation process difficult.

The Covid-19 pandemic: Partners were unable to proceed with implementation as planned which affected the collection of results and the level of participation. The lockdown measures and having to depend on online communication limited access to parents and students. Furthermore, there was scarce involvement of teaching staff beyond school hours or the physical space of the school. There was low response from the teaching staff when attempting to take activities beyond the classrooms. A certain amount of saturation by the teaching staff was noted, which should be studied in future projects. Notably, in Spain and in Greece, the work of the coordination team received a positive evaluation, especially the assistance provided to the participating schools and the ability to adapt to the new scenario created by the coronavirus pandemic.

- Partners noted the **obstacles within their education systems,** from bureaucracy at various levels of governments to low levels of support from school leadership and political pressure.

- The **pandemic** prevented partners from proceeding with planned implementation, made collection of results more difficult, and affected participation from the school community.

Unexpected results

Partner's self-reflection on inclusion: One unexpected result has been that the Scottish partner, Scotdec, was asked critical questions by teachers taking part in the project. These questions were about the make-up of the staff team, external communication processes and possible barriers that prevent schools from working with them. These prompted the staff and trustees of Scotdec to start a critical review of the inclusiveness of their own organisation. As a result, in August 2020 Scotdec created a new priority within their five-year strategic plan to ensure diversity and anti-racist approaches are embedded in their structures, partnerships and practice. They are currently analysing their database and undertaking qualitative research to identify barriers to people working with them and put in place new policies and practices.

In the case of OBESSU, a pool of inclusion leaders beyond partner countries, has been established as a follow up to the four-day international training involving student activities from Italy, Austria, Finland, Ireland, Romania and Slovenia. These students are involved in the development of their national organisation's action plans. Activities are coordinated by two mentors and regular online meetings.

- The project was an opportunity for partners to **self-reflect on the inclusiveness** of their own organisations and embed inclusion practices in their strategies and activities.

Good Practices

What is a good practice? Participants reflected that the term 'good practice' can be vague and overused. It was also highlighted that there should be a quality assurance of good practices. Participants suggested that a guide with criteria of good practices and specifically criteria of inclusive good practices should be put in place. This guide could answer questions such as: What constitutes a good practice? What are the parameters that all good practices have regardless of how different they are?

Peer education: A good practice learnt was that discussions involving students can help to make schools more inclusive. Teachers are not alone in this process, students are part of it, and sometimes teachers should assume their fair share of responsibility in causing exclusion, even if it is largely not done on purpose. Participants highlighted that they felt more confident and excited about peer education, a topic that made them nervous before, but they could now see the benefits. They noticed how children were more at ease opening up with other children. On the same lines, participants felt that the activities and the way they were done were understandable to the children. The activities functioned as a prismatic mirror of the representation of their reality. Furthermore, they considered positively the activities in which the philosophy of 'the other' could inspire the whole teaching practice.

Empowerment means sustainability: To achieve the sustainability of the programme, it was underlined that there should be provisions to lift inclusion barriers in order to empower teachers to take actions towards embedding inclusion at schools. For example, there were cases when positive attitudes from teachers towards inclusion may have been deterred because they didn't receive enough support, either from the school itself, or governing entities at various levels (local, regional and national). Inclusion policies and practices cannot be sustained unless they are accompanied by a holistic approach and administrative support that promotes them. The individuals and the local school community level can, at times, be or feel powerless without creating the conditions for a supportive ecosystem towards inclusion.

Community outreach: Communication from the school towards parents was highlighted as a good practice. For example, schools' notes and information to families should become multilingual (e.g. include all languages of family's background). Overall, there should be a stronger focus on working with the local community. Another initiative involved organising alternative activities at lunchtime during Ramadan for children who are fasting. Others used stories from other countries and encouraged pupils to tell stories in their mother tongue in order to celebrate language diversity. There are schools that organised a 'Children's Right of the month' in which a specific right is chosen as a focus.

Key success factors for inclusive projects with schools

Inscool Educational pack and Inscool methodology was well received by the participants. Here are some key success factors for the organisation of cross-sector and multi partner projects with schools on inclusion:

• **Whole-school and community approach:** multi partnership cooperation projects and initiatives with school gain from involving the school community as a whole, from students, school staff, to parents. Participants underlined that the project encouraged families and professionals not directly linked to take part, thereby creating a climate of care and trust

• **Flexibility in project implementation:** when doing a pilot with schools, it is important to leave some flexibility to the plan, for instance, to adapt to the work of the teaching staff.

• **Resources and activities:** Teachers should be supported in the path to inclusion. They need materials, resources, competences and mentors. When tailored to the needs of the teachers, projects such as InScool can greatly support the development of valuable resources for teacher professional development. InScool resources and activities are highly assumable in daily work and the didactic materials were quickly and easily accessible by teachers.

• **Involvement of an EU wide network of organisations:** Involving in the partnership EU wide networks or organisations proved beneficial for the project. Their involvement allowed for a wider reach not only in terms of awareness raising but also by allowing the active participation in the project of key stakeholders such as EU-wide student unions.

• **Inter-schools cooperation:** It would be beneficial for participating schools to connect more among each other in order to take advantage of synergies and share successful methodologies between teaching staff and other collaborating entities.

• **Connection with teachers' trainers:** When developing inclusive education projects, a higher connection with trainers of future teaching staff should be included. Links with universities and/or other teacher training institutions are essential for long-term change.

• **Mismatch between project's ambitions and a realistic timescale:** Inscool aimed at reshaping schools' culture, but it is a slow process. Inclusive education projects should aim to link their activities to long-term inclusion strategies.

• **Education systems:** There are similarities and discrepancies in terms of the obstacles faced in each education system. Each EU project should pay particular attention to establishing strategies tailored to the national or local contexts of participating schools to better surmount these obstacles or mitigate their effects in the best possible way.

• **The Covid-19 pandemic:** In order to avoid or mitigate the effects of future lockdowns, contingency plans should be developed that focus on communication between partners and participants.

> • **Self-reflection on inclusion:** An unexpected added value for partner organisations involved during two year in the project, it is that it led them to reflect on their own inclusiveness practices and governance. This shows the positive impact of participating in Erasmus+ funded projects on social inclusion that could be systematised, shall the inclusion dimension (as plan or strategy) be required in all Erasmus+ funded projects.

Challenges

Local, Regional and National levels

Covid-19 and digitalisation: The pandemic has shed light on the fact that many students that have limited or no access to the internet. This is something that should be considered in new policies on inclusive and digital education. The pandemic also affected collaboration with members of the school community (students and parents) from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Interactions were constrained due to a lack of material resources (e.g. computers, tablets) and adequate preparation, competence or experience to adapt to the new reality.

School level: One of the challenges at school level is the participation of all, from students and teachers to school staff and parents, when inclusion protocols or programmes are designed. Similarly, these programmes can sometimes overlook certain spaces in the schools such as the canteen which should also be included when designing inclusion protocols.

Multi-layered education systems: Navigating the various administrative layers rooted in each country's education system can be a challenge for everyone involved. In many cases it can greatly hinder the implementation of the project's activities.

National and regional policies: Partners and participants in the focus groups highlighted that one of the challenges at these levels is that policies are not sufficiently cross-cutting between the social and educational scopes and could use more synergies to improve inclusion in their areas. The top-down approach in the implementation of new legislation means that, very often, schools do not have the necessary human and financial resources to ensure efficient implementation.

In the case of Spain, although there are some elements of inclusive education at national level, the curricula still need adaptation to ensure implementation and guarantee transfer to lower levels of governance. This is particularly important since there are cases where policy, materials and resources reach neither regional nor local levels nor grassroots organisations. In Poland, it was noted that despite official declarations, the national curriculum presents deficiencies in terms of inclusive education.

In the case of Greece, the official policy of the country emphasises mainly the inclusion of students with learning difficulties and special needs and less of students who come from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds. Although attempts have been made to establish ZEP (Zones of Education Priority), there are still challenges around preparing teachers adequately to help students and fostering cooperation

EU level

Policy coherence: A challenge at EU level concerns the definition of inclusiveness and inclusive education - just as it is a challenge for related concepts such as gender, identity and sexual orientation, among others. Clarifying these concepts can help to create understandable and unambiguous public policies across Europe and support identifying the necessary resources needed to better implement inclusion policies. The EU could use its position to achieve consensus among Member States and ensure it is mainstreamed through tools such as the European Semester. Furthermore, the EU itself makes it challenging for organisations to make inclusion part of all EU-funded projects. In addition to of having calls for proposals specifically directed at inclusion, this aspect should be systematically integrated into all projects. These issues should be addressed during the implementation of the education package recently released and the upcoming post-ET2020 framework[25].

Stakeholders'outreach and cooperation[26]: Another challenge at EU level remains the participation of all stakeholders when elaborating policies on inclusion[27]. There is a gap between the transnational and institutional level and the grassroots action that needs to be addressed. The new Communication on the European Education Area already presents good initiatives such as the Pathways to School Success and the Erasmus Teacher Academies, however, an aspect missing is the role of CSOs in supporting schools to achieve planned objectives.

Long-term vision: As noted in the weak points of the project, the cultural shift by schools is a process that can take longer than two-year projects - notably including those funded by the Erasmus+ programme. Continuing the support of successful projects after they end would build stronger foundations and ensure the sustainability of interventions.

• **At local, regional and national level,** the main challenges found revolved around the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the difficulties with involving the whole school community, the issues of navigating the multi-layered education systems, and the deficiencies of national and regional inclusion policies.

• **At EU level,** the challenges included issues of policy coherence from EU institutions regarding inclusion, the fostering of stakeholder outreach and cooperation, and the lack of support for long-term projects.

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25 LLLP statement (2018) - LLLP Response to the second package of measures for creating a European Education Area - Lifelong learning and cross-sector cooperation are the key factors for success!
26 LLLP statement (2017) - LLLP Response to Future of Learning Package: Building bridges between all forms and sectors of education is the future of learning in Europe.
27 LLLP statement (2018) - LLLP Response to the second package of measures for creating a European Education Area - Lifelong learning and cross-sector cooperation are the key factors for success!

CONCLUSIONS

- The InScool project was able to plant the seeds of inclusive education principles into school management and foster a community of leaders - school leaders, teachers, staff and students - standing for inclusion.

- The proposed methodology outlined in the Educational Pack is an important contribution of the project. From the project partners' and stakeholders' experience, the methodology was a good tool to support schools in understanding the diversity of their own school community, identifying the needs of diverse groups and assessing the impact of the school activities and culture on these groups leading to an Inclusive School strategy and action plan. This was, despite the obstacles, encountered throughout the implementation.

- Implementation was mainly affected by obstacles within the education systems and the measures taken to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. However, despite necessary adaptations, participants gave positive feedback about the project activities and materials.

- Such projects are valuable for teachers and their professional development. Organisations such as those belonging to this partnership can really make a difference by supporting teachers to make inclusion in schools a reality.

Inclusive Schools Project