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Joint Statement for a quality inclusive education

February 2023

This document is a joint statement co-written by the Erasmus+ Open up project partner organizations (referred as 'we'): six organizations engaged in inclusive education initiatives in four different EU countries (France, Spain, Croatia and Cyprus).

The objective of this project is to contribute to ensure quality inclusive education (incl. formal and non-formal education) for children and teenagers with visual and hearing impairments.

This document is the outcome of two years and a half of mutual learning about our national contexts and the exchange of good practices. It is addressed to policy makers and formulates recommendations for improving the quality of inclusive education..



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The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education states that: 'The ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local communities, alongside their friends and peers' (European Agency, 2015).

Building a more inclusive society is a priority for all.

Promoting 'diversity and inclusion' is essential and it applies to all. However, we notice that there is often a confusion between: **integration**, which means that a young person with special educational needs and his/her parents have to adapt to 'mainstream' institutions; and **inclusion**, which is a principle based on the persons' needs, no matter their disabilities, in order to ensure their active participation in society in different ways and according to their capacities. In a context of formal education, it is not up to the young person with special educational needs and his/her parents to adapt themselves to the educational system, but it is the latter that should be adapted and accessible to all.

We acknowledge that the European strategy and our national educational public policies are truly inclusive. But, Inclusive education is an ideal that is hard to achieve precisely because of the diversity of special educational needs. Individual support and tailored adaptations are still necessary. Therefore, **we advocate for educational systems that include individual support and empowerment of vulnerable young persons**, enabling them to thrive as learners and active members of society.

A 'responsible' inclusive education policy that responds to the needs of young people with sensory disorders seems achievable **only if our governments consider the following recommendations:**



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1

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE ESTABLISHMENTS AND SERVICES MUST REMAIN OR BE CONSIDERED AS ESSENTIAL

This includes:

- District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) consist of professionals from various departments
- Institutional-Level Support Teams (ILSTs) are trans-disciplinary teams with departmental professionals promoting inclusive education through training, curriculum delivery, resources distribution, learning barriers identifying, leadership and general management.
- Full-Service Schools (FSS) support certain learners' needs
- Learning Support Educators (LSEs) support learners with special needs only
- Special Schools as Resource Centres (SSRC) support learners' needs in all specialised areas.

These are key actors of an holistic and child-centred approach that commits parents, 'regular' schools, youth organizations and sport clubs, or any other social group where the young person interacts with other people, because they:

- Act as effective resources providing expertise in supporting people with disabilities and outreach work with young beneficiaries and their families;
- Carry out supporting measures promoting empowerment with an adapted and caring approach, maintaining independence as much as possible;
- Adapt continuously and broaden their services with innovative projects (e.g. the Open up project) answering special educational needs (incl. complex disabilities);
- Raise awareness and promote a culture of 'responsible' inclusion contributing to positive change in the society.

Other associations specialized in particular fields of disabilities can also act on the following recommendations:

2

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES MUST BE IMPROVED

with measures and more investments in the following areas:

- **Assistive technologies.** Many adaptations exist (computers, smartphones, bone conduction headphones, etc. for partially sighted persons), but their costs are often prohibitive and they are usually only funded partially or not supported at all by the social welfare system.
- **Urban public spaces and open to public buildings.** The French law of 11 February 2005 on the equality of rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of people with disabilities, specifies that open to public buildings must be accessible to all, regardless of their category of disability (*ex. provide an example in your country*)
- **Digital accessibility.** Article 47 of the same law of 2005 made accessibility a requirement for all online public communication services of all State, regional and dependent public institutions. However, the French app for schooling follow-up between parents, pupils and teachers PRONOTE does not allow its users to have an accessibility mode
- **Learning materials.** Simple adaptations exist but very few or none of them are actually used (*ex. lack of awareness amongst parents with children with SEN and 'mainstream' institutions leads to miscommunication or sometimes no communication at all with specialized Health and Social care establishments. This has a negative impact on the overall young person's learning experience*)

3

AWARENESS-RAISING AND TRAINING MUST BE PROVIDED

The first two recommendations cannot work without this third one because the holistic and child-centred approach needs public awareness and qualified people; and because of the infrastructural and technological improvements mentioned above will never replace human aid.

People should be more aware and educated about disabilities. We recommend half-a-day group sessions facilitated by associations specialized in particular fields of disabilities, focused on overcoming stereotypes and prejudices.

All the stakeholders engaged in the holistic approach mentioned earlier must be trained. Inclusive education must be provided in a safe and caring environment. Professionals working in 'mainstream' institutions should be supported by their boards of Directors and decision makers at all levels and by their local community. Developing new profiles and upskilling existing staff can be done with further investments in lifelong learning (e.g. the Open up training curriculum).



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The Open up project partners formulate these recommendations in order to move towards quality inclusive education for all. Families, schools, communities, and governments at all levels must be aware that our educational system is not inclusive enough and it does not lie in the young person to adapt to it.

We consider that the Open up Guide for professionals and the training curriculum can contribute to improve the quality of inclusive education and therefore call for its dissemination and implementation among all involved stakeholders.

Contributors and working method

Developed from a bottom-up approach, the content of this Joint Statement results from a consultation of inclusive education stakeholders from five different regions and conurbations involved in this project: Hauts-de-France, Andalusia and the Balearic Islands (Spain), Zagreb (Croatia) and Nicosia (Cyprus). Local multidisciplinary boards of experts on inclusive education and sensory disorders contributed to write this Statement. In total, more than fifty persons participated in these local board meetings facilitated by:

- *La Vie Active and Ouvrir Les Yeux in Hauts-de-France*
- *VerdiBlanca in Andalusia*
- *Innovation Training Centre in the Balearic Islands*
- *Hrvatski savez gluhih i nagluhih in Zagreb*
- *INNOVADE in Nicosia*

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