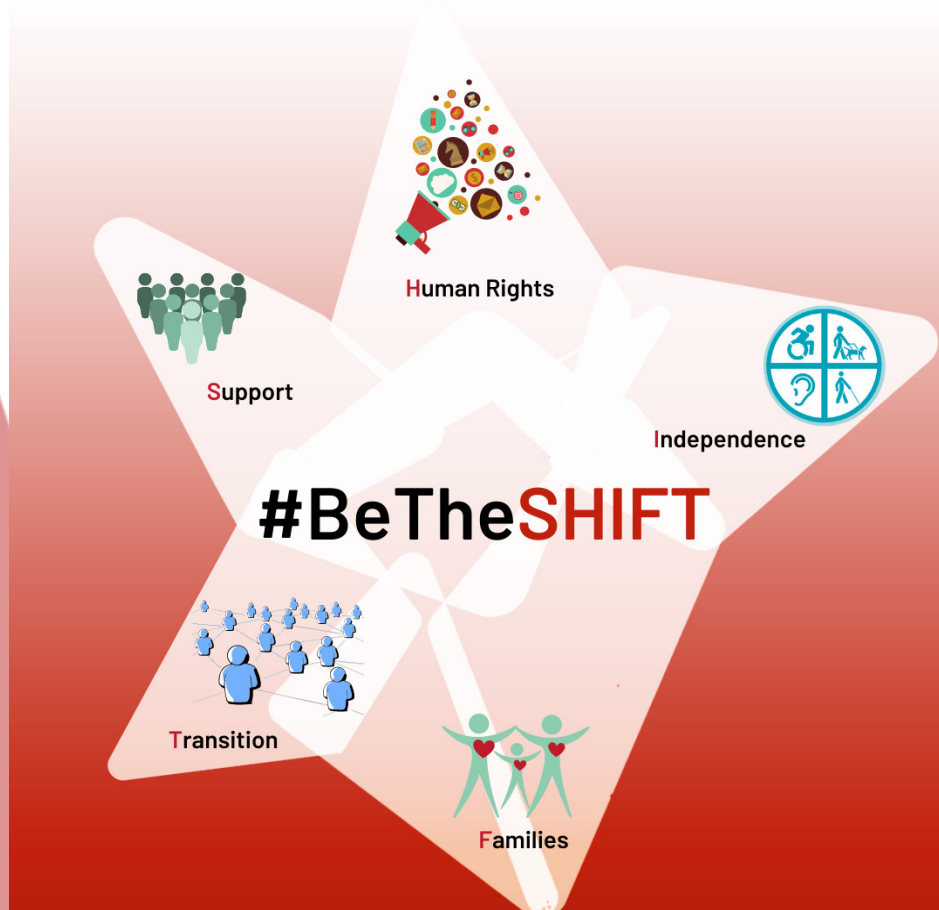


Recommendations on inclusive education

*Based on the COFACE Disability S.H.I.F.T. guide for a meaningful
inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families*



Introduction

According to article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), signed and adopted by the European Union and all its Member States, and of its General Comment No. 4, State parties must ensure the realisation of the right of persons with disabilities to education through an inclusive education system at all levels, including pre-schools, primary, secondary and tertiary education, vocational training and lifelong learning, extracurricular and social activities, and for all students, including persons with disabilities.

The inclusion of children with disabilities in education is key to implement Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) about ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Inclusive education requires an educational transformation for the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students, and primarily of those who are excluded or at risk of being marginalised.

Inclusive education is a tool to enable communities, structures and systems to combat discrimination and harmful stereotypes, to recognise diversity, to promote participation, and to overcome barriers to learning for all. This entails a cultural, political and practical transformation of the education system, in all its environments, to accommodate the different requirements and identities of all students, as well as the commitment and political will to undertake an in-depth transformation of education systems in legislation, policy, financing, administration, design delivery and monitoring of education.

Children and youth with disabilities are disproportionately excluded from any form of education, according to United Nations agencies, at least one third of the children out of school in the world have a disability. The quality of the education of the children with disabilities who attend school is generally of poor quality and last less years than for their peers. There is a global lack of adequate data, a need for a clear definition of inclusive education and strategies for implementation.

In 2019 COFACE Disability developed the **SHIFT Guide** to boost debates about a human rights based and meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities in all areas of society. It started with a general approach, covering different areas (**S**upport, **H**uman Rights, **I**ndependence, **F**amilies, and **s**ociety **T**ransition).

This list of recommendations on inclusive education are intended as a follow-up action, looking specifically at education, an area where the shift towards inclusion is yet to become a reality in Europe. Despite the commitment of the EU and all its Member States to implementing the UNCRPD, barriers remain in most aspects of education, from built and digital environment, to curricula or supports for teaching and learning, as well as within communities, and in local and national policies. In Europe many children with disabilities today do not access education, or they do in special schools, segregated from their peers.

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1. General comment No. 4 on the right to inclusive education, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/4&Lang=en
 2. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>
 3. What an inclusive, equitable, quality education means to us, Report of the International Disability Alliance, March 2020 https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/ida-inclusive-education-2020?fbclid=IwAR0PPpg4GFL_ykDBP_ToGYPFYgKfQEktTLulFykIgwNn-RLqIYNdm0Y5z4

Background on inclusive education

Here some key concepts that help understand *inclusive education*:

- ✓ **Exclusion** happens when students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education in any form.
- ✓ **Segregation** happens when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separated environments designed or used to respond to a specific or multiple impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities.
- ✓ **Integration** means that pupils and student with disabilities are placed in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as they can adjust to the standardised requirements of such institutions . An example of integration is placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to curriculum, organisation, teaching and learning strategies.
- ✓ **Inclusion** involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers in order to provide to all students with an equitable and participatory learning experience an environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.

An inclusive education system caters for, is accessible to, and supports every child. It is about looking at the ways schools, classrooms, curricula and lessons are designed so that all children can participate and learn, finding different ways of teaching to actively involve all children and develop friendships, relationships and mutual respect between the. It is:

- ✓ **Available:** public and private educational institutions are available in sufficient quality and quantity throughout the community for pupils with disabilities.
- ✓ **Accessible:** educational institutions are accessible to everyone, without discrimination including buildings, information, communication, curriculum, education materials, new technologies, teaching methods, assessment, language and support services. Universal Design is introduced, ensuring that the environment (both offline and online) and all instruments and tools for teaching and learning are designed from their origin and produced to foster inclusion and guarantee equality throughout the all education process, including classrooms, tutorials, gymnasium and sport areas, laboratories (including those of language), didactic and audiovisual materials, technological supports, transport, hygiene and toilet facilities, school cafeteria and recreational spaces. For the students who need reasonable accommodation to meet their specific needs, this should not entail any additional cost for them or their family.
- ✓ **Acceptable:** all education-related facilities, goods and services take into account and respect the requirements, cultures, views and language of persons with disabilities. The form and the substance of education provided must be acceptable for all, including the use of affirmative actions to ensure that school is of good quality for all.

- ✓ **Adaptable:** curricula are conceived, designed and applied to meet and adjust to the requirements of every student and providing adequate responses making methods, and resources more flexible and adaptable. Standardised assessments are replaced by flexible and multiple forms of assessment and recognition of individual progress towards broad goals that provide alternative routes for learning. This is achieved by applying the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.

Inclusive systems provide a better quality education for all children and are instrumental in changing discriminatory attitudes. Schools are the first setting where children build their relationships with the world outside their families, and where they develop social relationships and interactions. Respect and understanding grow when students of diverse abilities learn, and socialise.

The implementation of inclusive education policies and practice include the understanding of the concept of the right to inclusive education and its aims, the knowledge of the relevant international and national framework, the development of local inclusive education plans, collaboration and partnerships, support, guidance and supervision of local education institutions, monitoring and evaluation.

Parental involvement is a crucial strategy for promoting the inclusion and positive academic outcomes in students with special needs, by developing positive home-school collaboration sustained in a school climate where parents are seen as partners in their child's education.

The COVID 19 pandemic has worsened the structural exclusion of children and adults with disabilities from education . In many countries, schools were closed and distance learning became the norm, increasing barriers and discrimination. The lack of subtitles, and the use of inaccessible devices and digital platforms led to the exclusion of children with disabilities from long-distance education and from educational TV shows. Likewise, the lack of design of resources and of methodological and personal support, the limitation in personal relationships with peers or the lack of communication and information channels to families, have contributed to their educational exclusion. On the other hand, this crisis has stimulated innovation and new practices, including the use of technology that might benefit the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education also in the future. In our aims, the need for creating new solutions to respond to the pandemic does represent an opportunity to rethink and reorganise education, and to finally implement inclusive education for persons with special needs and of all marginalized groups.

These recommendations focus on the inclusion of students with disabilities, but their principles can benefit all excluded groups. They are intended as a tool for EU institutions, national governments, social partners and civil society, teachers, parents and students to make inclusive education a reality in Europe and its Member States. COFACE Families Europe is ready to help build partnership with all relevant stakeholders to help build inclusive education systems and societies.

4. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/4&Lang=en
5. Learning for all: guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning, UNESCO Digital Resources, 2016 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244355>



1. Inclusion and person-centred approach

- Public authorities must ensure non-exclusion from education for persons with disabilities and eliminate structural disadvantages to achieve effective participation and equality for all.
- The education system must provide a personalised education response, rather than expect the student to fit the system with the development of individualised education plans, identifying specific support and reasonable accommodation required.
- Education must offer flexible curricula, teaching and learning methods, and resources and assessment, adapted to different strengths and learning styles.

2. Co-production

- The involvement of pupils, parents and caregivers must be viewed as asset and the relationship between the learning environment and the wider community, and as a route towards inclusive societies.
- The education staff must work co-productively with all stakeholders, particularly parents and learners, in the development and delivery of an inclusive school environment, to redefine school achievements and assessment methods for a more flexible system.

3. Targeted support on independent living and autonomy

- Education must be directed to the development of the personality, talents and creativity of the students and directed towards their full and effective participation in society.
- Learners with disabilities must receive support to ensure their effective transition from primary and secondary schools in the communities where they live, to vocational and tertiary education, and finally to employment.



National governments should reform their education systems to ensure that children with disabilities have access to all level of education, in equal conditions with others. They should adopt and implement strategies for inclusive education, redefine budgetary allocations, including specific budgets for tools and bodies to develop inclusive education. They should monitor inclusive education, and regularly collect data, possibly disaggregated by disability type.



The **European Union** should foster a comprehensive collection of data for inclusive education across a number of target groups, including learners with disabilities through the incorporation of additional data collection mechanisms within the European Semester process with specific indicators in the Social Scoreboard for a full implementation of principle one of the European Pillar of Social Rights.



4. Information to persons with disabilities and their families about their rights

- Establish a clear human rights based vision of inclusive education at European and national level based on the UNCRPD and on General Comment No. 4
- Provide accessible information material and trainings on the rights of persons with disabilities and on inclusive education to persons with disabilities and their families and involve civil society organisations and disabled persons' organisations (DPOs) in the process.

5. Accessibility of educational materials and new technologies, easy-to-read, subtitling, technical aids and assistive technologies to facilitate communication

- Accessible education materials must be provided taking into account the different needs of children with different disabilities, including persons in the autism spectrum, with communication impairments and with sensorial disabilities.
- Investment in access to appropriate technology and alternative and augmentative communication systems to facilitate learning should be supported as well as of adaptations of methodologies and to classroom organisation to facilitate inclusion.

6. Complaints procedures and involvement of independent bodies to monitor the respect of the rights of persons with disabilities in education

- Children living in residential care structures, foster care or care homes, must be ensured the right to inclusive education and the right to appeal against decisions of the State party which deny them the right to inclusive education.
- Inform students with disabilities and parents about possibilities for individual and collective complaints to existing human right bodies when their right to inclusive education is denied.



National governments at every level, must implement or introduce legislation, based on the social model of disability that fully complies with article 24 of the UNCRPD and allocate sufficient financial support to mainstream education settings for inclusive environments and reasonable accommodation, according to the needs of the students living in the community.



The **European Union** should mainstream inclusive education in its actions towards disability and child rights, including the new Disability Strategy 2020-2030, the upcoming Child Guarantee and Child Rights Strategy.



Independence

7. Trainings on inclusion to professionals of the mainstream education sector

- Incorporate the core values and competencies of inclusive education in the education and training for teachers and school staff, including teachers with disabilities, providing them the necessary skills for intervention in inclusive learning environments.
- Train all teachers in the use of new accessible technologies, in the design of accessible materials, and incorporate accessibility in the teaching, learning and assessment processes, and in educational practice.

8 .Provide reasonable accommodation to all educational structures

- The right to non-discrimination includes the right not to be segregated and to be provided with support and resources and must be understood in the context of the duty to provide accessible learning environments and reasonable accommodation.
- Policies that commit to design for all and reasonable accommodation must be adopted at national, local and education institution levels, and at all levels of education.

9. Cross-sectoral and multi-level partnerships building bridges between disability-specific and mainstream sectors and professionals.

- Facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise from special education to mainstream providers and general exchange of good practices among teachers, educators and other training professionals.
- Ensure coordination between all relevant ministries, authorities and bodies as well as DPOs and family organisations.



National governments

ensure that all teachers are trained on inclusive education based on UNCRPD.



The **European Union** should facilitate the exchange of policies and practices among countries and stakeholders with the aim of facilitating the transition towards inclusive education, and improve the accessibility to persons with disabilities of its Education programmes and actions, such as Erasmus+.



10. Identify special needs and provide effective early intervention and support to children and their families.

- Ensure access to quality early childhood education and care, together with the provision of support and training to parents and caregivers of young children with disabilities, through cooperation, interaction and problem-solving.
- Provide information in the framework of early intervention on the benefits of inclusive education for the child development.

11. Two-generation approach in the assessment of needs and support, including of family carers.

- As a part of early childhood intervention, offer an early and transdisciplinary assessment of the child and family needs, including siblings.
- Offer training on education needs to family members providing care and support to children with disabilities.

12. Support and accessibility for parents with disabilities.

- Provide accessible communication and support to parents
- Provide an accessible and supportive environment which encourages working through collaboration, interaction and problem-solving.



National governments

should fund and implement early intervention, including early identification and assessment of the needs of children with disabilities and of parents; and inclusive education settings starting from early childhood education and care.



The European Union

should develop a clear policy framework and relevant legislation promoting inclusive education, in cooperation with persons with disabilities, DPOs, families, education providers and other relevant stakeholders.



Transition

13. Mainstream inclusive education across all relevant policy areas.

- All relevant ministries must commit to and align their understanding of the social and economic implications of an inclusive education system in order to achieve an integrated approach to work collaboratively towards a shared agenda.
- Partnerships on inclusive education should also be forged with service providers, DPOs, media, wider civil society organisations, local authorities, students associations and federations, universities, and teacher education colleges.

14. Information and awareness raising on the benefits of inclusive education.

- Provide awareness raising accessible campaigns directed to students with and without disabilities on disability and the benefit of living together, and to parents on the benefits of inclusive education for all.
- Provide awareness raising and education initiatives to address stigma and discrimination, particularly bullying in educational settings, including cyberbullying.

15. Regulations on equal participation of persons with disabilities in mainstream education.

- Adopt measures to build a culture of diversity, participation and involvement into community life and to highlight inclusive education as a means to achieve a quality education for all students, with and without disabilities, parents, teachers and school administrations, as well as the community and society.
- Guarantee all persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, the right to be heard and their opinion given consideration within the education system, including through school councils, governing bodies, local and national governments.

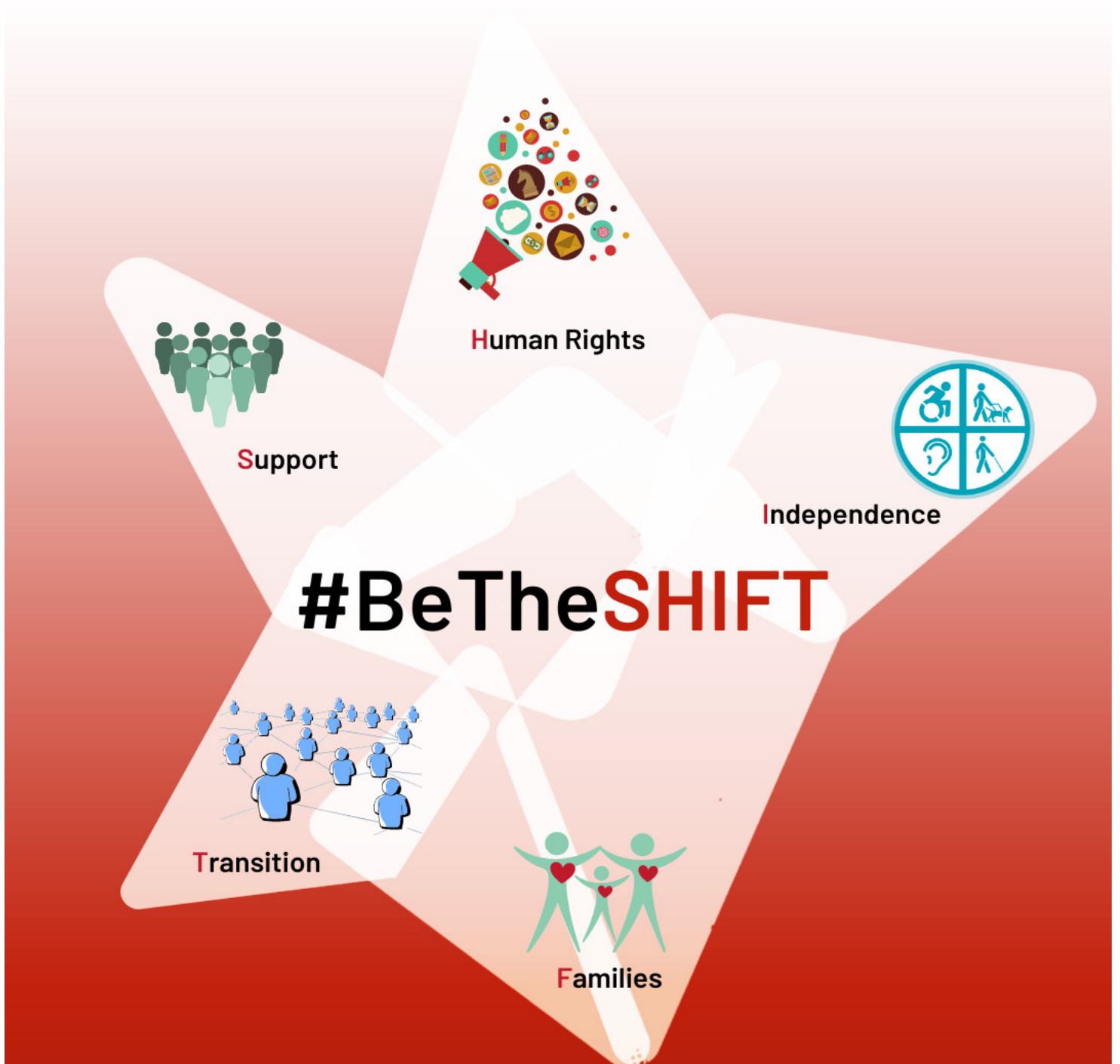


National Governments

should remove all barriers to inclusive education for pupils with disabilities. They should ensure the development and delivery of training to inform all relevant authorities on their responsibilities under the law, and to provide an understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities.



The **European Union** should contribute to the achievement of inclusive education systems via EU Funding Programmes including EASI, Erasmus+, ESF+ and InvestEU. These funds can support the transition to fully inclusive education by boosting the capacity of different stakeholders to test and upscale new ways of working to meet the obligations of UNCRPD article 24 on inclusive education. Furthermore, the regulations applying to funds should be in line with the UNCRPD principles, and funds directed to the transition towards inclusive education.



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