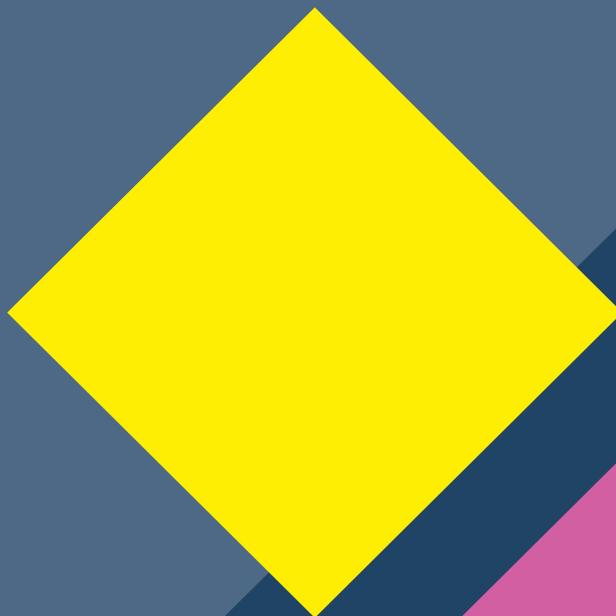
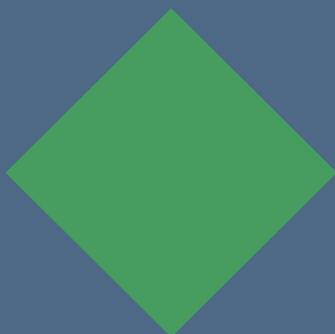




POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



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The ECO-IN project

The Algorithm for New Ecological Approaches to Inclusion (ECO-IN) project¹ was launched in 2019, under the Erasmus + programme with the aim of developing new assessment system and training activities, able to generate inclusive schools starting from an “ecological” approach. In order to achieve this, the project consortium, comprising the [University of Perugia](#), [FORMA.Azione](#), the [Lithuanian Education Trade Union](#), [University of Urbino](#), [MIRADA LOCAL](#), the [School Inspectorate of Alba County \(Romania\)](#) and [SOLIDAR Foundation](#), ran in-depth research on school inclusion in primary and secondary education in Belgium, Italy, Lithuania, Romania and Spain.

Based on the needs identified across these EU member states, and following further research at the EU level, the project delivers an innovative and digitalized assessment protocol for assessing and monitoring successful inclusion practices, policy recommendations to boost inclusion, and training to prepare all education stakeholders (teachers, school heads, policymakers, educators, external experts, parents, families) to actively participate in the school system following an “ecological approach”.

The following Manifesto is based on the ECO-IN project results and reports from FORMA.Azione,

the Lithuanian Education Trade Union, MIRADA LOCAL, the School Inspectorate of Alba County (Romania), SOLIDAR Foundation, University of Perugia and the University of Urbino, as well as the contributions to the ECO-IN High Level Conference on Policy Recommendations for School Inclusion of representatives of the following organizations: EESC Workers Group, ETUCE, European Commission (DG EAC), LLLP, OBESSU and S&D Group.

Policy recommendations

Based on the outcomes of the ECO-IN project, the following recommendations aim at support Inclusive Education at the EU level:

1. Evidence-based policymaking and assessment of inclusive education to inform and guide inclusive policies.

Education policies would be much more impactful if resulting from evidence-based approaches. This can be based on measurement tools such as the algorithm provided by the ECO-IN project which allows to collect data that can be used to inform decision making. The further development of such tools to be made available for both European and national policymakers in Education would contribute to the Achievement of important strategies such as the European Education Area. Moreover, assessing the Inclusiveness in Education

¹ [ECO-IN project website](#)

is possible and should be fostered by the EU. Not only by supporting projects such as ECO-IN but also by disseminating the outcomes of such projects so that they reach the ground (schools, teachers, education trade unions, school leaders, education employers, etc.).

2. Create a common definition of special needs.

The lack of a common definition of special needs is a crucial problem for the implementation of policy related to Inclusive Education. This common definition should be broad enough and based on an intersectional understanding of inequalities and needs.

3. Promote a positive perception and understanding of pupils with SEN and students with different socio-economic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds among teachers, parents, other students and the school community, and at the EU level

An 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 school community. 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.

4. Promote Ecological Training and Professional Development:

The EU should support member states better in providing comprehensive training for teachers and other support personnel, and professional development programs focused on inclusive education.

5. Develop EU guidelines for Inclusive Curricula

The EU should develop guidelines for member states to support the development of inclusive curricula that reflect the diversity of learners and foster a sense of belonging and respect for all and offer a systematic approach to inclusive education.

6. Recognise and Promote the Contribution of each Professional to foster Inclusive Education

At EU level, there are organisations representing students, families, parents and school heads all advocating for better participation of such external actors in policymaking and implementation. Civil Society Platforms such as the Lifelong Learning Platform contribute to ecological approaches and the recognition of the latter by institutional stakeholders. However, very often the policymaking process adopts a narrower approach, leaving aside the ecological approach and the recognition of different professions working in synergy to achieve Inclusive Education. Among these, the lack of definition and recognition of the role of professionals offering guidance in schools stands out.

7. Involve non- and informal stakeholders

When creating Inclusive Education policies, policymakers at the EU level should consider CSOs and volunteering organisations, and other types of educational support staff to enrich the consultation of teachers, parents, school heads and learners.

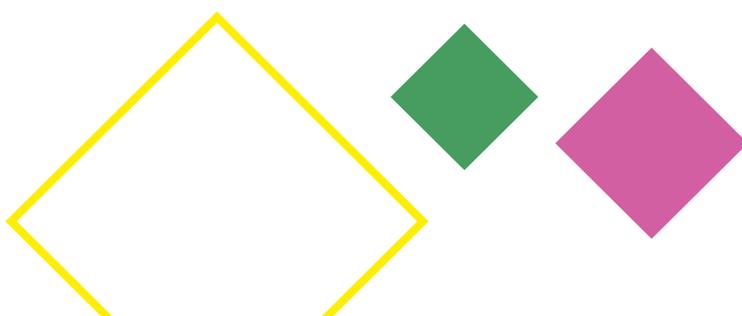
In order to promote Inclusive Education at the national level, the project recommends the following policy measures:

1. Develop more Flexible and Inclusive Curricula

The current school curricula from various Member States tend to be, on the one hand, a cause of overload to teachers, and, on the other, too strict to be adapted to students presenting differentiated needs. For this reason, it would be advisable to advocate for a spectrum of practices within each curriculum, in order to accommodate such needs. Time for dedicated training, and funding to support this as well as dedicated skilled workforce should be foreseen accordingly.

2. Allocate Adequate resources to Education and Inclusive Education

Inclusion in schools is undermined by the lack of funding for education in general and for making



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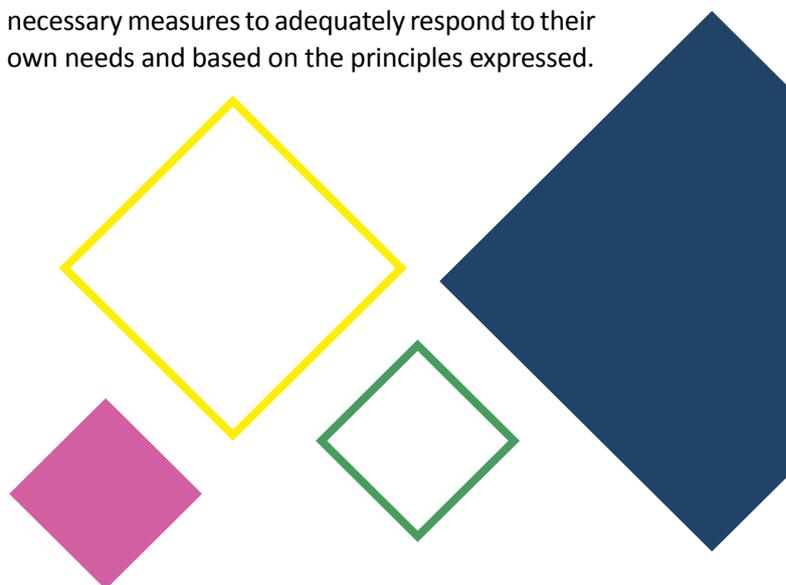
education more inclusive in particular.² Less resources mean less investment in specialized personnel that can support teachers to bring inclusion to their classrooms, as well as more workload on the teachers – often left alone to deal with it. Strategies and methodologies cannot overlook the question of funding when developing any kind of provision, recommendation, practice etc. for the promotion and implementation of Inclusive Education. These allocated resources must be public and sustainable, as well as targeted and accompanied by the mechanism for monitoring its effectiveness.

3. Design Teacher Training and Professional Development

The structure in place in many EU member states 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 size of classes is particularly large in many countries, the remuneration is low. 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 relying on the goodwill of a few teachers is unsustainable besides profoundly unfair. Importantly, these trainings should be tailored to teachers' needs and provided not only to teachers but to all education personnel, including school leaders and support personnel.

4. At the national level adequate assessment and monitoring systems are needed.

National tests still focus too much on performance, attainment, exams and qualifications, rather than promoting learning for all. At the level of education institutions, it is essential to track progress in the implementation of inclusive education against the existing regional/national frameworks. At the level of the learning process of students, it is important to have assessment systems that avoid reproduction of inequalities and promote learning for all, as well as take into account innovative pedagogical methods. At the same time, measures to increase school inclusion have to be well contextualised, allowing schools and the related stakeholders to conduct assessments and take the necessary measures to adequately respond to their own needs and based on the principles expressed.



The following organisations have initiated and carried out the ECO-IN project, including a set of policy documents. They are the first signatories of this document and they invite all interested stakeholders in inclusive education policies to join this commitment to further promote the evidence-based policy recommendations and tools stemming from the project. If you wish your organisation to join this effort and for any further information, please contact SOLIDAR Foundation.



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² Xhomaqi, Brikena (chief ed). (2022). "https://illplatform.eu/ill/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Position-Paper-2022-FINAL-1.pdf Investment in Education & Training: A public good for all" December 2022. Andrei Frank, Policy, Erika María Rodríguez Somlyay, Jessica Fiorelli, Alex O'Cuinn (eds.). Lifelong Learning Platform