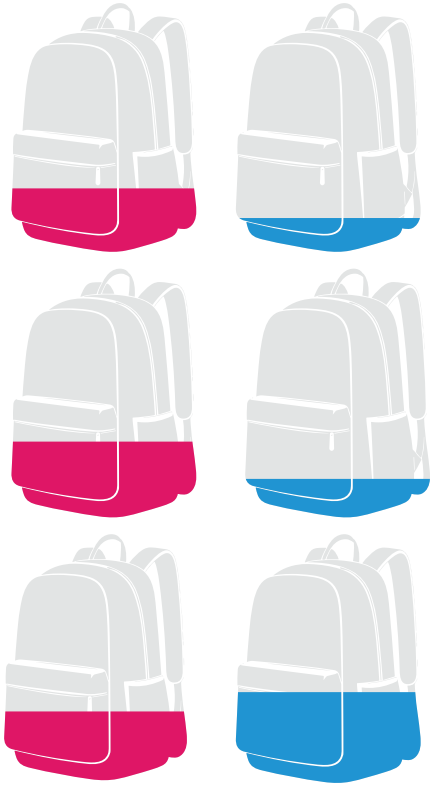
Promoting the inclusion of students with special educational needs and disabilities through social dialogue in education

According to Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), State Parties must "recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels" (United Nations, 2006).

Disability education in Europe :

Across the EU27, in 2024, considerable gaps persist between the educational outcomes of students with and without disabilities.



24.6%

of people aged 18 to 24 **with a disability** were early leavers from education and training.

8.0%

of people aged 18 to 24 **without a disability** were early leavers from education and training.

29.8%

of young people aged 15 to 29 **with a disability** were classified as NEETs.

10.0%

of young people aged 15 to 29 **without a disability** were classified as NEETs.

26.1%

of people aged 30 to 54 **with a disability** had a tertiary level education

41.1%

of people aged 30 to 54 **without a disability** had a tertiary level education

* Eurostat. (2025a). Early leavers from education and training by level of disability (activity limitation).
* Eurostat. (2025b). Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by level of disability (activity limitation) (NEET rates).
* Eurostat. (2025c). Population in private households by educational attainment level and level of disability (activity limitation).

Inclusive education for all :

Inclusive education is important to the creation of inclusive and democratic societies. A key aim of inclusive education is to ensure that every student feels valued, respected and a genuine sense of belonging, regardless of differences in gender, socio-economic background, ability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion (UNESCO, 2020).

Inclusive education policy frameworks are grounded in the social and human rights models of disability and emphasise the removal of barriers to learning, participation and achievement for all students (Ainscow, 2005). However, the implementation of inclusion in practice remains difficult and uneven.

Systemic challenges to quality, inclusive education :

- Inadequate education funding in general and insufficient dedicated investment in inclusive and special education.
- A significant and growing recruitment and retention crisis in the teaching professions.
- Limited professional development opportunities for education personnel in inclusive and special education strategies and methods.

This factsheet has been developed in the framework of the project "InclEdu4AllNeeds", co-funded by the EU.

Impact of inclusive education on education personnel :

Findings from TALIS 2024 indicate that the implementation of the inclusion agenda has implications for teachers' self-efficacy, job satisfaction and wellbeing (OECD, 2025).

One in four teachers reports a high level of need for professional development in teaching students with special educational needs.

Adapting teaching to students' diverse learning needs is a source of stress for **more than one third (37%) of teachers.**

Policy recommendations on inclusive education :

1. Prioritise sustained, long-term investment in inclusive education to strengthen social cohesion, reduce discrimination and advance inclusive societies.

2. Adopt a twin-track approach to education investment, ensuring adequate funding for education in general and special and inclusive education in particular.

3. Improve transparency in the allocation and use of funding for inclusive and special education to ensure effective support for students with special educational needs and disabilities.

4. Invest in enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching professions to improve supply of appropriately qualified teachers, specialists and support personnel.

5. Finance the continuing professional development (CPD) of education personnel in inclusive and special education, and ensure that provisions for CPD are included in collective agreements.

6. Reduce the bureaucracy and administrative burden in inclusive and special education, enabling education personnel to dedicate their time and expertise to supporting all students, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

7. Support the professional autonomy and discretion of education professionals, enabling them to determine the most effective approaches to support students with special educational needs and disabilities.

8. Reframe inclusive education as a fundamental human right of all children, young people and adults, aligning policy with the Salamanca Statement and the UN CRPD, and monitor progress on these frameworks.

9. Strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration between government and non-government actors across education, health and social care at local, regional and national levels to ensure integrated and equitable service provision.

10. Engage students, parents and the wider educational communities to ensure that their voices are heard in policy development.

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