

Barometer of Inclusive Education – Concept, Methodology and Preliminary Results in Selected European Countries

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Abstract: This paper presents concept, methodology and preliminary results of a European research project on inclusive education of persons with disabilities. The project *pathways to inclusion* (p2i) is funded by the EU Commission and coordinated by the European umbrella organization *European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities* (EASPD). To get an overview on legal situations, practice and progression related to inclusive education a ‘barometer assessment’ instrument was developed and applied in 10 EU countries. The barometer criteria are deducted from Art. 24 of UN CRPD, the methodology follow the idea of the Open Method of Coordination and is explained as an information based rating. Selected results of the assessment are presented. The barometer instrument has proven as an effective tool for data analysis and assessment.

Key words: inclusive education, inclusion, separation, education system, European countries, pathway to inclusion (P2i), European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)

Introduction

The Statement of Salamanca (1994) was the start for intensive international efforts to develop inclusive educational systems wherever possible. The Statement said clearly that regular schools “*are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes ... building an **inclusive** and achieving education for all* (Art. 2, Statement of Salamanca) and says schools should “*include all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties, (and) adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of **inclusive education***” (Art. 3, Statement of Salamanca). For this and the following argumentation see also: Schädler, J.: Begriffliche Grundlagen der Forschungsmethodik (English version) http://www.uni-siegen.de/zpe/projekte/P2i/begriffliche_grundlagen.html?lang=de.

With this highly respected international document inclusive education had become an official but non binding programmatic objective of the international community framed in a human rights perspective. When the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) was finally accepted in New York on the 13th December 2006, it stated the right for inclusive education as one of the central dimensions of human rights of persons with disabilities. The UN Convention says in Art. 24: “*States Parties 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 and lifelong learning...*”

Even though Art. 24 UN CRPD focuses in some parts on primary and secondary schools, it also states that all levels of education must be included and policies must also refer to pre-school, tertiary and other lifelong education forms. Meanwhile the European Union and 17 of its member states have formally ratified the document. In doing so, they have integrated its prescription in their national legal framework and thus committed themselves to implement inclusive education at all levels.

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It is important to note that education in international law is seen as a part of overall economic, social and cultural rights. As long as institutional practices are not directly discriminative the UN CRPD does not demand an immediate, but a progressive overcoming of segregating systems that are rooted in educational traditions of a certain state (Poscher et al., 2008). Nevertheless, Article 4 of the UN CRPD says that states have “to take appropriate measures” and “with a maximum of all available resources” have to fulfill the inclusive demands of the Convention. To monitor the progress a monitoring system was agreed upon that is able to identify the steps taken by each state. States that have ratified the Optional Protocol of the Convention have to report to the UN every two years on the present position and on progress towards full implementation.

In the following, this paper presents the concept of a *European Barometer on Inclusive Education* that has been developed in the European project *Pathways to Inclusion* (P2i)*. The project (2009-2012) is funded by the *Lifelong Learning Programme (Comenius)* of *Directorate General (DG) Education & Culture of the European Commission* and is coordinated by the *European Association of Service Providers* (EASPD). One of the objectives of the project is to provide an overview on the progress of implementation of Art. 24 (Inclusive Education) of the UN CRPD and thus to support the implementation process.

1 Conceptual basis, methodology and structure of the ‘barometer assessment’ on inclusive education

Whether or to what extend inclusive education of children with disabilities is implemented depends on the political will and the educational policies of governments and other political actors. Laws, structures and procedures have to be changed, resources have to be provided or shifted, conflicts have to be solved etc. (Pathway to Inclusion (P2i): Progress Report, 2009). In European politics, it has become apparent that systematic comparison and reporting between member states according to agreed criteria can produce public and political attention. The ‘open method of coordination’ (OMC) has been developed to create political dynamics and to develop a mutual learning process involving the scrutiny of specific policies, programs or institutional arrangements presented as good practices in the national strategic reports. For this and the following argumentation see also: EASPD / Schädler / Dorrance (Eds.) (2012): EASPD – Barometer Of Inclusive Education In Selected European Countries. Brussels / Siegen, ZPE-Schriftenreihe: p. 4.

It is a political framework “for national strategy development, as well as for coordinating policies between EU countries on issues relating to poverty and social exclusion, health care and long-term care as well as pensions. The open method of coordination is a voluntary process for political cooperation based on agreeing common objectives and common indicators, which shows how progress towards these goals can be measured” (European Commission, *Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Policy Framework* 2011).

Using the OMC-approach the ‘barometer’ was conceptualized as a tool that refers to the prescriptions of Art. 24 UN CRPD. Moreover, it was taken as the normative basis and as the basis for developing criteria for the assessment of the existing situation regarding legislation, given practice and transformation developments. A set of questionnaires was developed that address the national level in each country. The complete versions of national questionnaires and a full version of the barometer results with all references can be found on the project website (www.pathwaystoinclude.eu). The

* The P2i-consortium consists of: European Association of Service Providers for persons with Disabilities (EASPD, BE), Fonty Opleidingscentrum Speciale Onderwijszorg (Fontys OSO, NL), Association for Lifelong Learning (ALLL, HU), Vlaams Verbond van het Katholiek Buitengewoon Onderwijs (VVKBuO, BE), National Federation of Voluntary Bodies (NFVB, IE) Die Steirische Behindertenhilfe (AT), Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (FAIDD, FI), CUDV Draga Training, Occupation and Care Center (SI), Zentrum für Planung und Evaluation Sozialer Dienste, University of Siegen (ZPE, DE), Institut d’Education Motrice Charlemagne – Mutualité Française Indre et Loire (IEM Charlemagne, FR), Centro de Educação para o Cidadão Deficiente (CECD, PT).

assessment is structured in three parts: ‘Statutory Legislation and Prescriptions’ (A), ‘Situation in Practice’ (B) and ‘Progression of Implementation’ (C). The national partner experts of the P2i consortium were to complete their questionnaire and were asked to involve other national experts in their research process and to identify main references and comments. Data sources were official government reports, official statistics, scientific studies or other sources such as the *Special Needs Report* of the *European Agency for Special Educational Needs* (<http://www.european-agency.org>).

It was recognized in the development of the barometer methodology that a European overview based on national level data can provide only limited insights into the real development as the situation varies not only from country to country but also from region to region and from one local district to another. Therefore, all partners were to select a local region that could be regarded as rather typical for their country. Following the same methodology, the local research was conducted by all participating countries with a written questionnaire and with semi-structured expert interviews.

Finally the national partner experts of the P2i consortium were asked to do a rating on the situation of the legal basis, practice and progress of inclusive education in their countries. The barometer instrument conceptually follows the idea of an “informed rating” on inclusive education of people with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN) in participating European countries. The objective is to use the available data to identify the tendencies and to produce the information relevant for policy makers and other stakeholders to promote the implementation process of inclusive education. The P2i-project was inspired by the Germany Inklusionsbarometer presented by SOVD in 2010 (http://www.sovd.de/fileadmin/downloads/pdf/sonstiges/neu_-_Landkarte_Inklusion.pdf).

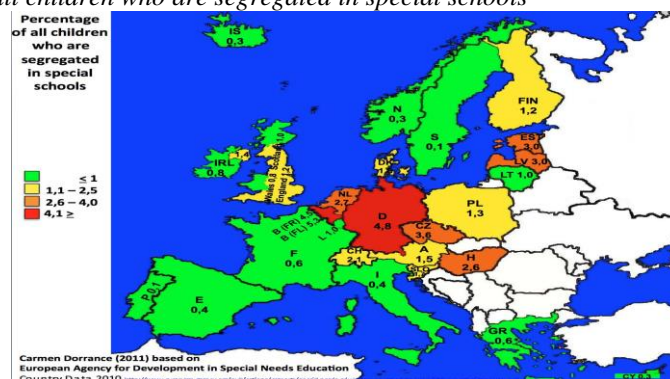
The barometer assessment instrument was used in an 18-month research process and proved to be an effective tool acceptable according to scientific standards. Its results are to create or endorse debates within the participating countries.

2 Selected results of the barometer assessment

2.1 Inclusiveness of school systems in the EU countries

The map below shows the differences regarding the inclusive education of people with special educational needs across Europe. The data have been taken from the recent report of the *European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education* 2010 (European Agency, 2011). The percentage of children and young people with SEN that are not included into regular schools vary from 1% to 6%. As outlined above, the reasons and explanations for these discrepancies are multifactorial, and must partly be seen in the light of different statistical reporting systems and different definitions for pupils with special educational needs. But of course the percentage of people excluded from inclusive education also reflects educational traditions and policies on how to address special educational needs in the educational system of a country. Particularly in the light of the obligations of member states having signed and ratified the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it is important to analyse more precisely how statutory legislative prescription on inclusive education can be assessed, and how practice and implementation progress is developing.

Figure 1 *Percentage of all children who are segregated in special schools*



2.2 Assessment of the Statutory Legislation and Prescriptions

In all European countries education is a highly regulated sector of society. Statutory legislation and prescriptions structure of the educational system provide the framework for the practice and development of inclusive education. This framework governs the allocation of resources, the environment under which schools and other educational facilities work; their conceptual orientation, teacher training and many other institutional preconditions that can be favourable or hindering for inclusive education.

In Part A of the barometer questionnaires the P2i national partners were asked 18 questions to assess the legal basis for inclusive education in their countries (for national reports and the full barometer report see www.pathwaystoinclude.eu). The results show that in spite of legal changes in all countries which have supported inclusive education, many pupils with SEN can enroll in a regular school only under certain organizational and financial caveats. In nearly all participating countries pupils with disabilities do not have effective access to primary and secondary inclusive education with the same ease as the others in their community.

In most partner countries legislation is neither consistent nor sufficient. In countries with a strong tradition of special education, legislation has to bridge the “old system” of special schools with new approaches to inclusive education. In other countries inclusion oriented legislation has not been accompanied with the allocation of the necessary resources to provide inclusive arrangements for all people with SEN in regular schools or other educational facilities. Efforts to make new resources available or shift resources from the special system to the mainstreaming one have been of limited success so far. Thus, both by inconsistent legislation and practice, people with disabilities in many cases have no access to inclusive education in mainstream services in their community on an equal basis with others. This is not to say there has been no progress. In some countries positive changes in educational laws have been introduced which have produced real changes to practice.

The following table shows how national partners assessed the statutory legislation and prescriptions in their countries. All questions were yes/no-questions. In this table the green bar above the line indicates the percentage of questions with a positive answer. The red bar under the line indicates the percentage of questions with a negative answer. Positive means positive implementation of the UN CRPD.

Figure 2 *Results of Barometer assessment Part A: Statutory Legislation and Prescriptions; Percentage of the positive and negative answers of the 18 questions in Part A (representing the assessments of the partner experts)*



2.3 Assessment of the inclusive education practice

In Part B of the barometer questionnaire (with 19 questions) P2i national partners were asked to assess the practice of inclusive education in their countries. The results show that even though there seem to be positive changes towards a less segregating school system in all participating countries, nevertheless inclusive education is not yet a high priority (for national reports and the full barometer report see www.pathwaystoinclude.eu). The percentage of all pupils with disabilities or other special educational needs excluded from regular education is still very high measured against the expectations of the UN CRPD. However, the percentage of segregation varies considerably between participating countries and differs also from the age level of the education systems in all countries.

Importantly also, although there has been a general slow increase in inclusive education, this has not been accompanied by a general decrease of persons with SEN in special schools or other segregating facilities. On the contrary, especially in countries with a traditional special education system, the number of children and youngsters in special schools has in fact also been increasing. In particular this is true for those with more severe disabilities or educational needs. So a pattern of reform can be identified rather as a “progress by addition” than a progress by (structural) change.

The following table shows how P2i-experts assessed the current practice of inclusive education in their countries. All questions were yes/no-questions; green means percentage of yes-answers; red means percentage of no-answers. Positive means positive implementation of the UN CRPD.

Figure 3 *Results of Barometer assessment Part B: Practice of Inclusive Education Percentage of the positive and negative answers of the 19 questions in Part B (representing the assessments of the partner experts)*

positive
negative

2.4 Assessment of inclusive education progression

In Part C of the questionnaire (with 22 questions) P2i national partners were asked to assess the development and progression of inclusive education in their countries. There are important indicators on different levels that give reason to assume that the education system in participating countries will become less segregating and more inclusive by 2015 (for national reports and the full barometer report see www.pathwaystoinclude.eu).

Firstly, there is a growing sensitivity to human rights issues in societies that results from effective campaigning for non-discrimination and equal rights of people with disabilities. Secondly, there is also a public questioning of the special school system as a result of the surprisingly intensive reception of

the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities in many European countries. Thirdly, professional opinion has become stronger in putting forward the argument that inclusive education brings better results for pupils with SEN than segregating approaches. Fourthly, demographic developments will probably contribute to more inclusiveness of the education systems because the absolute decrease in the overall numbers of children will provide better school and classroom conditions.

There are also some very concrete policies recently started in some participating countries to close or reshape the special school system and concrete initiatives of authorities for special schools to give attractive financial incentives to regular schools ready for inclusion. Also local governments are increasingly willing to change their education system for children with SEN. But it is still realistic to assume that the development towards more inclusive education will be an on-going but mostly rather slow process.

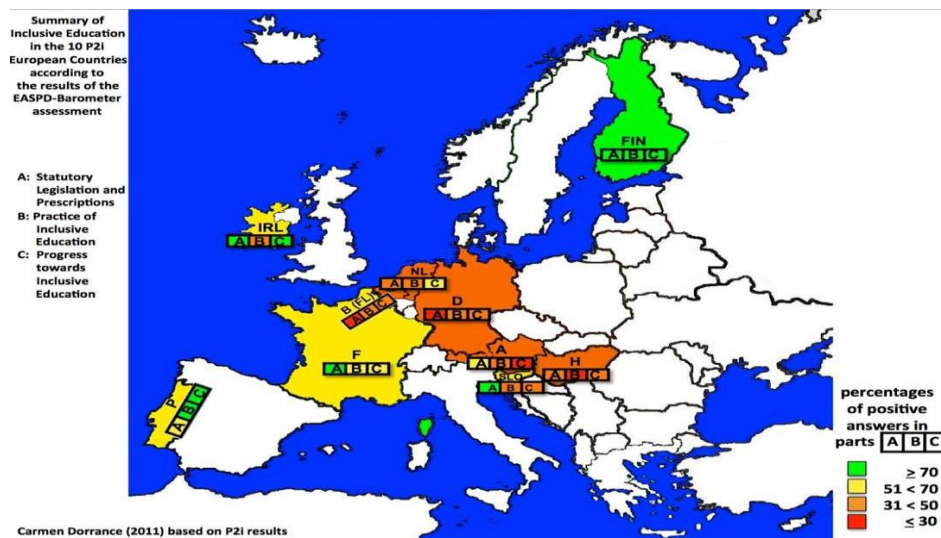
The following table shows how national partners assessed the progression of inclusive education in their countries. All questions were yes/no-questions; green means percentage of yes-answers; red means percentage of no-answers. Positive means positive implementation of the UN CRPD.

Figure 4 *Results of Barometer assessment Part C: Progress towards Inclusive Education Percentage of the positive and negative answers of the 22 questions in Part C (representing the assessments of the partner experts)*

positive
gative

The map (Figure 5) gives an overview on the assessment results of all participating countries. For a more detailed picture it is necessary to discuss the comprehensive and more differentiated results that can be found in the national barometer reports and in the full version of the barometer report (all information see: www.pathwaystoinclude.eu).

Figure 5 Map: Summary of Inclusive Education in the 10 P2i European Countries according to the results of the EASPD-Barometer assessment



Conclusions

The P2i-assessment on the situation and perspectives of inclusive education for persons with special educational needs (SEN) conducted in 10 European countries can be summarized as follows:

Increasing awareness

There are clear indicators that there has been an increase of awareness both of the educational potential and the citizen's rights dimension of inclusive education for children with SEN in all participating countries. This is reflected in positive statements towards inclusive education formulated by governments, parents' organisations, teacher unions and other relevant public actors. It is also reflected in legal developments for support of inclusive education concerning education and school laws.

Rights for inclusive education without rights for the needed resources

The assessment results show that in the past years in all participating countries there have been changes in educational, youth welfare and social laws to support the possibilities of children with SEN to be educated in inclusive settings. In two out of ten participating countries (Finland, France) legislation was rated "fully supportive" for inclusive education. In all other countries legislation has not been accompanied with the allocation of necessary resources to provide inclusive arrangements for all persons with SEN in regular schools or other educational facilities. Efforts to make new resources available or to shift resources from the special system to mainstreaming have been of limited success so far. Thus, both by legislation inconsistent with UN CRPD values and also sometimes by practice, persons with disabilities in many cases do not have access to inclusive education in mainstream services in their community on an equal basis with others.

Significance of categorization and diagnostic procedures

In all participating countries, there are institutionalized procedures by which children with developmental problems that affect their learning performance are processed into the status of a "disabled child" or into the status of a child with other special educational needs. For the person with learning problems this is important, because this status gives access to support measures other children do not get. For the school system the categorization process is important because traditionally it directs the placement of a child. In countries with a strong tradition of special education, the "diagnosis" and categorization are still the mechanisms for placing children into different types of special schools, which are profiled around the so-called "primary defects" of children (e.g., hearing impaired, blind,

physically disabled, intellectually disabled, emotionally disabled, language disabled, etc.). In other countries the categorization is more used for placing children in “special units” of ordinary schools or for allocating additional hours of support in normal classrooms.

One view is that categorization of students must be eliminated because of its inherent stigmatization and replaced by general school budgets and perhaps additional budgets for providing measures to prevent the necessity for categorization. An alternative view is that the assessment and categorization processes in welfare state arrangements are unavoidable gate-keepers of resources. Thus progress to inclusive education must meet the challenge to find intelligent ways of categorization that allow access to additional support in mainstream educational settings without producing segregating and stigmatizing effects. Therefore it is all the more important to look for examples of good practice related to non-discriminative forms of categorization.

Path-dependending developments

The assessment results show that the development in inclusive education is path-dependending, i.e. restricted in their options and speed by the traditions of the general educational system and the special education system of each country. These traditions have led to certain institutional structures in educational systems, power and interest structures, “taken-for granted-assumptions” and routines that are now being questioned, but nevertheless hold a high degree of resistance to change. The educational and political challenges of implementing inclusive education have to be coped with from different structural backgrounds and starting points. One very important aspect of this is how national school systems deal with children with SEN who have behavioral problems or are “slow learners”. By tradition, in Germany, Belgium and Hungary this has led to an extensive structure of specific special schools that does not exist in most other European countries.

The longer and the more established the tradition of special education in a country is, the more difficult and conflicting is the reform process towards inclusive education. The more universalistic and comprehensive the tradition of a school system is, the easier are developments towards inclusive education. Both decentralized regulation and privatization of school systems are not per se supportive for inclusive education. They need a strong legal framework which individuals with SEN and local actors can refer to in particular situations to realize their rights.

Increasing inclusiveness and increasing segregation (“progress by addition”)

The data in all participating countries show an increase in the number of persons with SEN in inclusive educational settings on all age levels. Inclusive education is realized mostly in pre-school facilities where more children with SEN are educated in inclusive than in special institutions. At the primary school level the percentage of pupils with SEN in regular schools is growing remarkably quickly in all participating countries, but with big differences (approximately 10-50%) according to starting points and traditions. At the secondary school level, the development of inclusive education is slower.

The general increase of inclusive education has not caused a general decrease of persons with SEN in special schools or other segregating facilities. On the contrary, especially in countries with a traditional special education system the number of children and youngsters in special schools has also been increasing. So a pattern of reform that rather follows the principle of “progress by addition” than progress by (structural) change can be identified. More people are involved in the SEN-systems and as a consequence, people with more severe educational needs still are mostly excluded from inclusive education.

Resource barriers against inclusive education

Assessment results show that in all countries there are still very elementary barriers against inclusive education to be yet overcome. In some countries the majority of mainstream school buildings do not comply with accessibility standards. In addition, assistive transport is often provided only to special schools. There are also frequent problems in adaption of equipment. Deficits are also identified

concerning the availability of functional assistance and care provision, even though in some participating countries many positive developments have also been reported.

Assessment procedures in development

In all partner countries the process for more inclusive education also led to a critique of and conceptual changes of assessment procedures in most countries. Whereas the traditional assessment procedures functioned to place persons with SEN in special institutions, the new concepts of assessment are oriented to a man and his or her social-ecological context and they strive to create educational arrangements in inclusive settings, identifying needs, supporting measures and conditions for an individual plan.

Parents' involvement in decision making

Decision-making processes for providing special needs education have been opened up for parents' involvement. Parents have been given more rights to be involved in decision making about the school career of their child. But the resources are often not guaranteed when parents opt for inclusive education.

Conceptual aspects and teaching models

The assessment results show that in all countries there have been intensive developments of teaching models for inclusive education. These have included involving special school staff to support inclusive education in mainstream schools or to prevent segregation in cases of children at risk of segregation. The decisions of school authorities to reduce classroom sizes in inclusive settings have been handled very restrictively in most participating countries. Due to demographic changes in some countries, especially with falling populations in rural areas, classrooms in preschool facilities and primary schools have become smaller, thus creating more favourable conditions for inclusive education.

Availability of adaptive and communicative technology in inclusive education

The assessment results of the questionnaire show that the adaptive technology is not completely restricted to special schools and is also available in inclusive settings in all countries. This is also reported for alternative and augmentative communication technology. Nevertheless, even though new models of mutual support between special competence centres and mainstream schools have been developed, very often knowledge, competence and creativity to apply, adapt and use the technological means is still difficult to find in inclusive education.

Teacher training without (sufficient) inclusive orientation

There are differences in teacher training orientation between the partner countries. In the countries with a strong tradition of special education most academic teacher training curricula still completely separate the mainstream and the special school sectors. The education of teachers for children with SEN is still dominated by the special school's perspective. In these countries inclusive education has not become a mandatory topic for the mainstream teacher training yet. In other countries there are concerns about the relevance and quality of inclusive education teaching, especially in the initial phases of teacher training.

Monitoring of progress in inclusive education

Whereas in some partner countries, there are several statutory or official institutions that systematically monitor the progress of inclusive education and regularly publish the data, in other countries there is no systematic monitoring of the number of pupils with special education needs in mainstream schools or other educational settings. The paucity and variability of data collection seriously impairs effective monitoring as required under Art. 24 of the UN CRPD.

Initially, during the project all partners felt the trend towards greater inclusion would continue and perhaps accelerate. However, as the project has continued there has been an increasing concern as to whether this positive development can be maintained under the pressures of the economic crisis.

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