Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe

Eurydice report - Main findings

OVERALL FINDINGS

All learners need to be considered in policies aiming to promote diversity and inclusion in schools in order to ensure that no one is left behind and that all are supported in their learning and development to achieve their full potential.

The Eurydice report on 'Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe' investigates what national/top-level education authorities across Europe do to address discrimination and to promote diversity and inclusion in schools, with a special focus on targeted initiatives to support those learners who are most likely to experience disadvantage and/or discrimination. It shows that students with special educational needs or disabilities are a main target group in all analysed areas – data monitoring, strategic policy frameworks, policies and measures to promote access and participation, national curricula, learning and social-emotional support initiatives, and teacher education and training. Another very frequently targeted student group across most of the thematic areas is migrant and refugee students, followed by ethnic minority students, in particular Roma students. This corresponds to the two most often reported grounds of discrimination in school education, that is, special educational needs/disability and ethnic background.

Gender equality is also relatively frequently promoted, for example through top-level bodies monitoring cases of discrimination in schools, through cooperation initiatives between education authorities and independent organisations active in the field of diversity and inclusion, or through national curricula. Learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, although not explicitly defined as a target group in this

report, are also relatively frequently targeted, especially by policies and measures promoting access to and participation in schools and those fostering learning and social-emotional support.

LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexual identities) and religious minority students, on the other hand, are much less frequently targeted by policies and measures aiming to promote diversity and inclusion in schools. Even though the different groups of learners analysed in this report face different and varying degrees of challenges and have different needs, it is important that they are all considered in policies aiming to promote diversity and inclusion in order to ensure that no student is left behind and that all are supported in their learning and development to achieve their full potential.

Throughout the report, many examples of recent policy initiatives are presented, which can inspire national efforts aiming to enhance diversity and inclusion in education. However, the report does not cover the practices implemented in schools. Analysis of the policies' effectiveness or outcomes also falls outside the scope of this report. Therefore, these elements need to be investigated and considered to draw comprehensive conclusions on how to ensure access to quality, inclusive, mainstream education for all learners.

FINDINGS BY CHAPTER

Chapter 1: Diversity and inclusion in the context of school education

Addressing discrimination and disadvantage in schools requires a focus on more equitable and inclusive education that considers the specific, multifaceted needs of each learner.

The importance of valuing diversity and the inclusion of all learners in education and training is widely recognised in key EU policy documents, including the EU equality strategies linked to the grounds of discrimination listed in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. However, much evidence shows that there are persistent differences in equity of educational access, experience and outcomes when looking at students with different personal and social characteristics, related to their sex, gender, ethnicity, migration background, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, etc.

People with certain characteristics may face more barriers to accessing resources, such as quality mainstream education, and they may be discriminated against. Discrimination can be structural (e.g. segregation policies or a lack of resources to meet specific needs); it can be compounded by prejudice (both intentional and unintentional), and it can be multifaceted (e.g. bullying of LGBTIQ+ students in schools, which might be compounded if teachers are not adequately trained on how to react).

It is important to take a holistic intersectional approach when addressing inequity and discrimination. For example, a refugee student may be seen only through that lens, and in school be offered additional support only in learning the language of schooling, and not in other subjects. Inclusive policies and measures thus need to consider the specific, multifaceted needs of each learner.

Chapter 2: Monitoring discrimination and diversity in schools

Although most European countries have national bodies for monitoring discrimination and cooperate with different organisations to address it, over half of the education systems report not having access to comprehensive data on the main grounds of discrimination in schools.

Data collection and monitoring can be useful mechanisms to draw attention to groups at risk of discrimination and exclusion. Although most European countries report having top-level bodies in charge of monitoring cases of discrimination, including in school education, over half of them indicate not having access to comprehensive data on the main grounds of learners' discrimination in schools. Where these data exist, special educational needs or disabilities and ethnic background are reported as the most common grounds for discrimination.

Most education authorities report having access to disaggregated data on individual student characteristics, especially sex and/or gender, special educational needs or disability, nationality, country of birth and socioeconomic background. However, fewer than half of the education systems report having access to data on students' refugee/asylum seeker or migration backgrounds and the language spoken at home, and only a minority of them have access to data on learners' ethnic background and religious affiliations.

Education systems report using disaggregated data mainly as a tool for policy development and/or evaluation, as such evidenced-based information can help education authorities to understand the impact of a certain measure on a specific group of learners, to provide support to learners or to help schools plan appropriate programmes of intervention, using resources where they are needed the most.

All education systems report that they cooperate with independent bodies and/or organisations, including national equality bodies, to address discrimination in school education. Among the most common fields of cooperation are policy development and support for schools to promote diversity and inclusion, to foster education equality and to prevent discrimination.

Chapter 3: Top-level legislation, strategies and action plans promoting diversity and inclusion in schools

Many targeted strategic policy frameworks promote the inclusion of Roma students, students with special educational needs or disabilities, and migrant and/or refugee students, whereas the promotion of gender equality, combating antisemitism and the discrimination of LGBTIQ+ students are less frequently in focus.

National/top-level legislation, strategies and action plans can contribute to removing existing barriers to education and to promoting equality and inclusion in schools on a systemic level. All European education systems report the existence of such overarching policy frameworks. Many of them have been introduced in recent years, and they are sometimes based on related EU policy initiatives (e.g. the EU anti-racism action plan or the EU LGBTIQ equality strategy).

Most education systems report existing policy frameworks that have the global aim to improve the education system (through, inter alia, inclusive education, equal access and learner support), and many report policy frameworks with a focus on preventing discrimination and promoting equal opportunities in education, and on improving students'

learning outcomes and/or reducing early leaving from education and training.

Among the targeted strategic policy frameworks, those most widely reported aim to promote the participation and inclusion of Roma students, closely followed by policy frameworks promoting the inclusion of, and support to, students with special educational needs or disabilities. Policy frameworks targeting other specific student groups, such as migrant and/or refugee students, are still relatively widespread, but strategies focussed on promoting gender equality or combating antisemitism or the discrimination of LGBTIQ+ students are much less frequently reported.

The success of these policy frameworks depends on adequate resource allocation and the monitoring and evaluation of results.

Chapter 4: Promoting access to and participation in schools

Policies on access and participation focus mainly on inclusive education for students with special educational needs or disabilities, or from a migrant, refugee or ethnic minority background, and on financial support for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Evidence shows that access to and participation in schools is inequitable for some groups. Across Europe, policies and measures to promote the access and participation of learners who are more likely to face barriers are widely reported. They mostly target learners with special educational needs or disabilities, learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and migrant, refugee and ethnic minority students.

Rates of enrolment in mainstream education of learners with an official decision of special educational needs vary between European countries, and they tend to be low in some cases. Education systems therefore aim to promote the access and participation of students with special educational needs by addressing the way students are assessed and oriented, the schools' human resources and the adaptation of the physical and learning environments.

Many European education systems also approach barriers to access and participation by providing financial support for school-related costs to compensate for socioeconomic disadvantage. However, the challenge with financial interventions is to ensure sustainable comprehensive support structures that last beyond project-based funding measures.

More than half of the education systems report policies and measures promoting blended learning approaches, to facilitate the participation of students who are unable to attend school for health reasons, as well as of migrant students and those with learning disabilities. Around half of the education systems also report targeted admission policies giving priority to disadvantaged students and/or removing administrative barriers, such as entrance examinations for newly arrived students.

Chapter 5: Strengthening diversity and inclusion in school curricula and assessments

All European education systems promote diversity and inclusion through their curricula, and they aim to make assessments more inclusive, mainly by adapting them to the needs of learners with special educational needs or disabilities and/or by accommodating language barriers for non-native speakers.

Although most European education systems report that issues related to diversity and inclusion are already considered in their curricula, nearly half of them report recent curriculum revisions aiming to reinforce these dimensions. They are promoted mainly through the general aims of the curriculum, different subjects (e.g. citizenship education, social sciences, ethics) or cross-curricular areas (e.g. intercultural/multicultural education). Fewer education systems report home-language teaching as a means to support the inclusion of students whose mother tongue is different from the language of schooling.

Half of the education systems do not specifically target any group of learners when addressing diversity and inclusion in their curricula. Among those that mention specific groups, the groups most commonly referred to are students with special educational needs or disabilities and ethnic minority students, followed by migrant and refugee students, girls/boys, and, to a lesser extent, students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and religious minority students. LGBTIQ+ students are the least mentioned target group.

In terms of curriculum content, the topic of preventing prejudice and discrimination has been most frequently addressed in recent curriculum revisions; however, addressing human rights, representing diverse identities, combating stereotypes and raising awareness of exclusion, bullying and/or violence have been nearly as frequently considered in recent reforms. Tackling misrepresentation or non-representation of minorities/groups and promoting inclusive language are relatively less frequently reported as topics in existing and recently reformed curricula.

Promoting diversity and inclusion in school curricula goes hand in hand with adapting assessment systems and practices. The two most common ways in which education authorities try to make assessments more inclusive is by adapting them to the needs of learners with special educational needs or disabilities, mentioned by most education systems, and by accommodating language barriers for non-native speakers, reported by more than half of the education systems.

Chapter 6: Promoting targeted learning and social-emotional support

Education systems promote many targeted policies and measures to help schools to identify and meet students' learning and social-emotional needs; at the same time, an intersectional approach is required to address the particular challenges and needs of each learner.

Across Europe, the most frequently reported policies and measures aiming to help schools identify students' learning and social-emotional support needs are the ones ensuring the availability of guidance and/or counselling services for evaluating students' learning difficulties, and any behavioural, social-emotional or family issues, etc. Many policy initiatives are also related to procedures for determining students' special educational needs. Less frequently reported are specific guidelines and/or tools for assessing students' learning and social-emotional needs, diagnostic national tests for assessing learning needs and guidelines or tools for assessing language competences.

Ensuring the availability of a variety of support interventions can help address the multifaceted needs of all learners. Most education systems report policies and measures promoting the provision of learning support in schools, and in particular targeted support interventions for specific groups of at-risk students, such as students with special educational needs or disabilities, refugee migrant and ethnic minority students, as well as those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Policies or measures on social-emotional support are also widely reported; however, they tend to be rather universal (i.e. intended for all students) and less targeted to the needs of specific learners.

Chapter 7: Teaching staff and teacher training to promote diversity and inclusion

Education authorities provide many teacher education and training opportunities on diversity and inclusion, and promote the use of educational support staff; however, a reported lack of teacher preparation to manage inclusive classrooms and inadequate funding to employ support staff are challenges that still persist.

Evidence shows a lack of diversity within the teacher workforce; nevertheless, only eight European education systems have top-level policies or measures promoting the recruitment of teachers from diverse backgrounds to schools. Where such measures exist, they encourage mainly the recruitment of teachers with disabilities or those from migrant backgrounds.

The most widely promoted teacher competences, through top-level competence frameworks for initial teacher education and/or top-level continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, are related to teaching students with special educational needs, differentiating and individualising teaching and assessment strategies and understanding the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination. Somewhat less frequently reported are education and training programmes promoting the capacity of teachers to collaborate with other teachers, professionals and families and to teach in multicultural/multilingual settings and increasing teachers' awareness of bias and stereotypes.
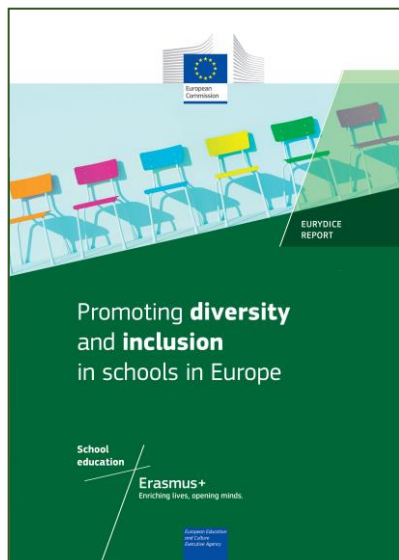
The rate of teacher participation in some of the aforementioned training programmes can be low. For example, only 20 % of teachers across Europe have participated in CPD on teaching in multicultural or multilingual settings, and many are concerned about their lack of training and preparation in managing an inclusive classroom, indicating a potential need to investigate barriers to participation, and to ensure that teachers have the required competences to promote diversity and inclusion in schools.

Educational support staff can support the work of teachers and help ensure that all learners achieve their full potential. Most European education systems require or recommend that different specialists (e.g. psychologists, speech therapists, special educational needs specialists, social workers) or teaching assistants should be available in schools and/or they provide financial resources that allow schools to employ support staff. Apart from providing general support to all learners who may need it, educational support staff are mainly intended to provide targeted support to students with special educational needs, those who are not yet fully proficient in the language of schooling (including learners from Ukraine) and Roma students. However, evidence shows that inadequate funding means that schools are sometimes unable to employ the required educational support staff.

Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe

This fact sheet presents the main findings of the Eurydice report on 'Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe'. This report investigates national/top-level policies and measures in 39 European education systems, which address discrimination and promote diversity and inclusion in schools. It focuses in particular on targeted initiatives to support those learners who are most likely to experience disadvantage and discrimination, including girls/boys, students from different migrant, ethnic and religious backgrounds, LGBTIQ+ students and students with special educational needs or disabilities.

The full report as well as the policy data can be downloaded from the Eurydice website:

Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe (europa.eu)

The Eurydice Network's task is to understand and explain how Europe's different education systems are organised and how they work. The network provides descriptions of national education systems, comparative studies devoted to specific topics, indicators and statistics. All Eurydice publications are available free of charge on the Eurydice website or in print upon request. Through its work, Eurydice aims to promote understanding, cooperation, trust and mobility at European and international levels. The network consists of national units located in European countries and is coordinated by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

For more information about Eurydice, see: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/