

Inclusion of autism

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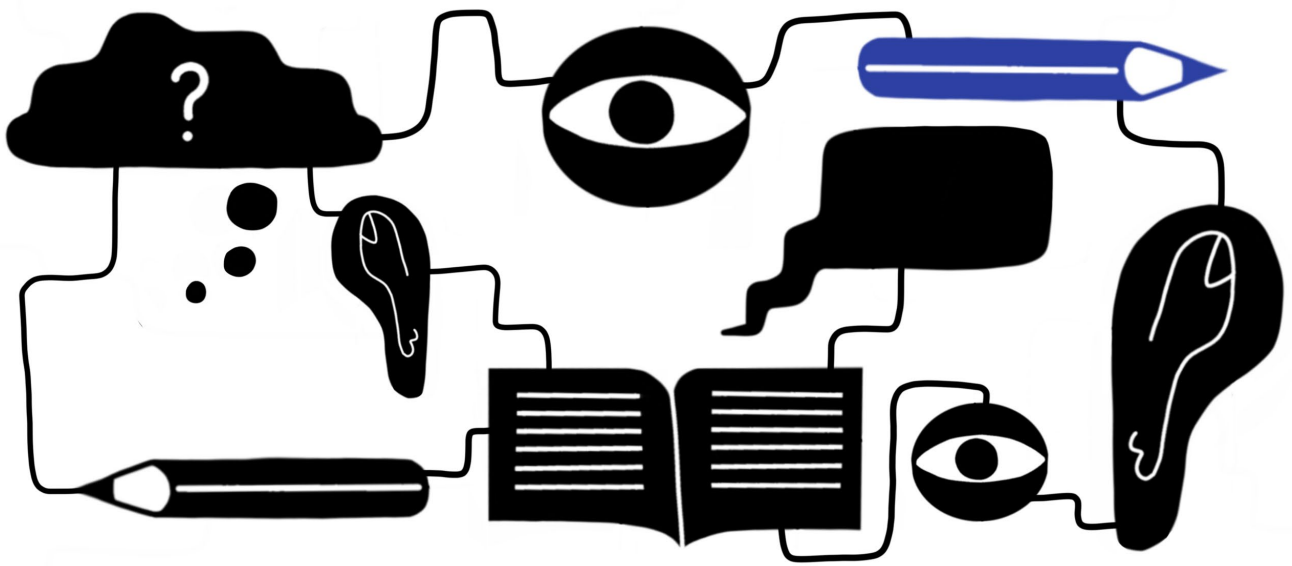
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Summary

One in 160 children globally has autism, causing an array of health and education needs throughout their life and being at risk for stigmatization, discrimination, and human rights violations. Inclusive education has widely emerged as a means to improve education for all children with special education needs, including autistic children. However, implementing inclusion is challenging, both in policy and practice, since systems of inclusion require the synthesis of mainstream and special education frameworks.

The focus of this thesis is analysing and describing education policy in the European Union (EU) covering 20 out of 28 Member States. The corresponding aim is to determine how the right and access to education for autistic children in the EU can best be improved, putting a particular focus on inclusive education.

This thesis discusses five Themes, namely (1) Right to Education; (2) Access to Education; (3) Support; (4) Tension; and (5) Trends. Each theme focuses on different (combinations of) chapters. Right to Education and Access to Education pool data from Chapters One through Five; Support from Chapters One through Three; Tension from Chapters Four and Five; and Trends from Chapter Six.

Right to Education examined the extent to which the right to education for autistic children was implemented in the twenty countries under study. It was found that all countries integrated the right to education for children with special education needs in general (thus including autism) in the early stages of the development of their education systems. Additionally, after the ratification of the Salamanca Statement and the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a trend towards developing inclusive education was observed.

Access to Education focused on how education was developed and implemented for autistic children. All countries under study started with the implementation of different schools as to allow autistic children to follow education. Over time, most countries integrated autistic children that were able to participate in mainstream education into mainstream classrooms, while some fully delved in the development of inclusion systems, and a few retained their segregated systems.

Support looked into (1) the support autistic children receive from their parents; (2) the support parents of autistic children receive; (3) the support autistic children receive from

teachers; (4) the support teachers receive in learning and understanding how to effectively address autism in a classroom; and (5) the support autistic children receive structurally. The role of family in mainstream education was generally limited to choosing the school in which a child will be admitted, while special education policy elaborated a bit more on the inclusion of parents, though that mostly involved the education of family.

Teachers, in their role in supporting children in mainstream education, were found to have been assigned massive responsibilities, which are raised even higher among autistic children. Teacher training curricula were also found to mostly include a course on SEN and autistic children were found to be able to receive additional provisions in classrooms.

Tension investigated two separate forms of tension, namely the tension that arises due to the difference in size of Member States when following international guidance; and the tension that arises from a change in ideology—in this case the change from the communist ideology harbored by the former Soviet Union to the UN human rights ideology.

Tension as a result of a difference in size is minorly present. International guidelines are implemented in large and small sized Member States alike. The observed difference was that larger Member States tend to have more elaborate policies on education and SEN, whereas small Member States tend to have more compact policies. Tension as a result of a changing ideology was found to primarily affect policies directly after the transition. In the investigated countries, the education policies that initially emerged after the adoption of the UN human rights ideology still held traces from the old, communist ideology, especially in regards to the education of autistic children (and children with SEN in general).

Trends examined patterns and trends that could point towards beneficial and obstructive factors for the development of inclusive education for autistic children. Seven factors were identified as being influential in the development of inclusive education, namely (1) the right to education for autistic children, (2) support for teaching staff, (3) general support services for autistic children, (4) individualized learning outcomes, (5) parental involvement, (6) an established definition of inclusion, and (7) mixed mainstream classes. From these factors, mixed mainstream classrooms and support services for autistic children were found to be key in allowing inclusion to develop, while inclusive education policies and teacher support were found to further enable the development of inclusion.

The thesis concludes that, based on the performed analyses, the United Nations model that outlines the four educational approaches “exclusion, segregation, integration, inclusion” should be adjusted slightly as to better cover the children in the “integration” approach that cannot participate in mainstream education. Subsequently, based on the chronological analyses of the EU Member States and the identification of trends on the development of inclusion, five scenarios are drafted that outline possible future developments of education systems, some also considering the coronavirus pandemic. These scenarios aim to incite discussion on what factors should be focused on in the development of education systems and what outcomes should be prevented. Ultimately, this thesis adds a building block in the development of inclusive education for autistic children and, by extension, an improvement of the quality of life of the autism community moving forward.