INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS FOR PREVENTING SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN TODAY’S DIVERSE SOCIETY

PEER LEARNING SEMINAR, MALTA, MAY 10-12, 2017

BACKGROUND NOTE

(A) INTRODUCTION

This background note is intended for participants in the fourth Peer Learning Activity (PLA), within the framework of the ET 2020 Working Group on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. This PLA will take place in Malta from May 10-12, 2017. The following document serves as a tool to familiarise the participants with some of the major insights, findings and discussions pertaining to the themes of the Malta PLA and the larger framework of the Working Group, as well as to identify possible discussion topics relating to the Malta workshops and breakout sessions.

The Malta PLA will focus on the theme of ‘Inclusive education as the most effective means for preventing social exclusion in today’s diverse society’. Through policy examples and exposure to various practices in Malta and other member states, the PLA will seek to identify key messages and recommendations regarding the implementation of policies in member states relating to inclusive education.

(B) RATIONALE FOR ACTION

Despite various policies developed and adopted at the EU and national levels, indicators of intolerance, discrimination and racism have not shown any significant decrease across Europe in the last decades. A Pew Research Report focusing on 10 European countries, released in July 2016, confirms earlier findings that many Europeans do not fully embrace the principles of respect, tolerance, inclusion, human rights for all, and solidarity. The Pew study found that only a minority (approximately one-quarter on average) of EU citizens felt that growing diversity made their country a better place to live. Large numbers of Europeans feel ill at ease with growing diversity in society and tend to think that for instance refugees are a burden on society rather than an enrichment (though there are significant differences among EU countries). Also, on average, 16% had a negative view of Jews, 43% had a negative view of Muslims and 48% a negative view of Roma. Regarding refugees, on average, significant percentages of those participating in the study indicated that they thought refugees increased the likelihood of terrorism in their country. More than 40% of participants in each country made the link terrorism-refugees.

2 The countries included in the study were: France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Poland, Spain, UK.
3 In Sweden, UK and Spain this was about 1/3, while in Greece, Poland, the Netherlands, Italy and Hungary less than 20% felt growing diversity made their country better.
4 Regarding rejection of diversity, this was highest in Greece, Hungary and Italy; regarding attitudes towards refugees, the least tolerant countries were Hungary and Poland. It should be noted that...
to an earlier study by the Pew Research Center in 2014, the results show that the level of such intolerant attitudes has remained fairly stable, though there has been a significant increase of negative attitudes towards Muslims on the periphery of the EU (e.g. in Poland, Greece and Italy). Noteworthy is that there was a decline in anti-Muslim attitudes in Germany. There are indications that it is not only many adults that hold intolerant attitudes towards minorities and reject core values of tolerance, solidarity and co-existence. Negative perceptions of minorities are clearly present among young voters and school-aged youth in various EU countries.

In addition to attitudinal barriers to inclusion there are multiple structural barriers to (educational) inclusion in the EU. Many urban areas in Europe tend to be segregated according to ethnicity (or nationality), sometimes resulting in ghettos. While the concentration of racial and ethnic groups in the education system has been found to differ across jurisdictions and institutional contexts, similar factors drive the process, including inequality of educational achievement, a concentration of poverty, social isolation in certain neighbourhoods, and segregation. A study by Erlend Paasche and Katrine Fangen (2011) in 7 European countries showed, for instance, that ethnic segregation in neighbourhoods was pronounced in many cities, and that socio economic factors played a key role. High levels of socioeconomic and residential segregation tend to lead to lower quality schooling and cumulative inequalities based on pupils’ socioeconomic and migratory background. Enrolment in high quality schools and higher education tracks is particularly limited for Roma pupils. It has also been found that asylum seeker and refugee children tend to receive only limited support in reception centres and school systems throughout the EU. According to the EDUMIGROM survey (2010) of the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, ethnic

sizeable numbers of people in some countries with almost no refugees still blamed them for crime and taking away jobs and social benefits.

In Poland, Greece and Italy, the percentage with negative opinions rose from 50%, 53%, and 63% to 66%, 65% and 69% respectively; In Germany, the percentage dropped from 33% to 29%.

For instance, during recent elections for President in Austria, in 2016, the youngest voting block (16-28 years of age) came out strongly for far right candidate Hofer during both rounds of the election. In Hungary, a 2016 study among 15-34 year olds showed that support for the far right Jobbik Party had risen from 12% in 2012 to 53% in 2016. In France, a 2014 study showed that 30-37% of young voters between the ages of 18-24 indicated they would vote for the far right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen in 2017. In the Netherlands, the NGO Pro Demos conducts a mock election among school students aged 11-12 before every real election. The trend shows increased support for the far right and openly Islamophobic party PVV (Partij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, led by Geert Wilders). While 12.6 % of pupils indicated they would have voted for the PVV just before national elections in 2012, this rose to 19.9 % in 2015 (Provincial elections), which would have made the PVV the largest party in the Netherlands (Pro Demos, 2015).


separation in education is just partially a by-product of the given residential conditions: spontaneous processes of ‘white flight’, local educational policies aiming at raising efficiency through inter- and intra-school streaming, and minority ethnic parents’ attempts at protecting children from discrimination and ‘othering’ also contribute to the process. Segregation then becomes a key component of producing and reproducing inequalities of educational and labour market opportunities.\(^\text{14}\)

(C) KEY CONCEPTS

The following definitions will help participants contextualize and better understand the various presentations and discussions in Malta.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

Initially, inclusive education was focused on the integration of children with disabilities (special needs) into the mainstream education system. More recently, however, this has changed. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education notes that its main focus is on “inclusive education in its widest interpretation – that is, dealing with learner difference and diversity in all educational settings as a human rights and quality imperative.”\(^\text{15}\) According to the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, inclusive education aims at the participation of all children at risk of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement.\(^\text{16}\) A key aspect of inclusive education, as defined by UNESCO, is that ‘in order to attract and retain children from marginalized and excluded groups, education systems should respond flexibly… education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled, and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners.’\(^\text{17}\)

The following working definition is proposed for inclusive education:

**Inclusive education aims at providing good quality education for all children in mainstream settings, including children at risk of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement by actively seeking out to support them and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners, including through individualized approaches, targeted support and cooperation with the families.**

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education has developed a position paper on inclusive education systems\(^\text{18}\) in April 2016 and notes that:

“All European countries are committed to working towards ensuring more inclusive education systems........Inclusive education systems are seen as a vital component within the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies that all countries align themselves with, both ethically and politically. 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

\(^{14}\) EDUMIGROM, *Ethnic and Social Differences in Education in a Comparative Perspective*, 2010.
\(^{15}\) https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/AgencyFlyer2017-EN_A4_electronic.pdf
\(^{16}\) https://www.phzh.ch/MAPortrait_Data/56098/56/Participation-in-Inclusive-Education.pdf
\(^{17}\) http://www.unesco.org/education/sne/
\(^{18}\) www.european-agency.org/about-us/who-we-are/ position-on-inclusive-education-systems
local community, alongside their friends and peers. For this vision to be enacted, the legislation directing inclusive education systems must be underpinned by the fundamental commitment to ensuring every learner’s right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. The operational principles guiding the implementation of structures and procedures within inclusive education systems must be those of equity, effectiveness, efficiency and raising achievements for all stakeholders – learners, their parents and families, educational professionals, community representatives and decision-makers – through high-quality, accessible educational opportunities.”

UNESCO’s work on inclusive education is highlighted in the 1994 UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on special needs education. This key international document states that:

“Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building and inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.” (Article 2, Salamanca Statement).

UNESCO, more recently, defines inclusion as “a process of responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education”. Also, according to UNESCO:

“an inclusive curriculum addresses the child’s cognitive, emotional, social and creative development. It is based on the four pillars of education for the twenty-first century – learning to know, to do, to be and to live together. It has an instrumental role to play in fostering tolerance and promoting human rights, and is a powerful tool for transcending cultural, religious, gender and other differences. An inclusive curriculum takes gender, cultural identity and language background into consideration. It involves breaking negative stereotypes not only in textbooks but also, and more importantly, in teacher’s attitudes and expectations. Multilingual approaches in education, in which language is recognized as an integral part of a student’s cultural identity, can act as a source of inclusion.”

Most recently, The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), have referred to

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19 ibid
20 http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF
22 UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education 2009
the important role of inclusive education to counter intolerant discourse and hate speech, and to ensure that their root causes are addressed through education.  

INTEGRATION VERSUS ASSIMILATION VERSUS INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

Integration is a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States. Integration, according to this view, does not only refer to migrants receiving the tools to be able to succeed and better fit into a new society, but a process of mutual acceptance and respect. There needs to be a focus on removing the barriers that prevent migrants and other minorities from being included. Such barriers are multiple and can include language barriers, racial, sexual and cultural discrimination and restrictions arising from immigration policies. Due to a tendency to equate integration with one-way assimilation is being replaced by the concept of inclusion (and participation).

CHARITY BASED APPROACH VERSUS HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO EDUCATION

Charity implies the performance of a good deed or action. In a charity based approach to education the starting point is the moral obligation to help somebody who is needy. Students are seen as needing assistance, so essentially there is a deficit model in place. The students are seen more as a passive object. In a human rights based approach, there is an emphasis on realizing rights (of the students). This includes rights associated with access to the educational process, language, and culture. Students are seen as an active subject.

EQUALITY VERSUS EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Equality in education tends to be built on an assumption that students should be treated the same, so that ‘one size fits all’, so as not to discriminate. Such an approach is blind to differences and to different needs. Equity in education adopts a social justice, empowerment and critical thinking approach in which equity becomes a goal, through genuine and inclusive participation. It is recognized that students have different needs, sometimes relating to (socio-) psychological, historical, and structural barriers. The OECD has recently highlighted that equity in education enhances social cohesion and trust.

WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH: A whole school approach can be defined as a holistic and ecological approach to education. The approach involves all members of the school community, including school staff, students, parents, psychologists, youth services, NGOs and the broader community – working together in promoting a sense of belonging and cohesion. The entire school community engages in a cohesive, collective and collaborative action, based on multi-disciplinarity and on differentiation.

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26 See also http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001548/154861e.pdf
(D) DEFINING THE SCOPE AND SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

As a follow up to the Paris Declaration, the European Commission examined, through an independent report, the existing international evidence regarding what kinds of educational interventions contribute towards promoting key dimensions of inclusive policies, namely ‘tolerance’ and respect for diversity. The report, entitled *Education policies and practices to foster tolerance, respect for diversity and civic in children and young people in the EU: Examining the evidence* (NESET II report), and published in early 2016 (European Commission 2016b) highlighted that at present, progress is being made that much more needs to be done at the national and local policy levels to effectively promote inclusion for 21st century European multicultural societies. Measures that were found to be especially effective include (among others) whole school approaches, community schooling approaches, a strong school ethos promoting respect, interactive student centred methods, inclusive curricula (including inclusive history teaching), teacher professionalisation and strong community-school relationships. Valuable insights are also provided by other NESET II reports including *How to Prevent and Tackle Bullying and School Violence: Evidence and Practices for Strategies for Inclusive and Safe Schools* and *Evidence and policy guidance from European research projects funded under FP6 and FP7: Policies and Practices for Equality and Inclusion in and through Education*.

Though various declarations, reports and other official documents point to the importance of inclusive education, rarely are analyses made regarding whether ‘one size fits all’. So should inclusive education strategies and policies with respect to children with special needs, LGBTQ identified individuals, the socially disadvantaged, Roma communities, migrants and refugees, etc. (to mention a few main categories) look the same?

It is clear that the groups mentioned above have different histories in European society, for instance with respect to language, culture, histories of persecution, exclusion and discrimination, and also their sense of belonging in society, among other things. All have experienced exclusionary practices in some shape or form in recent years. Below, a few specific issues are briefly highlighted per group that can be seen as deserving special attention.

**Socially disadvantaged**

Socioeconomic disadvantage (SED) is a very complex concept and is viewed differently across Europe. In some countries it is viewed in terms of social class, in others in terms of educational disadvantage, social heritage, impoverished conditions, social background, or sub-standard living conditions. In many instances, social disadvantage overlaps with characteristics such as minority group status, ethnicity and migration background. Significantly, at the level of policy intervention, SED has been tied to conditions that are persistent and structural, threatening the full participation or people in the social, economic and civil life of a society. According to Eurostat, 118.7 million people, or 23.7 % of the population in the EU-28, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2015 (compared with 24.4 % in 2014). With respect to the youngest cohort, 25 million children, or 26.9% of the population aged 0 to 17, in the European Union (EU)
were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2015. This means that these individuals found themselves in at least one of the following conditions:

- at risk of poverty after social transfers (income poverty);
- severely materially deprived; or
- living in households with very low work intensity.

One of the five headline targets of the EU’s Europe 2020 headline indicators is to reduce poverty by lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty by 2020.

There are strong links between poverty and educational performance. Children from poorer homes in most OECD countries are between three and four times more likely to be among the poorest scorers in mathematics at age 15. The gap among the upper and lower social quarters is very different across EU Member States: while it is 26.2 percentage points in the EU average, it is especially large in BG (42.1 percentage points) and above 35 percentage points in LU, HU, RO, SK and EL. At the same time, some countries are able to combine both low levels of achievement with a low level of reproduction of socio-economic patterns (e.g. EE, FI).

The persistent nature (across generations) of poverty and social exclusion has been highlighted in a recent Eurostat study. It concludes, among other things, that: “In 2014, 63.8 % of children of parents with at most pre-primary and lower secondary education were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This was almost six times higher than for children of parents with first or second stage tertiary education.” The European Commission’s 2016 Education and Training Monitor also highlights that “students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and who had recently migrated perform less well than other groups.” It also underlines the link between early school leaving and poverty in later life, contributing to a vicious cycle of inter-generational poverty and disadvantage: “Upper secondary educational attainment is a prerequisite for better labour market integration and avoiding poverty and social exclusion.”

Migrants and refugees

While there are some indications that, over time, migrants to Europe are joining the mainstream in terms of economic and educational mobility, it is important to underline that there remains, on average, a significant gap between the native population and migrants regarding employment, housing and education.

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34 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7738122/3-16112016-AP-EN.pdf/c01aade1-ea44-411a-b20a-94f238449689
35 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion
39 European Commission (2016), Education and Training Monitor 2016, p.43
40 European Commission (2016), Education and Training Monitor 2016, p.38
42 See Oberdabernig and Schneebaum, 2015 – children of migrants more likely to surpass their parents’ level education than natives, although this is largely due to the low level of education of the migrant parents.
43 Settling in: OECD Indicators of Immigrant Integration.
including for second generation migrants, as shown in the recent 2015 PISA results.

Though socio-economic status is a powerful indicator of school success it still is not a sufficient explanation. According to PISA 2015 results, after taking socioeconomic status into account, immigrant students are still on average “more than twice as likely as their non-immigrant peers to perform below the baseline level of proficiency in science” (OECD, 2016b: 20). However, these results also show that, after accounting for the school’s socioeconomic intake, attending a school with a high concentration of immigrant students is not associated with poorer performance (Ibid.). As evidenced in the 2016 Education and Training Monitor, the rate of early school leavers among students with a migrant background is considerably higher than that of ‘native’ youth.

Sense of belonging refers to the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected and supported by others in the social environment of the school. As has been shown with other groups, students with a lower sense of belonging tend to be less socially integrated in the school and are less attached to the school community. They also tend to be more isolated and alienated in school. Recent OECD work based on the PISA 2015 results has highlighted the importance of the impact of the sense of belonging on the performance of immigrant students.

The results of a recently published (2017) study of 6 European countries, also using OECD data, point to the importance of both governmental policies and school policies. The study concluded that school belonging, attitudes towards school, and truancy, are all related to achievement and deserve more attention. The authors conclude that:

“multicultural policies in particular, which are only endorsed by few of the countries in our study, may allow immigrant students to draw on their ethnic culture as well as the mainstream culture as an additional resource for school belonging and adjustment. …integration can only flourish when the context allows. Especially in countries where integration is less promoted on an institutional and policy level, schools may play a crucial role in promoting multicultural values and thereby integration and adjustment of immigrant students.”

It is important to note that the findings above can also relate to refugees, but that most of the studies refer to studies carried out before the major recent arrivals of refugees in the EU and hence are not a reliable source of evidence on the specific case of refugees. Indeed, refugees differ from other migrants in several ways that can impact the kinds of educational policies to be implemented to promote inclusion: (1) Being a refugee implies having an official status, with a series of educational rights attached to this status (2) Refugees, unlike others,

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45 European Commission (2016), Education and Training Monitor 2016, p.40
48 Schachner et al. (2017) Acculturation and School Adjustment of Immigrant Youth in Six European Countries: Findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Psychological Frontiers
frequently have had little if any preparation for their move to a new country and culture. (3) Also, before arriving in Europe they have invariably experienced some level of trauma. This means that a culture shock can be significant. Nevertheless, it has been emphasised by experts on refugee issues that, though some refugee youth need more therapeutic care, there also needs to be a greater emphasis on the strengths and resilience of refugees. 49

**Roma individuals and communities**

The Roma, in addition to being the largest minority across Europe remain the most excluded and marginalized community in Europe. Multiple studies have shown that throughout Europe, the majority population has strong negative attitudes towards Roma. 50 Multiple Court decisions, especially from the European Court of Human Rights, have been handed down that criticize various EU nations for education policies that discriminate against Roma and promote exclusion and segregation 51. According to the FRA, some 50% of Roma between the ages of six and 24 in the EU do not attend school. 52 Due to centuries of persecution there is also great distrust of the majority population among Roma communities. This poses very specific challenges for inclusion policies in the field of education. In 2011 the Commission adopted the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 inviting all Member States to develop National Roma Integration Strategies covering four thematic areas: education, employment, health and housing.

In December 2013 the Council adopted a Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration strategies in the Member States. The Recommendation has reinforced the EU Framework by introducing an annual reporting obligation for Member States and by extending the framework to new areas. The Commission reports annually on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies. The 2016 Commission report on Roma looked at both at progress in the key areas of the EU Framework and provided for the first time an overview of measures reported under all areas of the Council Recommendation. The Commission continues to pursue regular exchanges with Member States (under the Network of National Roma Contact Points) as well as with Roma civil society organisations involved in the process of Roma inclusion.

Since 2012 five Member States received Roma related Country Specific Recommendations referring to inclusive education, employment, poverty issues or on the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategy (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia). Recent recommendations (2015 and 2016) increasingly focused on promoting the participation of Roma in inclusive mainstream education.

Though a lot or work has been done, evaluations of the initiatives taken show limited results on the ground. Some academic experts within the Roma community have claimed that the efforts were too top-down, too assimilationist in character, and did not include the Roma communities sufficiently in policy and implementation decision. 53 There has also been concern raised about the effectiveness of use of European funding for Roma integration and that the broad

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49 Hayward, M. (2017) Teaching as a primary therapeutic intervention for learners from refugee backgrounds. Intercutural Education, 28,2, in press
50 See for instance a 2014 Pew Study http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/05/12/chapter-4-views-of-roma-muslims-jews/
51 See for an overview: Arabadjieva, K. Challenging the school segregation of Roma children in Central and Eastern Europe. The International Journal of Human Rights, 1, 33-54
range of small scale targeted initiatives do not make a difference due to structural barriers and inadequate change in the mainstream education system.

**LGBT (also referred to as LGBTQ or LGBTI) individuals and communities**

Sexual orientation is now recognized in EU law as a ground of discrimination. Nevertheless, multiple studies show that attitudes towards those who identify as LGBT are significantly negative across Europe (with major differences among nations) and that LGBT youth indicate they do not feel comfortable being open about their identity. The Fundamental Rights Agency found in a 2012 study that many LGBT youth hide their identity or avoid locations because of fear, while others experience discrimination and even violence for being LGBT. 54 About a quarter of LGBT identified individuals claim that they have been subjected to attacks or have been threatened. 55

According to the 2016 report by ILGA, progress with respect to removing discriminatory barriers towards LGBT individuals through policy and legislation has been mixed in recent years. There have been some major policy gains in certain countries, such as in the host country of this PLA, while other countries have slipped backwards towards more intolerance. 56 A consequence of exclusion, bullying and lack of support is high attempted suicide and actual suicide rates. 57

Several particular challenges for inclusion policies relating to LGBT individuals are that: (1) Unlike other groups that face exclusion and discrimination, many LGBT individuals cannot find support among parents or family members. Also, teachers can harbor biases, (2) religious leaders and religious institutions, and in some cases governments, frequently promulgate anti-LGBT views; (3) LGBT-related programmes and policies that promote inclusion and tackle bullying, almost all focus on the secondary school level. It has been found that exclusionary behaviour and even suicides can take place as early as the first classes in primary school. Many school students also develop their first impressions of LGBT individuals in their primary school years. Policies related to teaching about LGBT related issues at the primary school level have been highly controversial.

Heteronormativity and heteronormative norms (that heterosexual behaviour is the only ‘normal’ and even ‘preferred’ social behaviour) also serve to promote the exclusion of LGBT individuals and strengthen their belief that they do not belong or are not accepted by society. Such heteronormativity can be found in the curriculum (either blatant or subtle or completely invisible), institutional norms, in school activities and also at the policy level. 58

**Persons with disabilities and special educational needs**

Initially, inclusive education referred to policies focused on learners with disabilities or special needs and how to move them away from separate schools into mainstream education. Research also showed that that students with disabilities achieve better school results in inclusive settings, since they provide

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opportunities to build social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance and trustworthiness.  

In line with such findings, early Council of Europe resolutions emphasized the importance of integration and autonomy of people with disabilities. Later resolutions confirmed this commitment and also called on the need for more specialized pre-service and in-service teacher training. The Council also called for international cooperation in this area. Though the definition of inclusion broadened in subsequent years the specific needs of this group remains in focus.

In 2010, the European Commission published its European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, which again emphasized the need for quality education for people with disabilities. It strategy also highlights the need: “to remove legal and organizational barriers for people with disabilities to general education and lifelong learning systems; provide timely support for inclusive education and personalized learning, and early identification of special needs; provide adequate training and support for professionals working at all levels of education and report on participation rates and outcomes (European Commission, 2010, p. 7-8).”

That many challenges lie ahead for persons with disabilities is confirmed by a report published in 2017. With respect to early school leaving, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education concludes that: “Learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are among those who are at particular risk of ESL. Across the EU, ESL is almost three times higher among people with disabilities than non-disabled people” (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017, p. 10).

(E) MOVING FORWARD: IDENTIFYING KEY DISCUSSION ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

The topic of inclusive education, and the specific focus of the Malta PLA bring several challenges with policy dimensions to light.

Individualised approaches and student-centred initiatives

For many groups of learners, inclusion in the mainstream of education or training provision does not guarantee that that their individual needs will be met. As such, it is imperative that individualised or ‘personalised’ approaches are developed to

respond to their individual needs. As shown in a 2013 OECD study\(^63\), a key principle for achieving this is to “place the students at the centre of the framework”. A key component to student learning is for students to ‘own’ their educational trajectory. This ‘student-centred’ educational approach implies that students are given responsibility for their own learning. As the OECD report states: “Students should be fully engaged with their learning, contributing to the planning and organisation of lessons, having learning expectations communicated to them, assessing their learning and that of their peers, and benefitting from individualised support and differentiated learning”. A recent report from the European Commission’s High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education for example underlined the importance of individualised learning, based on student-centred approaches: “Students are unique, and so is the way they learn. Therefore, the teaching tools used in universities and colleges should cater for individual ways of learning, with the student at the centre”\(^64\). Recent policy documents from the European Commission, including for example the 2016 Recommendation on *Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*, have underlined the need to propose tailor-made solutions responding to individual needs, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups\(^65\).

**Peer education and mentoring**

Peer education is an advanced model of student-centred learning that has also been found to be highly effective in improving the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the classroom\(^66\). It involves students becoming active agents in the education of their peers. Like other student-centred approaches (for instance peer mentoring), teachers have the opportunity, through peer education, to actively engage their students in tackling exclusionary patterns and classroom conflicts. Implementing peer education strategies implies a different role for teachers and sufficient training to take on that role. It also entails allowing students to make mistakes (since they do not have as much subject-related knowledge as teachers). This is definitely a challenge for many teachers who have not been trained to supervise peer mentoring and peer education methodologies and are not accustomed to taking on a more facilitator role. Also, few teachers have personal experience with (successful) student-centred learning during their earlier school years.

**Multilingual approaches**

Language, like religion, has a profound impact on a person’s sense of identity and wellbeing. Very few countries in Europe presently promote multilingualism approaches in education that include immigrant languages, and a deficit approach is common (viewing one’s mother tongue as a disadvantage). Although there is a significant amount of research showing the benefits (for both native and non-native students) of both mother tongue and especially certain types of bilingual education, in promoting social inclusion and belonging\(^67\), there is only limited research in Europe on successful policies and implementation. A key challenge is to find the resources (both in terms of finances and staff) to provide language support for non-native speakers and to implement multilingual programmes,

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\(^63\)OECD (2013), *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment*

\(^64\)High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education (2014), *New modes of learning and teaching in higher education*, p.18

\(^65\)See also European Comission (2016), *Towards more effective adult learning policies*

\(^66\)See e.g. Karen B McLean Donaldson, "Racism in U.S. schools: Assessing the impact of an anti-racist/multicultural arts curriculum on high school students in a peer education programme" (January 1, 1994). Doctoral Dissertations Available from Proquest. Paper AAI9434473

especially sustainable programmes. A promising practise is involving member of the local community to bridge the language gap and provide support to newly arrived migrants in their own language.

**A human rights focus**

Human rights and inclusion issues can be connected when developing policy measures. A rights based approach involves a holistic approach, encompassing access to education, educational quality (based on human rights values and principles) and the environment in which education is provided. A distinction can be made between educating about, through and for human rights.68 Educating about human rights refers to: ‘education about human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection’. Education for human rights has a strong activist dimension; it empowers ‘persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others’ so that ‘human rights can be translated into social and political reality’. Educating through human rights, is education that respects the rights of both educators and learners and where human rights values such as justice and equality are infused throughout, including within decision-making processes and disciplinary procedures; this is often referred to as a rights respecting classroom or school environment’.69 Centralized and more rigidly organised school systems are severely challenged by the demands that arise when teachers and students become aware of their rights and starting making (sometimes costly and time consuming) demands for change.

**Parental involvement and segregation**

There is a general consensus that parents play an important role in their children’s education. In a recent study, the European Commission noted that almost all European countries have ‘introduced central regulations and official recommendations to allow or encourage parental involvement in school governance’.70 Parental involvement is strongly linked to children’s academic, social and emotional development and building parent-school partnerships is one strategy for improving students’ outcomes and shaping their attitudes towards other cultural groups.71 Parents also play a key part in whole school approaches and community schooling, and these have been shown to be effective tools in promoting social inclusion. Roma education projects, such as the programme ‘A good start’72 have proved to be effective. The Good Start programme is a set of actions that aim to promote pre-school education for Roma children. It fosters parental involvement and several of the 16 localities involved in this project have testified that this aid granted to parents has played a central part in reducing segregation and prejudice, while helping young children from disadvantaged communities to grow.73

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Another dimension relating to parental rights and school choice has proven to be more problematic. The argument is that parents have the right and should be empowered to find the best education path for their children. Also that school choice produces better educational outcomes. The OECD, however, has pointed to the adverse impact of such parental choice when it comes to inclusion issues:

“Governments often allow parents a choice of schools, partly in the interests of equity. But this may in fact increase the risk of inequity because better-educated parents make better-informed choices. In many OECD countries, greater choice in school systems is associated with larger differences in the social composition of schools. The conclusion is that school choice requires careful management from an equity perspective, particularly to ensure that it does not result in increased differences in the social composition of schools.”

The key question is how to create the best balance between parental rights and the need for a fair and inclusive education.

A further area of tension is how to involve parents when their values might not match the values of the school. For instance, certain religious denominations do not appreciate teaching about sexual diversity issues.

Making Higher Education institutions more inclusive and sensitive to diversity issues.

Higher education institutions across Europe are increasingly catering to a more diverse student population. In recent years, many higher education institutions have adopted policies and strategies to create a more inclusive culture and to prevent drop-out among those students most likely not to complete their degree for instance ethnic minority students. Only a few countries in the EU, however, include quality assurance requirements related to diversity in Higher Education, in general, and in ITE, more specifically. With respect to ITE, these consist either of explicit requirements on the content of ITE programmes and curricula, or on student teachers’ expected competences and learning outcomes. Various measures are tested across several Member States to find the measures that work the best to attract non-traditional students into Higher Education institutions (e.g. the teaching profession) and prevent drop-out.

Developing a strong school ethos

In addition to national policy makers, school heads play a key leadership role in establishing an inclusive school culture or ethos. Part of this ethos is the promotion of acceptance of diversity in schools and also establishing strong bonds with the wider community. A 2012 report by Eurydice found that national curricula and/or education regulations in about a third of European countries made explicit references to the fostering of a school ethos or culture, implying that two-thirds did not. A key question is how to make sure there is significant

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74 See e.g. http://www.economist.com/node/9119786
support from all stakeholders to develop such a school ethos, how to make sure it is supported in daily practice and how to assure the development of an ethos of respect and inclusion is sustainable.

Cooperative learning

One of the most researched classroom methods that goes beyond passive processing and that has been found to effectively promote inclusion is cooperative learning. More than 1000 studies in North America, Europe and elsewhere have documented the positive impact of Cooperative Learning strategies in classroom settings, many explicitly aimed at improving majority-minority relations. A key aspect of Cooperative Learning involves collaborating with other pupils to reach shared goals. Cooperative Learning, as a systematic method, involves the instructional use of small heterogeneous groups (relating to academic skills, linguistic skills, ethnicity and background, culture or religion) where students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning. Teachers assign learning tasks in such a way as to maximize each pupil’s’ skills or strengths. Though there are many variations of cooperative learning, they tend to share five essential elements that need to be carefully structured when applied: positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, promotive interaction, appropriate use of social skills, and group processing. Some of the established benefits of Cooperative Learning have been: higher achievement scores for all, greater creativity, improved perspective taking, greater acceptance of differences, greater interpersonal attraction and liking among individuals, expanded networks of friends, more inclusiveness in the classroom, prejudice reduction, increased self-esteem, more caring about each other, improved classroom and school climate, development of better communication skills, valuing interdependence and multi-perspectivity, more empathy, greater social support, and increased peer support (Johnson, 2003; Johnson and Johnson, 1999, 2009). Challenges involving the implementation of cooperative learning involve lack of training (by teachers), lack of personal experience (on the part of teachers) during their own school career, attempts to promote cooperation in a culture of competition, how to give grades that are acceptable to all students involved, and the time needed to complete certain tasks. Also, despite policies promoting such interactive student based work, the reality in classrooms often reflects that traditional approaches dominate.

Inclusive curriculum

Most European countries tend to have a monocultural curriculum that reflects the histories and identities of the ‘majority’ population. Traditionally, textbooks and other educational materials have not incorporated the views, contributions and experiences of various minority groups in society, including women, migrants, people with disabilities, religious minorities, the LGBT community, etc. This applies to the books that students are required or encouraged to read (lack of inclusion and diversity) and how history is taught (often nationalistic). The consequence is that schoolchildren from these communities do not see their identities reflected in the curriculum and, consequently, may find it difficult to engage with it. Accordingly, an inclusive curriculum can be defined as a school curriculum that accommodates the content-related needs of all children in the classroom and better reflects their histories, abilities, cultures, religions, etc. This

can happen in many subject areas, even including mathematics. In order to promote respect for other cultures, various authors have highlighted the need for a culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy. The cultural and social identities of pupils are seen as assets rather than as deficits or limitations. These identities are not ignored in education but become triggers and resources for learning. It has been demonstrated that an inclusive and culturally relevant curriculum creates more equitable education for young people and helps reduce prejudice and discrimination against marginalised populations (including women, children with disabilities and ethnic minorities). Additionally, it has been shown that a culturally relevant curriculum can improve academic achievement and reduce racial bias. The research in this area also shows that teachers tend to lack the knowledge and confidence to make such curricular changes on their own, and admit to frustration with the lack of institutional support when attempting to introduce more inclusive reading materials, project based work, history activities, or use their own cultural and social competences to assist student learning.

A separate discussion relates to teaching about sexual diversity. A key issue is at what age to start such education and to what extent parents should be included in the consultation process. A further issue is whether the school curriculum should pay special attention to for instance LGBT issues or integrate such topics into the regular curriculum (thereby normalising such identities).

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81 See e.g. Moll, L.C., 'Mobilizing culture, language, and educational practices: Fulfilling the promises of Mendez and Brown' (2010), Educational Researcher, 39, pp. 451–460.
82 See e.g. Cammarota, J. (2007), 'A social justice approach to achievement: Guiding Latina/o students toward educational attainment with a challenging, socially relevant curriculum', Equity & Excellence in Education, 40, 2, pp. 87–96.
83 Bone, J.; Slate, J.,(2011) 'Student Ethnicity, Teacher Ethnicity, and Student Achievement: On the Need for a More Diverse Teacher Workforce.' The Journal of Multiculturalism in Education, 7(1), pp. 1-22