

Inclusive Education – towards a Universal Design for Learning

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Malta

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About Autism-Europe

- Autism-Europe is an international association. We aim to **advance the rights of autistic people and their families** and to help them **improve their quality of life**
- It brings together over **90 autism associations** in more than 38 countries, as well as **governments** and **European and international** institutions.

About autism

Autism forms a 'spectrum', which means that each person will experience autism differently. There is not one size fits all solution to accommodate the needs of autistic people.

Autism is a lifelong disability and it is associated with :

- Difficulties in **social communication and social interaction**
- Specific interests
- Preference for **routine**
- **Sensory difficulties**, such as increased or reduced sensitivity to light, sound, colour, smell, taste or touch
- Autistic people often experience difficulties with **executive function** (time management, etc).



Definition of inclusive education by the CRPD

Art. 24 – Education

The CRPD committee has outlined the right to inclusive education as a “process that transforms **culture, policy and practice in all educational environments to accommodate the differing needs of the individual students**, together with a commitment to remove barriers that impede that possibility. An inclusive approach involves **strengthening the capacity of an education system to reach out to all learners**”



Access to inclusive education is key

Education is not only purely academic.

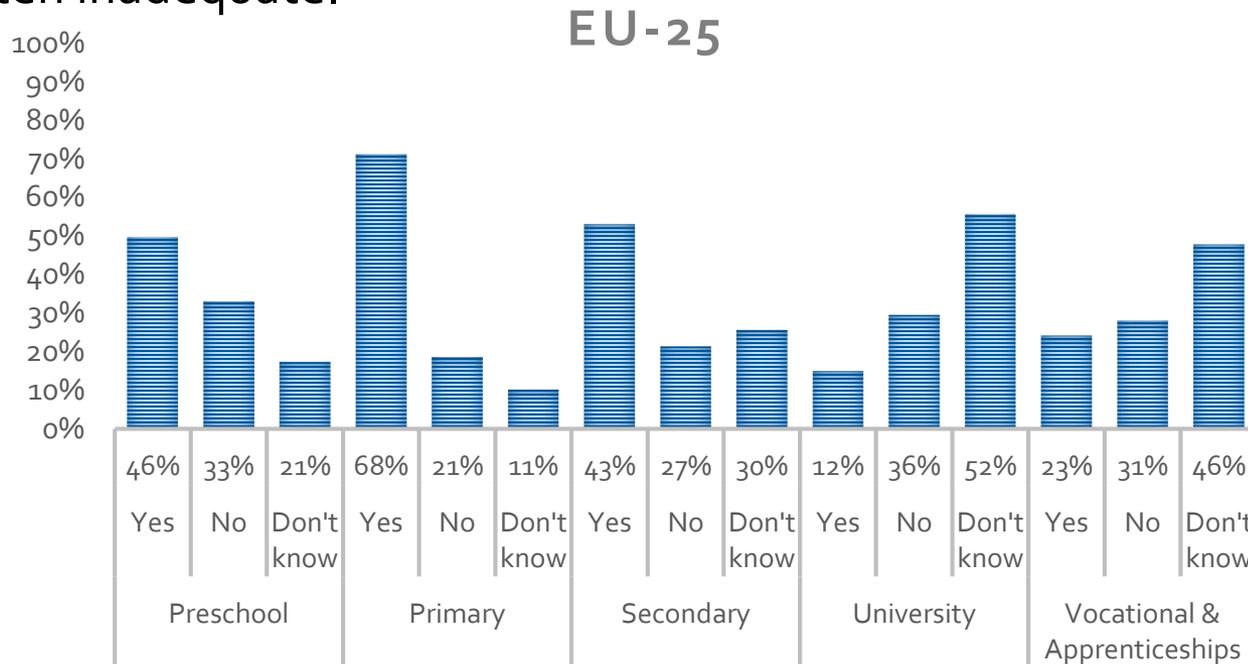
Equally important is the learning of interaction and communication skills with others.

Education also has a role of teaching children life skills, empowering them to live as autonomously as possible in adult life.



Barriers to inclusive education

A recent survey conducted by Autism-Europe highlights that the autism community assesses the level of support in education as being limited, and if present, often inadequate.



Barriers to inclusive education

Many autistic children remain excluded from inclusive education, as they experience:

- A lack of understanding of their individual needs and what is adapted support
- A lack of flexibility of the education curriculum and infrastructure to use their strengths
- Bullying

If they access mainstream schools, autistic children tend to face a higher rate of exclusion compared to their non-autistic peers. This is often blamed on so-called “challenging behaviours” (often triggered by a lack of support and understanding).

Despite changes in the legislation of many countries, people report a lack of changes in mindsets.

Universal Design for Learning concept

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, including cognitive neuroscience, that guides the development of **flexible learning environments** that can accommodate individual learning differences.

It involves creating a curriculum from the outset that provides:

Multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge

Multiple means of expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know

Multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn

Autism-specific recommendations to foster access to inclusive education

Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2009\)9](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the education and social inclusion of children and young people with autism spectrum disorders

Member states should provide a **legal framework** which ensures the rights of children and young people with disabilities, including people with autism spectrum disorders, to receive education – within general schemes wherever possible

It notably highlights that **intervention to meet individual needs should be through a personalised plan, which is regularly reviewed.**

Following diagnosis, education for children and young people with autism should be based on **detailed assessments that identify the needs and strengths of each individual.**

Autism-specific recommendations to foster access to inclusive education

Families should be fully **informed and involved** in all stages

Initial and continuing training programmes should be introduced for professionals liable to be involved in the education of children and young people with autism spectrum disorders.

Specific education and support for children and young people with autism spectrum disorders should be provided to help prevent secondary consequences of their difficulties, such as anxiety and depression.



Examples of accommodation of learning for autistic children

Communication

Spoken language can be difficult for autistic children who tend to be visual learners

Encouraging other means of communication such as pictures and visual supports can help students with autism to access learning. ICT tools can also be used.

Many autistic children find following directions and understanding what is being asked of them difficult

They may need extra time to process what is being asked. Teachers should be mindful of different possible meanings and be very explicit. It is good to test knowledge in a practical way.

Examples of accommodation in learning for autistic children

Social Interaction

Imaginative play

It can be difficult for a child who has a very literal understanding of the world. There has to be an acceptance rather than trying to mold the child into a specific behavior and alternatives can be sought.

Respecting the need for a quiet space

The fact that some autistic children are not interested in social interaction has to be respected, a safe environment for them to do something quiet, such as read or play on their own, is not necessarily an isolationist policy.

Efforts should also be made to develop mutual understanding amongst children to allow positive interaction and acceptance.

Examples of accommodation of learning for autistic children

Exploiting specific interests

Autistic children tend to have intense areas of interests that can vary greatly from one person to the next. It is positive to transpose these interests in many areas of learning.

They can be linked to a range of educational and longer-term benefits for autistic children.



Some recommendations

- Monitor the access to education of disabled people disaggregated by types of disability and **collect data and statistic across countries**
- Promote **the use of EU Structural Funds to support the training of education professionals**
- Establish **common standards for the qualification of support teachers and assistants** for autistic pupils and students.
- Foster further research into **Universal design for learning**
- **Developing and adopting guidelines on the prevention of abuses and bullying against children with autism**



Questions?



Sponsors



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Thanks for your listening

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