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Repertoire on School Inclusion Programme

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The purpose of this document is to present a state of the art in the European Union and the partner countries of the ECO-IN project, that gives a picture of the current legislation regarding Inclusive Education, and their implementation at school level. Several issues concerning the inclusion process at school are presented, delineating the way it is approached in each context. The document is therefore divided in three sections: the first one is dedicated to delineating the policy/ legislation framework on Inclusive Education relative to EU and each partner country, alongside a description of its implementation at school level; the second section is more specifically dedicated to the existing paradigms and practices characterising Inclusive Education in the analysed contexts; finally, the Conclusions section is dedicated to summarising the issues arised in the analysis of the state of the art, and develops a few reccomendations that may be taken into consideration when designing a process for Inclusive Education.

State of the art of policy and legislation on Inclusive Education in Partners' Countries

The following paragraphs aim to give a general knowledge concerning the state of the art of polic and legislation concerning Inclusion Education across the European Union, with a further focus on Lithuania, Romania, Italy and Spain. The policy and regulations are then compared to real school contexts in the four countries – so to highlight the existing discrepancies between theory and practice. As special aspect that is given space to concerns the general perceptions towards pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusive Education developed in the various contexts, as it might represent a factor influencing the above mentioned discrepancies.

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The EU and national frameworks have been collected with an eye on the history and background of their development, pointing out which kind of terminology and categories are currently used, which are the benchmarks and standards for inclusion in each country.

Europe

Inclusive Education according to country policies/ legislation

A stepping stone, that is still referred to, anchoring many EU documents, is the UNESCO 1994 Salamanca Declaration. Through its Framework of Action it aimed to ensure that pupils can attend their neighbourhood schools regardless of their needs, as the education legislation and policies had to be adapted to make sure that schools could accommodate any kind of need a pupil might have. The focus was on allocating sufficient resources to schools to ensure inclusion, on monitoring of implementation of actions that facilitate inclusion, on facilitating participation of parents in the process of inclusion, and on training for teachers on working with children with SEN. The focus was on developing a child-centred pedagogy (which nowadays is more referred to as a learner-centred approach). The aim was to move away from one-size-fits-all solutions and to celebrate the differences between children. Since then, conversations about SEN and disabilities are conflated with other categories for inclusion, with more focus on migration as an inclusion topic in the recent years.

Currently, EU institutions guide themselves after the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching: benchmarks are established via Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society (Europe 2006-2015 and European Disability Strategy 2010-2020). Action Line 4 of the Council of Europe Action Plan illustrates the commitments Member States made for themselves regarding education, with the aim of ensuring that all learners have equal access to quality education, and that all schools ensure that they have the educational provisions to welcome any learner, with any kind of needs.

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Furthermore, at the basis of the European Union action for a more inclusive European society, stands the Pillar of Social Rights. It comprises 20 principles, grouped into 3 spheres: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market; Fair working conditions; Social protection and inclusion. Its first principle “Education, Training and life-long learning”, preaches that “Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market”, therefore setting the basis for Inclusive Education.

Discrepancies between policies and the real school context

According to the periodic UNESCO reports accounting for the positions of the Joint Research Centre, all countries are sliding backwards on the topic of inclusive education, including the Nordic countries which usually are hailed for their education system. With the decrease in public funding for education across Europe, it is no doubt that it is becoming more and more difficult for the education systems to implement what the academia is observing as effective inclusive education. Moreover, the teacher workforce is ageing rapidly in the EU, putting more pressure on the education system given that less and less people want to enter a system in which they do not feel valued.

SOLIDAR’s research and contributions from its members in the Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2019 point out to another issue concerning the support needed by teacher workforce: the shared responsibility is not a reality across Europe given how the workload of teaching professionals has been increasing, affecting work-life balance and without any reflection of this in their remuneration. There is a lack of support regarding initial and continuing training for teaching in a multicultural environment and for using digital tools in teaching.

Perception of pupils with SEN and of Inclusive Education

Overall, there does not seem to be a singular definition, but the EU institutions operate with a catch-all understanding that children with SEN are children whose learning difficulties hinder

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their ability to benefit from general education system without support or accommodation to their needs. Not having a common definition it is not only a matter of terminology, but it could lead to different perceptions of what kind of special needs are educational contexts referring to and consequently what kind of skills, settings and learning environments should be available for better meeting these needs and ensuring the respect of inclusivity as set at European policy level.

Lithuania

Inclusive Education according to country policies/ legislation

Inclusive education (IE) – quality education for each student. This principle is reflected in the concept of a Good school, which was approved in 2015 by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania.

In 2013, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania approved the State Strategy for Education for 2013-2022, according to which, in 2017 the Action Plan was approved for inclusion of children in learning and miscellaneous education for 2017-2022.

In 2020, amendments to the Law on Education were adopted, enacting provisions on inclusion in education, but they will come into force only in September 2024. Year 2020 has been a turning point in the adoption of amendments to the Law on Education related to IE. It took 4 years to prepare for the entry into force of these amendments.

Since 2011 Child welfare commissions have been formed in educational institutions in Lithuania. The purpose of these commissions is to organize and coordinate preventive work, provision of educational assistance, creation of a safe and child-friendly environment, adaptation of educational programs for students with special educational needs, initial assessment of special educational needs and other functions related to child welfare.

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Discrepancies between policies and the real school context

For many years, there has been a lack of political will to implement IE and formalize it at the level of Lithuanian law. “Real school context” is shocking, because every year the number of students with special educational needs is growing and educational institutions are not adapted to this. Currently most Lithuanian schools are not ready to implement IE. It is necessary to create appropriate educational environments, to ensure the readiness of the staff of all educational institutions to work with children with special educational needs. There is currently a particular shortage of educational support professionals in schools.

In most educational institutions in Lithuania the Child Welfare Commissions are formally constituted, but in reality, they do not solve problems, and often engage in the so-called firefighting. Due to the lack of specialists and poor cooperation between the administration of the educational institution, teachers, children and their parents, it is difficult to ensure the special needs of students.

Despite the unorganized institutional base, there are districts in Lithuania where issue of segregation has been overcome, and there are no special schools left (e.g. Klaipeda district).

Perception of pupils with SEN and of Inclusive Education

As pointed out in the article and research by Lakkala et al. “Implementing Inclusive Education in Lithuania: What are the main Challenges according to Teachers’ Experiences?”, published in 2019, “[...] teachers have disbelief in the abilities of students with disabilities, and, when talking about personal interaction, they often seek to distance themselves from these students and support segregationist ideas [...]. Teachers lack competence in differentiating and individualising their teaching [...]. Indeed, inclusion requires more and more versatile skills and expertise from teachers, as well as profound understanding about the ideology of inclusion (Määttä, Äärelä, and Uusiautti, 2018)”.

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Romania

Inclusive Education according to country policies/ legislation

During the Communist years (1948–89) the Romanian special educational system was separated from the mainstream educational system, and the government's attitude was that such persons could not become 'productive' members of the socialist society, and as a result they were marginalised and ignored. Throughout the 1990s, Romanian education alignment of international regulations imposed inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Unfortunately, there is no connection between the values promoted by inclusive philosophy, social values, and current practices: the different philosophical approaches to inclusion represent an important impediment in realizing this educational policy, leading to reluctance, detachment, ignorance and transfer of responsibility to specialists.

In the spirit of the promotion of an inclusive education, the Ministry of Education and Research has passed a new legislation pack in 2011. This pack has brought a number of important changes to the process of school inclusion, more precisely, changes in the diagnosis, intervention and monitoring process for children with special educational needs (SEN) within the special and integrated education. With all the efforts made to transform the traditional educational system into an inclusive one, there are still many weak elements which regard areas such as: financing, coherent and consistent educational policies, new ways of recruitment and, initial and continuing teacher education, collaboration between secondary and university education as well the business field etc.

Discrepancies between policies and the real school context

The obstacles that teachers face daily are numerous:

- Limited intervention from itinerant teachers;
- Rejecting children with special educational needs by the parents of other children, on grounds that they would affect the overall classroom level of performance;

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- The lack of a material base and some support instruments in achieving inclusive education;
- Socio-relational marginalizing of children with SEN by their classmates;
- Lack of communication and support between the members of the intervention team.

A small category of teachers, the majority enrolled in Master's or teacher training programs, perceive inclusive education as "provocative", "beneficial" and "useful". If in theory and legislation teachers are encouraged to accept that all challenges or issues arising from special educational requirements always enjoy several solutions, in practice the possibilities to implement these goals are limited.

Perception of pupils with SEN and of Inclusive Education

The phrase 'special educational needs' has different meanings for teachers, parents and students. Although it was created to protect and support pupils with SEN, the term itself creates a lasting stigma for the child, if teachers, parents and other children understand and use it as a label. Furthermore, the SEN label was expanded from child to teacher ("not good/ non-performing") and then to the school as a whole. There is, generally, a lack of information or a tendency to denigrate the issue of children with SEN, because most of the teachers think only of children with severe deficiencies. The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs is considered by some teachers as "difficult and inefficient", "an obstacle to educational activities because of their behavioural disorders". From the perspective of parents of children with S.E.N. integration into mainstream school is a significant guarantee of children's social integration.

Italy

Inclusive Education according to country policies/ legislation

In the international horizon, Italy is considered a leading Country in the field of inclusive education, and is a unique case of 50 years of expertise in the field in OCSE Countries: The

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Italian model, represents an example of national how policy ensures access to all children and youths to school, from kindergarten to university, whichever their condition, even with severe disabilities (Ianes & Dell'Anna, 2020).

Together with the changes occurred in the psychiatric field, Italy dismantled the “special” school system, opening to school integration (law 118/1971; law 517/1977) following a document of the parliamentary committee presided over by MP Falcucci, in 1975, that had already observed that “The whole school structure, particularly compulsory education, can and must decisively contribute to the overcoming of every situation of human, cultural and social exclusion that has its roots in the failure of the development of potential of the individual” (Documento Falcucci, 1975).

Law n.104 of 1992 synthetizes two psychiatric models: the clinical model, which sees disability as a problem of the person caused directly by a pathological condition linked to neurobiological determinants; and the social model (Oliver, 1990) which challenges the assumption that causally connects impairment with being disabled, and strongly emphasizes the context as the main obstacle to the full development of the person with disability. Law n.104 therefore confronts social instances while aiming at ensuring full rights to persons with disability during their lifetime and in every context, from the educational to the work market.

Recently, D.M. of December 27th 2012 was adopting: it provides a specific direction for what concerns special educational needs which include disability, specific developmental disorders, socio-economical, cultural and linguistic disadvantage, and more recently, gifted children. Actually, we see the opening of a double channel of educational care which entails personalization (Piano didattico personalizzato – Personalized Instructional Plan) as further instructional action which sides the by now consolidated practice of individualization (Piano educativo individualizzato – Individualized Educational Plan).

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Discrepancies between policies and the real school context

A snapshot on the current situation of the Italian school system show, on many aspects, an asynchrony between intention and actual implementation, between legislative process and educational research. A reading of the Italian model for inclusion shows the multidimensional connotation of this phenomenon, which is made of a principles level, an empirical evidence level, an organizational level and a methodological – instructional level (Cottini, 2019). As a matter of fact, despite being a role model for inclusion education, the Italian one also shows grey areas. An example regards the access to secondary schools for students with disabilities. There is a lack in the reorganization of the secondary school system, which is still affected by an outdated ancient model with the consequence that it does not facilitate access to high school to students with disabilities who are often pushed towards professionalizing high schools. This aspect is made clear by the data collected by the Ministry of Education¹ for the school year 2017/2018 which show that only 23,8% of the overall population of students with disability attend high schools, while 27,3% attends Technical schools, and the majority, 48,9% is enrolled in professionalizing high schools. We see, therefore, the persistent scarcity of empirical evidence that would give each institution the chance to analyse the issues of the system.

Spain

Inclusive Education according to country policies/ legislation

The Spanish educational system is a decentralized one and the education competence has been transferred to each Autonomous Community, in practice, we can talk about 17 different educational systems in Spain. The legal changes addressed have had the general purpose of making the Spanish educational system a more flexible one to facilitate the access and permanence of all the students, no matter their background and needs (i.e., special, social,

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cultural, and so on). Below is a brief overview of the history of the legislature in terms of education in Spain:

- Organic Law 1/1990 on the General Organization of the Educational System (LOGSE) clearly bets on the principles of normalization and integration, introducing for the first time the concept of SEN.
- Royal Decree 696/1995, of the 25th of April, of ordination of the education of students with special educational needs
- Law 51/2003, of the 2nd of December, of equality of opportunities, no discrimination and universal accessibility of the persons with disabilities
- Organic Law of Education (LOE, 2006) delves into the social commitment of the centers to carry out schooling without exclusions, responding to the principles of quality and equity.
- Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013, of the 29th of November, approving the Consolidated Text of the General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion
- Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE, 2013) has among its objectives to promote the maximum personal and professional development of people. Organic Law 8/2013, of 9th of December, on the Improvement of the Quality of Education

The law holds that the educational administrations shall: (a) provide the measures so that all students reach their maximum development as possible; (b) facilitate the necessary resources for that; (c) establish the 6 processes and resources necessary to identify the specific needs for educational supports of the students; and (d) ensure the family participation in the decision-taking procedures pertaining the education of students.

In Spain there is not a national inclusive education plan, but there have been different initiatives to address the inclusive education of students with disabilities of different kind from a state-level perspective, but the decentralization of the country regarding education makes that each

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Autonomous Community develops their own plans and regulations to achieve inclusive education through an instrument called Attention to Diversity (AD). The strong decentralization existing in the general educational system in Spain has motivated that every Autonomous Community develops their own normative regulating Educational Guidance.

In Spain, the SEN are those educational needs within the SNES - Specific Need for Educational Support umbrella term, which are associated with the presence of specific conditions relating to individual functioning (i.e., disability or severe behavioural disorders). Hence, concerning the diagnosis of the SEN there are two possibilities during the psychopedagogical assessment which are derived from the nature of the SNES detected:

- a) The SNES is not a SEN. In this case, specific Attention Diversity measures are provided and there is a monitoring to see the extent to which the needs have been successfully covered.
- b) If during the psychopedagogical assessment there is evidence to consider the SNES as a SEN, then it is compulsory to conduct further assessment through a schooling report to determine the SEN and to provide the extraordinary Attention Diversity measures. The schooling report, which is based in the psychopedagogical assessment, is also an instrument to take a decision on the most appropriate form of schooling for the student (i.e., general education, combined education or special education) (De Luis, 2016).

Discrepancies between policies and the real school context

The controversy between the concepts of integration and inclusion has led to a broad terminological debate among professionals, which has not always been useful for the defence of their common interests (Verdugo, 2003). In fact, despite the positive trajectory that has taken place in the name of inclusion, in the current school and social reality various practices are intermingled, many of them corresponding to paradigms that have long been overcome.

In Spain, there still exist the “general or mainstream education” and the “special education” systems referring to each Autonomous Community, as well as intermediate options of schooling (e.g., special education classroom within a general school; or combined education

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between special and general schools) which are considered “integration” options (De Luis, 2016).

Spain claims to have less than 0.4 of students with special educational needs in special education centres (EADSNE, [8], [7]) and is thus regarded as one of the EU countries with a more inclusive system. Despite this, it has been argued that current actions reflect a more integrative approach than one that is inclusive (De Luis, 2016).

Although the general budget for this exercise has already been approved, there is not a specified amount linked to inclusive education the Ministry of Treasury has provided information on the amount expended on “special education”, which consist of a 0.10% (2.62 million Euros) of the total expenditure in education.

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Practices of Inclusive Education from Partner Countries

This section aims to list and analyse fundamental aspects for fostering Inclusive Education in school, by analysing their application across the European Union, as well as with a focus on Lithuania, Romania, Italy and Spain. The aspects that will be analysed are:

- **Theories underlying the practices of school inclusion and the paradigms that characterise inclusion** – indeed, as described in the section above, the historical and cultural background of each context characterises the perception and therefore provisions adopting for fostering inclusion in school;
- **The role of psychologists in the scholastic context to foster Inclusion Education** – indeed, the school psychologist is becoming much more important in the school as collaboration figure for planning the steps of the inclusion process, inside and outside the school, as they fulfil a crucial role on the social and emotional outcomes for all students;
- **Cooperation and mutual support among Teaching Professionals** – Indeed, shared responsibility among all school team members and a shared vision with explicit goals towards IE should be an essential and basic procedure at school. Cooperative and mutual support between regular (curricular) and support (special) teachers in Special education is fundamental for the build-up of an appropriate learning path.
- **Social inclusive practices and the academic researches and analysis conducted to analyse their relevance**

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Europe

Theories underlying the practices of school inclusion and the paradigms that characterise inclusion

According to the periodic UNESCO reports on the views of the European Joint Research Centre, it seems that special and inclusive education are conceived on a scale with 4 steps: exclusion, segregation, integration and inclusion, with the inclusion step being the preferred one. This final stage accounts for actually changing education systems to adopt inclusive values and effectively respond to the individual needs of the learners. Teaching styles and curricula need to become more flexible to accommodate these needs, while schools become learning organisations that make use of the diversity of pupils to help them in finding creative solutions to various challenges. The aim is to prepare all pupils to fit this flexible systems, for all to have individualised plans, and for caregivers, parents and other stakeholders to contribute, in order to find the best ways in which the children can be supported.

A relevant paradigm behind Inclusive Education in Europe is the 'whole-school approach'. Within the European Commission's Education and Training 2020 Strategy, working groups, formed by experts and stakeholders, have been created with one specifically focus on School Policy. They have approached the topic of whole-school education but from the perspective of preventing early school leaving. This provides a clear understanding of what the EU institutions believe this approach is, focusing on: promoting a positive school culture, teamwork and collaborative practices within the school community. They hope to bring all school actors and stakeholders together to ensure educational success. However, usually most of the conversation focuses on teachers, parents, school heads and learners, not considering other types of educational support staff members or NGOs/CSOs/volunteering organisations. Again, the EU institutions would be focusing on the institutional actors more because of their lack of competence over national policies.

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The role of psychologists in the scholastic context to foster Inclusion Education

At EU level, there are organisations representing families, parents and schools heads all advocating for better participation of such external actors – also psychologists, CSOs, etc. - in policy-making and in implementation. However, the role of psychologists is less clear given that they do not seem to be as represented within the EU-level education debate.

Cooperation and mutual support among Teaching Professionals

A recurring aspect among all EU Member States, is that teachers do not have time. Collaborating and planning for the schools, finding new ways to communicate, ensuring mutual support are done on an ad-hoc basis, depending on highly motivated teachers. The structure in place in many EU countries does not allow for sufficient time or recognition for teachers to engage in these activities. The trainings in which they are forced to participate do not aid them, the paperwork they have to deliver is becoming a huge burden, the class sizes is particularly large in many countries, the remuneration is low, the work-life balance becomes complicated with the intrusion of parents and pupils in their free time. Overall, it is highly difficult to motivate teachers and to provide them with enough space to also engage in operations that would contribute to a more inclusive environment. A structural change is needed, as it is unsustainable to depend on the good-will of a few teachers.

Social inclusive practices and the academic researches and analysis conducted to analyse their relevance

Inclusive Early Childhood Education Environment Self-Reflection Tool

This Self-Reflection Tool was developed as part of the Agency's Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) project, which ran from 2015 to 2017. The project aimed to identify, analyse and promote the main characteristics of quality IECE for all children. It represents a tool that all professionals and staff could use to reflect on their setting's inclusiveness, focusing on the social, learning and physical environment. The Self-Reflection Tool is non-copyright material, so it can be adapted, modified and re-purposed as required, provided a reference to the

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original source is given. The resource can be downloaded at the following link:
<https://www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/inclusive-early-childhood-education-environment-self-reflection-tool>

Inclusive Education in Action

Inclusive Education in Action is a UNESCO initiative aimed at achieving Agenda 2030 Goal number 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The Platform collects Case Studies from all around the world, concerning inclusive education: tools, practices, curricula, etc. The initiative and the map of Case Studies can be explored at the following link: <https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/>

Further resources can be found at: <https://www.european-agency.org/resources>

Lithuania

Theories underlying the practices of school inclusion and the paradigms that characterise inclusion

The 2015 policy indications from the Education and Science Ministry of Lithuania underlines the necessity to equate IE with personalized education for each student, but not only with the transfer of students with special educational needs from special to general education schools. IE covers rethinking the content of education, teacher training, student support, teachers and school assessment, education organization and funding.

The Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Education emphasizes that:

- IE in Lithuania is the most important political goal of the education system;
- access to education is an opportunity to study in a safe and appropriate educational environment, where everyone is educated according to their abilities, needs and inclinations.

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The role of psychologists in the scholastic context to foster Inclusion Education

The description of the procedure for providing psychological assistance states that a psychologist working at a school provides assistance to a maximum of 400 students. Nevertheless, due to low salaries and very difficult working conditions, Lithuanian educational institutions are facing shortage of not only psychologists, but also other educational support specialists who could help teachers to work with children with special educational needs. There are schools in Lithuania where such specialists do not exist at all or such a specialist works through several educational institutions, so it is really difficult to ensure the appropriate quality of services. The biggest problem is that the state and municipalities do not allocate sufficient funding to ensure quality IE.

Cooperation and mutual support among Teaching Professionals

Often in Lithuania teachers are left alone to independently prepare and implement programs for students with special educational needs. Furthermore, in some schools the practice of differentiated classrooms is adopted, where teachers are again left alone to prepare a curriculum adapt to children with a variety of needs, going against the principles of IE. Opposed to this, in schools that adopt heterogeneous classes, not always teachers are able to collaborate as a group. Nevertheless, where it occurs, they consult and jointly develop specific programs for pupils with SEN.

Social inclusive practices and the academic researches and analysis conducted to analyse their relevance

The following information has been taken from the article and research titled “Implementing Inclusive Education in Lithuania: What are the main Challenges according to Teachers’ Experiences?”, published in 2019 by S. Lakkala et al. The analysis gives an effective picture of the current practices at school level for implementing Inclusive Education (online article: <https://www.journals.vu.lt/acta-paedagogica-vilnensia/article/view/16157/15327>).

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Two are the forms for education for learners with SEN in general education schools: student support within the general class; education in a special class, usually for learners with cognitive disorders. Concerning the general classrooms, three practices are foreseen for implementing the curricula: “the general curriculum and two levels of adjustment of it. The adjusted program creates the conditions for a learner to acquire basic, secondary or vocational education and/or qualification. Individualised program constructs the studies of learners with mental disorders, by individualising pre-school, primary, and lower general secondary curricula. The studies are designed in collaboration with the students and their guardians. The Child Welfare Committees coordinate the arrangements for education assistance.” (2019, S. Lakkala et al.).

Romania

Theories underlying the practices of school inclusion and the paradigms that characterise inclusion

Parents are the first “teachers” of a child in terms of tolerance and acceptance of diversity. Also, parents of children with SEN should understand that it is not only the teacher's duty to advocate for inclusive education; they can also achieve effective lobbying for inclusive schools.

The educational system for children with disabilities is still in development. If at the legislative and institutional level, things seem to evolve and work, we cannot say the same about the employment of inclusive education. There are still barriers, regarding the individual, families, communities, as well as organizational barriers. Unfortunately, nowadays in Romania, pupils with SEN have a “tolerated status”, they do not fully benefit from the idea of inclusion in its true meaning.

Cooperation and mutual support among Teaching Professionals

Teachers’ thinking and approach should undergo a change, so the prospects can be positive in terms of inclusion. Parents have an extremely important role and they should be given fundamental emotional support, besides the material one. Aside from the fact that these

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systems that need to work together in order to truly achieve inclusive education, there is a need for more training programs for itinerant teachers. The need for training for itinerant teachers is high and it is necessary to develop continuous training programs for them so that they can truly provide an inclusive education to children with SENs.

Social inclusive practices and the academic researches and analysis conducted to analyse their relevance

The infrastructure and material resources of the Romanian educational system often constitutes a barrier to the access of disabled people to quality education, and the practice of segregation is still very diffused. The network of special education units is developed with priority in the urban environment; over 90% of pupils with special educational needs learn in urban areas. In rural areas, there are very few specially-educated primary and secondary education units and some special schools organized by school groups. The specificity of school network development determines access difficulties and inequities regarding the access of children with disabilities to education, especially those in rural areas. The lack of special schools as close as possible to home leads, in many cases, to the non-attendance of children with disabilities. Measures to support inclusive approaches in education have led to a steady decrease in the number of special education units, together with an increase in the number of pupils with special needs in mainstream education.

Italy

Theories underlying the practices of school inclusion and the paradigms that characterise inclusion

At governmental level, the inclusive paradigm has become an essential theoretical and reference framework only with the most recent laws (Dlgs 66, 2017, Dlgs 96, 2019) that have integrated ICF theoretical and practical structure, therefore strengthening those changes that progressively lead to a new inclusive model. The notion of inclusion represents a process, a philosophy of acceptance, to provide students – whatever their abilities, gender, language,

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culture – with a frame where they can be equally appreciated, respected and given equal educational opportunities (Mitchell, 2017).

In light of the new approaches to inclusion which look at diversity through an ecological – systemic lens besides functioning, we can hope, while thinking about inclusion, for the paradigm shift that Borland (2005) recalled in the field of gifted education and that Bocci (2021) wished so this concept would not be reduced simply to an elegant yet empty formula.

A further paradigm shift is represented by the ecological – systemic model for inclusion (Mitchell, 2015; Anderson et al., 2014), which overcomes simple definitions and redefinitions, categorizations, educational sectarianism to approach a vision of inclusion oriented towards an educational-instructional action that can answer the needs of all students at all levels, in any environment and stage of life. Such a model provides an innovative outlook, which sees in the relation and inter-connections between different systems the only way of realization, outlining how at assessment, instructional, organizational and territorial level it is necessary to train, involve and cooperate with all the players of the educational process: teachers, school heads, families, educators, collaborators, policy maker and specialist. The ecological model, therefore, is the horizon towards which Italy is heading for a broadening of borders of school inclusion that can encompass social inclusion as well.

Cooperation and mutual support among Teaching Professionals

Two tools are used in schools: The Individualized Educational Plan – IEP, and the Personalized Instructional Plan – PIP. Both are clear examples of how the Italian school system tried to establish a convergence between the legislative and the educational horizon, signifying the efforts put in the pursuit of a quality inclusive education. According to both documents, regular teachers and support teachers must work together in order to meet the needs of those pupils with special educational needs. However, there are differences between the two documents regarding to the school population they are aimed at: The IEP is aimed at students with certified disabilities, while the PIP addresses the educational needs of students with learning disorders such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia. Furthermore, while the IEP

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has been a stable instrument in the Italian schools for almost thirty years, the PIP is relatively younger, having been introduced in the educational system only ten years ago, with the law 170/2010 which was the first law ever to shed a light on the educational needs of those students with learning disorders attending Italian schools (Magni 2015; Cottini, 2017).

Social inclusive practices and the academic researches and analysis conducted to analyse their relevance

While there is no doubt that the Individualized Educational Plan – IEP and the Personalized Instructional Plan – PIP play a pivotal role in ensuring access to education to all students, it is important to highlight that discrepancies between their purposes and their implementation have consequences on the many educational and instructional processes happening daily in the school. This is linked not only with the way the documents are structured but also to teachers (both curricular and support) readiness in approaching the drafting of these tools with a shared, focused and strong set of inclusive values that should not be reduced to declaration of intents. More specifically, what the two documents lack are means for assessing the quality of Inclusion Education in school, which in turn affects the way teachers approach it, and the propositions that research can formulate to improve it.

Despite the many efforts that have been made and still are, the Italian school system still presents gaps that should be filled. As all structures that have been standing and changing for such a long time, the Italian school system as well needs to be reviewed and revised in the light of global changes in terms of new approaches to teaching – learning strategies and methodologies and new ways of understanding what being “fully inclusive” means, educationally and socially. What surely emerged is the need for a new approach to research in order to gather data that would either support or push for the change of longstanding assumptions that may not be so scientifically sound – both from a practical – instructional and ethical perspective.

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Theories underlying the practices of school inclusion and the paradigms that characterise inclusion

Some of the measures already proposed to initiate a model of inclusive education and practice are:

- Schooling of all pupils in a single system.
- Increased resources in terms of personnel, materials and infrastructure in order to attend pupils' SEN
- Use of Special Education Centres only in cases where mainstream education is neither possible nor advisable.
- Development of plans of attention to diversity.
- Significant improvement in teacher training on inclusion issues.

In addition, some notes that could be added in a more specific way would be the following (Osuna, 2021):

- For greater effectiveness, during the sessions, it is important to have variety, to listen to the opinion of the children, to highlight the objectives and benefits that are intended to be extracted and always, at the end, to collect learning and feedback, in this way activating a machinery that is always fed back.
- It would be interesting if, with the systematisation of explicit inclusive education, resource banks could be created and made available to professionals.
- It is important to assess the group cohesion at the moment of starting the intervention. This can be done by applying observations and various dynamics. In this way, as the application of the different dynamics and the implementation of resources progresses, the effectiveness and improvement that is taking place can be assessed.
- It is also necessary to look for measures to assess the success of the intervention: satisfaction, reduction of conflicts (reflected in tutoring and the number of expulsions or

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punishments implemented) and even the improvement in the performance of those who were less included.

The role of psychologists in the scholastic context to foster Inclusion Education

With the launch of the L.O.G.S.E. (1990) - *Ley Orgánica General del Sistema Educativo* the model that the educational administration proposes for psychopedagogical intervention and educational orientation is being outlined, considering two levels of professional performance; on the one hand, the Guidance Departments in Secondary Education as technical support for the teacher's tutorial work and professional guidance resource at the center, with functions related to the center itself, the students, the teachers, families and other institutions; and on the other hand, the Sector Teams to provide Primary Education centers with assistance and technical support of a didactic, psychological, social and organizational nature, in addition to specific functions at the sector level. There are also Specific Teams (Autism, Deaf, Blind, Motor) at the provincial level and Early Care Teams (which cover the Early Childhood Education stage).

Overall, educational psychologists represent approximately 38% of all psychology professionals who practice as such, which places them as one of the most numerous areas of the professional group. In the public educational sector, in the last twenty years, the practice of non-existence of psychologists has gone to the more than 3000 that can be calculated today in the various municipal, regional, and central administrations. The main difficulties have come from a double path, on the one hand those related to the administrative-labour status, in some cases due to the forms of recruitment, in others due to problems of professional recognition (fortunately to a lesser extent) and in many cases, on all in which the professional intervention is more recent, due to pure labour and socioeconomic problems (COP, 1998).

Cooperation and mutual support among Teaching Professionals

It should be highlighted that there has been an increase in SEN in Primary and Secondary, a fact that often causes teachers to feel overwhelmed by the situation. Professionals

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demonstrate that they do not have sufficient material or human resources, at the same time they lack training to respond to SEN (Segura, 2021). Secondary education teachers do not receive training in an undergraduate program to become secondary education teachers and they don't need to have specialized training to meet the needs of students with SEN linked to disability. In this sense, to become a secondary education teacher it is necessary to hold a given degree (e.g., physics), and then to obtain a master's degree that provides teaching training called "University Master on Secondary Education". As a part of their training in this master's degree, they can take different ECTS addressing AD measures and procedures (Amor, Verdugo, Navas et al. 2018). However, it has been noticed that they are often not enough and current practitioners stress that this is one of the biggest challenges they face every day (Osuna et Segura, 2021).

Normative says, on one hand that education must be inclusive; and, on the other hand, it gives the possibility to segregate students. In Spain two parallel systems of education coexist and segregation is a habitual practice, even so, there are several organizations that help regulate inclusion and counselling practices within the general educational system. An example would be Catalonia, which has organizations such as Psychopedagogical Counselling and Guidance Teams (TEPG's) are educational services that support teachers in educational centers to offer the most appropriate educational response to all students, especially those with disabilities or more difficulties in the learning process, their families, educational centres and the sector (Generalitat de Catalunya, n-d). They have a regional or sub-regional scope of intervention. Nevertheless, many are local or district, depending on the specific needs of each area. The professionals of the TEPG's work as a multidisciplinary team in their territorial scope in the evaluation, monitoring and guidance of students, especially those with special educational needs, and in advising teachers in educational centers.

Another example of a key support organization for inclusive schooling would be the Intensive support for inclusive schooling (SIEI) (Generalitat de Catalunya, n-d), which is endowed with extraordinary professionals who support schools and institutes with intensive resources to serve students with special educational needs.

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Social inclusive practices and the academic researches and analysis conducted to analyse their relevance

According to Amor, Verdugo, Calvo et al. (2018), in Spain, the assessment and provision of supports towards students with SEN is governed by policies which set out the Attention Diversity procedure, a process whereby student needs are identified, and the appropriate responses provided to fulfil the right to inclusive education. This process involves a series of interdependent successive phases which vary according to the student's needs. After an initial identification of alert signs in the child there is a provision of general measures of Attention Diversity. When the general Attention Diversity measures are not sufficient to address the needs of the students (i.e., there is evidence that everything is the same or worse), a psychopedagogical assessment is carried out to identify the nature of the student's Specific Need for Educational Support (SNES) and to provide measures related to the detected needs. The psychopedagogical assessment is a very important step within the Attention Diversity process, since this step is critical for detecting the SEN. This is because under the umbrella term of Specific Need for Educational Support/ SNES there are different possibilities to be detected: "gifted students", "students with learning difficulties", "students that have accessed the educational system", "students with personal/school special records" or "students with SEN".

The execution of educational policies is decentralized and therefore differs on several points. There are some common points that come from the different modifications and updates of the Decree:

- Prevention, understood as an anticipation of the appearance of imbalances in the educational process
- Personal development, as an ongoing process which intends to help the whole development of the students
- Social intervention considering the socio-educational context in which the school and family life of the students take place.

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The educational guidance consists in an organizational and functional model based in three levels of intervention:

a) Tutorial action, whose responsibility concerns all teachers but especially the tutor teacher. Tutorial is a coordinative, dynamic, and integrative element of the whole educational reality.

b) Teams of Educational and Psychopedagogical Guidance (TEPGs). These are services of guidance and support to the schools in each city sector, and they act collaboratively and coordinately with other services and programs with the aim of improving the educational response towards the detected needs.

c) Guidance Departments. These are organizational units within high schools and schools for adults. Of these elements comprising the model of educational guidance, the TEPGs play an important role for the provision of early intervention programs. The TEPGs are the technical support for the educational guidance, and their main functions are:

- to facilitate that the schools establish the measures to attend to the diversity of capacities, interests, and motivation of all students;
- to promote that schools, adapt their educational response and methods to the needs of the students, acting through counselling and educational guidance at different levels. The TEPGs can: provide support to students of second cycle of preschool (3-6 years old) and primary education (general TEPGs). The provision of support is aimed at students attending special education schools, special classrooms and open, specialized classrooms; provide support to students younger than 3 years old who are not yet attending school and to students attending preschool education (early Intervention TEPGs); provide support to specific personal conditions (e.g., autism spectrum disorders or hearing impairments, among others). They work complementary with the general and early intervention TEPGs. In elementary and primary education, educational guidance is aimed at: early detection of difficulties and needs and supporting teaching- learning process and tutorial (specific TEPGs).

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Finally, a virtuous practice towards inclusion in Spain concerns the participation of parents in the educational process of their children. Since the democratic era in Spain, there has been an important increase in the educational laws regarding the presence and participation of families in the education of their children. Hence, the families participate in the elaboration and monitoring of the Educational Project of the school. This Educational Project is a key document in the schools and is grounded in the principles of non-discrimination and inclusion and it embodies the characteristic of the cultural and social environments of the school, the values, the objectives and the priorities of action and the quality response towards the needs of all students (Calvo, Verdugo, & Amor, 2016).

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Conclusions

Looking at the legislations, paradigms, perceptions and practices that characterise Inclusion Education at European and national level, it is possible to summarise a set of suggestions regarding the promotion and application of IE:

1. A generalised problem, which is often cause for discrepancies between policy/legislation and practice in school, concerns the resources allocated to education by governments. It appears clear that financial cuts to the budget allocated to the education public sector have been applied in partner countries, meaning that less resources are dedicated to inclusive measures towards students with SEN. Less resources mean less investment in specialised personnel that can support teachers to bring inclusivity to their classrooms, as well as more workload on the teachers – often left alone in their work. Strategies and methodologies that take into account and, possibly, respond to these issues should therefore be well thought out when developing any kind of provision/ recommendation/ practice etc. for the promotion and implementation of Inclusive Education.
2. Another aspect that affects a successful adoption of Inclusive Education concerns the perception and understanding of pupils with SEN among teachers, parents, other students and the community of the other schools. This means that working towards a change in culture and attitudes is a necessary step to improve Inclusive Education in any scholastic environment, as well as to enhance its long-lasting impact at community level.
3. One more aspect that was highlighted in various cases is the fact that teachers lack proper skills and competences to be prepared for the 21st Century Classroom. As outlined in point 1, an aspect of this kind of classroom concerns lack of resources and specialised professionals, as well as an extreme workload on teachers. Other aspects that characterise the 21st Century Class concern increasing multicultural environments, as well as the use of digital tools integrated in teaching methods. For these reasons,

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when developing training for teaching professionals it is necessary to prepare them to effectively confront these issues, for improving their flexibility in teaching styles, resilience and quality of work.

4. At more governmental level, the current school curricula set by the Ministries for Education from various countries tend to be, on the one hand, cause of overload to teachers, and, on the other, too strict to be declined and adapted to students presenting differentiated needs. For this reason, it would be advisable to advocate for more flexible curricula, that can be accommodated to such needs, so that schools become a place where learning makes use of the diversity of pupils for finding personalised creative solutions to their challenges.
5. In general, it seems that the role of school psychologists is highly undervalued across all analysed systems, and often unclear. This issue needs to be tackled with a set of actions that address, in turn, policy makers, school leaders and educational practitioners, to respond to it through a multi-objective approach.

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