

Inclusion of autism

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1. Approximately one in 160 children in the world is on the autism spectrum, which often corresponds with having significant health and education needs (World Health Organisation, 2019);
2. Inclusive education has become a priority in international and national policy over the last few decades due to its significant benefits for children with special education needs in later life, such as improved social capabilities, employment outcomes, and ability to live independently (Hehir et al., 2016);
3. The right and access to education were implemented in all twenty European Union Member States under study. Nine-teen out of twenty European Union Member States are in the process of developing or have developed inclusive education;
4. The twenty European Union Member States under study showed few autism-specific policies and/or strategies. Most policies are aimed at special education needs in general, which allows a wide spectrum of conditions to be addressed, yet runs the risk of not providing specific guidelines for complex conditions, such as autism;
5. Teachers play crucial roles in the development of children on the autism spectrum and in delivering inclusive education, yet many feel unprepared, are unmotivated, or portray other attitudinal barriers towards incorporating children with special education needs in an inclusive classroom (Van Mieghem et al., 2018), which can be related back to the lack of specificity in guidance;
6. The infrastructure for teachers in the European Union (in particular teacher training and multi-disciplinary support) at a policy level has to be massively improved in order to be able to adequately implement inclusive education consistently;
7. Countries outside the European Union are found to experience similar barriers when attempting to implement inclusive education as European Union Member States (Dubkovetska et al., 2016; Kavelashvili, 2017);
8. The rise of the coronavirus-19 pandemic has changed the landscape of education considerably (Deguen et al., 2020). This landscape calls for novel policy solutions that incorporate options for in-person and remote delivery of education and SEN services in a way that ensures inclusion.