



Joint Statement on Inclusive Schools Within the Context of Diverse Societies

A joint initiative on promoting EU Common Values and Inclusive Education



In associated partnership with





Joint Statement on Inclusive Schools Within the Context of Diverse Societies by the EU CONVINCe project partners

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Globalisation, socio-economic inequalities, increased mobility and migration lead to a significant diversification of the population, while technological progress and digitalisation contribute to wide-spread massification and individualisation in society. Modern society also faces such dangerous trends as the growing threat of radicalisation, populism, extremism, and xenophobia. Schools, teachers, school leaders, employers in education and other education personnel are confronted with a variety of challenges from personal identity conflicts to complex societal issues, often linked to discrimination, frustration at lack of influence and the lack of the sense of belonging.

The key role of education is to realise the full potential of every student regardless of their cultural or socio-economic background, and prepare open-minded, culturally sensitive and responsible citizens with solid democratic values. It is also to contribute to building a better society. Increasing diversity among learners and education personnel coming from different realities and cultural backgrounds requires inclusive learning environments that embrace diversity, address the needs of all learners and promote knowledge and understanding of shared values and principles.

'Inclusive education aims to allow all learners to achieve their full potential by providing good quality education to all in mainstream settings with special attention to learners at risk of exclusion and underachievement by actively seeking out to support them and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners, including through individualised approaches, targeted support and cooperation with the families and local communities'.¹

¹ Definition proposed by the European Commission's Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Promoting Citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination



Following this definition and in the light of UN Sustainable Development Goals, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, European Pillar of Social Rights, and other international and European instruments for inclusion, the EU CONVINCe project partners agree that:

- Inclusive education is an adequate response to increasingly complex and diverse societies of today, which addresses the needs of all learners, including those coming from a disadvantaged background. It is also a strong tool in the fight against extremism, xenophobia, and all kinds of discrimination, as it perceives diversity as an added value.
- Education systems, based on inclusive schools which provide safe physical and social learning environments, reinforce the sense of belonging to the school community and to a wider society. In such environments, all education actors feel free to discuss any topics in a democratic and mutually respectful manner.
- The joint cooperation of various education stakeholders (teachers, academics, school leaders, other education personnel, students, families, and the broader school community), as well as social partners (education trade unions and employers in education) is key to developing and promoting inclusive schools.
- To make inclusive education a reality, national and European policies and media should enhance diversity and promote democracy leading by example.

EU CONVINCe project partners consider the following elements essential for the implementation of inclusive education, starting from the students' earliest age:

1. Safe physical and social learning environments where the freedoms of opinion and expression are respected. These learning environments also promote discussions among all members of the whole school community with a view to building a democratic school culture. These environments include:

- *Ensuring the school infrastructure and environment that encompass the different aspects of diversity within the school community.*
- *Shared school governance with clearly defined responsibilities which takes into consideration the needs of all key stakeholders in education, including teachers, school leaders, and other education personnel, students, parents, and the wider community.*



- *Promoting the exchange of experience and good practices of inclusive education among teachers, school leaders, other education personnel, employers in education, schools and classes at local, regional, national and European level.*
- *Providing adequate space within the school schedule and curricula for teachers and students to experience in practice fundamental rights and cultural and socio-economic diversity at first-hand.*

2. Teachers and other education personnel who are prepared and supported in managing the diversity in the school and intercultural dialogue, including teaching controversial and sensitive issues. This can be achieved by:

- *Providing free of charge initial and continuous teacher training on democratic citizenship and inclusive education which equips teachers with the relevant and updated skills and competences for managing a diverse classroom and promoting mutual respect, cross-cultural understanding, and intercultural dialogue (including teaching techniques to hold challenging conversations).*
- *Ensuring the pedagogical and professional autonomy of teachers and other education personnel to implement different and innovative approaches of inclusive education tailored to the particular needs of learners and to the local context.*
- *Promoting the principles of team work, including co-teaching and peer learning, with a view to create strong teacher/other education personnel networking within the school and among different schools based on collegial support and mutual consultation.*
- *Encouraging teachers and other education personnel to implement participatory and collaborative learning approaches with the view to strengthen the joint work of students from diverse backgrounds, peer mediation to solve their problems together, and to provide students with opportunities to experience what it means to be an active citizen and to be responsible for other people.*
- *Maintaining and encouraging the diversification of the teaching force to reflect the diversity of society and to provide a broad range of role models.*
- *Exploring the educational opportunities of the Internet and communication technologies (ICT) and other media. They can bring added value to teaching as one out of many tools that teachers and other education personnel have at their disposal. ICT tools and media can be used to foster inclusion in education and provide students with knowledge*



and values to engage positively, critically and responsibly in the digital environment, including such essential competences as critical thinking and media literacy.

3. School leadership committed to creating an enabling, supportive learning and teaching environment and with a vision of the inclusive school which is shared and discussed openly with other education stakeholders in the framework of democratic school governance. Such leadership includes:

- *Providing school leaders with the relevant and updated skills and competences through professional development on managing a diverse student and teacher body, maintaining the shared school governance, and implementing the whole-school approach.*
- *Ensuring a collaborative democratic school culture and collegial governance with the involvement of teachers and other education personnel. Furthermore, school leadership in inclusive schools place the emotional, mental, physical, and social wellbeing of students, teachers, school leaders and other education personal at the forefront of school policies and practices.*
- *Implementing a whole-school approach in a way which suits the needs of the students, teachers, parents, and wider local community, by addressing all aspects of the school community that can impact the wellbeing of students and staff.*
- *Fostering the collaboration and exchange of good practices among school leaders, teachers, and other education personnel.*
- *Maintaining and encouraging the diversification of the school leadership and education management to reflect the diversity of society and to provide a broad range of role models.*

4. Education authorities with a holistic perspective on education systems. This perspective entails the integration of every person in the society and preparing learners to be active and responsible citizens in the socially and economically diverse world, as the main focus of education. Education authorities need to work on:

- *Developing clear and supportive legislative and policy frameworks for inclusive education (including policies on addressing and preventing discrimination and*



exclusion) in the framework of effective social dialogue.

- *Integrating inclusive education in internal and external quality assurance with a view to providing teachers and school leaders with clear definitions and guidance, as well as adequate tools for building inherently inclusive schools.*
- *Ensuring an open dialogue between education authorities, education personnel and the local community with the view to better understand the needs of all groups to promote diversity and multiculturalism in education.*
- *Providing teachers, school leaders and other education personnel with professional autonomy; relevant and free of charge initial and continuous professional training; sufficient support personnel; and economic and political support, in order to support them in managing the diverse student body and building inclusive schools in the local context.*
- *Preventing segregated learning environments which can lead to social exclusion, including fighting against the creation of de-facto segregated schools where for example, only students with migrant or low socio-economic background or only students with disabilities attend the school.*
- *Ensuring that digitalisation in education provides opportunities for inclusion of all learners and addresses inequalities within society and the education system.*
- *Initiating and conducting profound research on the knowledge and competences needed for teaching intercultural dialogue and human rights and providing inclusive education.*
- *Ensuring good communication and partnership among education authorities at local, regional, national, and European level, supported by the European-level organisations, with the view to find effective solutions to the similar challenges in inclusive education.*

5. The involvement and full commitment of all relevant stakeholders, including school partners and social partners, to maintain inclusive schools and promote diversity, mutual respect and intercultural dialogue in education. Such a collaborative approach encompasses:

- *Cooperating with and educating parents and families as valuable partners in promoting mutual understanding and human rights, respect for diverse opinions, and intercultural*



dialogue through all forms of learning, understanding and ownership of fundamental values.

- *Collaborating with the organisations in the local community and civil society (e.g. social workers, NGOs, etc.) in order to provide the support on implementation of inclusive schools, detect vulnerable individuals, and bring diverse views to the school discussions.*
- *Involving students and student organisations in inclusive initiatives inside and outside of the school with the view to build a common understanding of needs and issues regarding inclusive education and to provide them with the opportunity to become positive influencers.*
- *Presenting and promoting local youth, sport or cultural associations and organisations as spaces for students to put their comprehension and skills related to non-discrimination, diversity and inclusion in practice.*
- *Consulting education social partners on education policy reforms and developments at European, national, and local level, as professional organisations which contribute to development of the clear vision of inclusive schools and support innovative teaching methods and approaches.*

EU CONVINCe project partners emphasize that only education which is provided in the safe learning environment by teachers and school leaders who are prepared and supported in managing the diversity in the school, is able to address the needs of all learners, including those coming from a disadvantaged background. This system based on inclusive schools also requires the collaboration and full commitment of all relevant stakeholders, including school partners and social partners, as well as education authorities with a holistic perspective on education. Finally, EU CONVINCe project partners underline that inclusive education must remain high on the EU agenda through the implementation of relevant European and international frameworks.

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