Towards inclusion in education:

Status, trends and challenges

The UNESCO Salamanca Statement 25 years on

UNESCO Education Sector

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Education Sector

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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Acknowledgments

Foreword

The year 2019 celebrated the 25th anniversary of the *World Conference on Special Needs in Education*, held in Salamanca, Spain. At the conference, representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organizations adopted a Framework for Action that called on schools to welcome all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other characteristics.

The principles elaborated in Salamanca have set the foundation for understanding the importance of inclusion in education. Since then, the concept of inclusion has broadened, emphasizing the need to reach all learners, on the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive relevant, quality, equitable and effective educational opportunities.

This is reinforced by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically Goal 4 (SDG4), which calls upon education systems 'to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

To achieve this ambitious goal, we encourage governments to ensure that adequate legislative frameworks are in place to enshrine the right to education and fight all forms of discrimination. Countries should also identify who is excluded, why and when, and at what stage of their educational journey. In this way, we can build education systems that see diversity as a strength and where every learner matters equally.

UNESCO is convinced that inclusive education systems are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and gender-based discrimination, in order to create welcoming communities, build inclusive societies and achieve education for all.

This publication aims to inform thinking and practice globally. It provides an overview of the progress and challenges since Salamanca, as well as guidance and suggestions to help countries minimize barriers to learning and ensure the genuine inclusion of all learners.

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Introduction

The year 2019 marked the 25th anniversary of the *World Conference on Special Needs Education*, which was co-organized by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain. Held in the city of Salamanca, the conference led to the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*, arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education. Its creation endorsed the idea of inclusive education, which was to become a major global influence in subsequent years.

On the occasion of the International Forum on inclusion and equity in education held in Cali, Colombia in September 2019, UNESCO set out to capitalize on its unique convening power to give new impetus to inclusion in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It did this by addressing the following questions:

- **How can we advance legislation, policies, programs and practices that ensure inclusion and equity in education?**
- **What actions must governments take to translate principles into practice in order to ensure inclusive learning environments?**
- **What recommendations can help to foster inclusion and equity in education?**

This publication looks at the **past**, **present** and **future** since Salamanca to guide the further development of inclusive national policies and practices. In so doing, it explains the way that confusion regarding what is meant by key terms such as inclusion and equity has often made progress difficult. It also shows how more recent international policy documents have helped to bring greater clarity to discussions of these concepts.

Drawing on international research and experience, the third section of the report outlines a series of actions that are recommended to guide future developments. It is stressed that these actions must apply from early childhood provision through to tertiary education, keeping in mind that **international human rights law guarantees the right to education**. This is seen as being fundamental for human, social, and economic progress, and a key factor in achieving lasting peace and sustainable development.

1. What has happened so far?

This first section explains the international policy context that has led to the increased emphasis on inclusion and equity in education. In so doing, it describes the crucial contribution of the *World Conference on Special Needs Education*, held in Salamanca, Spain, on 7-10 June 1994, and summarizes the activities that it stimulated.

1.1 Education for All

In considering the impact of Salamanca, it is essential to see it in relation to other international developments. In particular, since 1990, the United Nations' Education for All (EFA) movement has worked to make quality basic education available to all learners. *The World Declaration on Education for All* (UNESCO, 2000a) sets out an overall vision, which is about being proactive in identifying the barriers some learners encounter in attempting to access educational opportunities. It also involves the identification of resources available at national and community level to overcome those barriers.

Ten years later, this vision was reaffirmed by the *World Education Forum* meeting in Dakar, 2000, held to review the progress made in the previous decade. The Forum led to a greater emphasis on inclusion. It declared that EFA must take particular account of the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children and young people affected by conflict, HIV and AIDS, hunger and poor health, and those with special learning needs.

The participants in the Forum endorsed the *Dakar Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2000b), which confirmed their commitment to achieving Education for All by the year 2015, and identified six key measurable education goals which aimed to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults. In addition, the Framework reaffirmed UNESCO's role as the lead organization with the overall responsibility of coordinating other agencies and organizations to achieve education for all.

1.2 World Conference on Special Needs Education

A major impetus for inclusive education was given by the *World Conference on Special Needs Education* in 1994. More than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations met in Salamanca, Spain to further the objective of Education for All.

They considered the fundamental policy shifts required to promote inclusive education, namely enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those defined as having special educational needs (UNESCO, 1994). Although the immediate focus of the Salamanca conference was on what was termed special needs education, its conclusion was that:

> **"Special needs education – an issue of equal concern to countries of the North and of the South – cannot advance in isolation. It has to form part of an overall educational strategy and, indeed, of new social and economic policies. It calls for major reform of the ordinary school."**

The aim, then, is to reform education systems. This can only happen, it is argued, if mainstream schools become capable of educating all children in their local communities. The Salamanca Statement concluded that:

> **"Regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an 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."**

This suggests that moves towards inclusive schools can be justified on a number of grounds:

- An **educational justification**: the requirement for schools to educate all children together means that they have to develop ways of teaching that respond to individual differences and that therefore benefit all children;

- A **social justification**: inclusive schools are intended to change attitudes to difference by educating all children together, and form the basis for a just and non-discriminatory society; and

- An **economic justification**: it is likely to be less costly to establish and maintain schools which educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of school specializing in particular groups of children.

A question to consider now in relation to these justifications is: What evidence is there to support these arguments?

The publication of the Salamanca Statement proposed a major change in policy direction, not least for the education of students with disabilities. It is worth noting, for example, that at that time such students were not considered by national education departments in some countries. Rather, they were the responsibility of health or social care ministries in a way that implied that these young people did not have their right to education fulfilled. It is worth adding that there are parts of the world where this is still the case.

It was inevitable, therefore, that the Salamanca conference involved disputes about orientation, with representatives of some countries and organizations arguing for the continuation of separate provision for particular groups of students (Kiuppis & Hausstätter, 2014). As a result, the Statement contains some ambiguities that have subsequently become apparent when used in the field as the basis for strategic developments. In particular, the thinking associated with the field of special education that encourages educational difficulties to be defined solely in terms of learner characteristics that sometimes appears in the text has continued to delay progress. There is, therefore, a need to move away from ways of thinking that focus on what certain individual learners lack, towards a focus on the contextual barriers that are limiting the participation and progress of many children.

Despite these difficulties, subsequent years have seen considerable efforts in many countries to move educational policy and practice in a more inclusive direction. Further impetus to this movement was provided in 2008 by the 48th session of the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE) International Conference on Education, with its theme *Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future* (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2009). The conference, which gathered more than 1,600 participants, including approximately 100 ministers and deputy ministers from 153 UNESCO Member States, took place in Geneva, Switzerland, and focused on ways of providing education to the hundreds of millions of people around the world with little or no access to learning opportunities.

The long-term objective was to support UNESCO Member States in providing the social and political conditions which every person needs in order to exercize their human right to access, take an active part in and learn from educational opportunities (Opertti et al., 2014). During the conference, ministers, government officials and representatives of voluntary organizations discussed the importance of **broadening the concept of inclusion to reach all children**, under the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive effective educational opportunities. In this way, greater clarity was achieved regarding the ideas introduced as a result of the Salamanca conference.

In adopting a broader view of inclusion as being concerned with all learners, the concern to include children with disabilities remains an essential strand within the international policy agenda. This is stressed in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2008), which states:

> **"The right to inclusive education encompasses a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility."**

It is important to highlight, however, that this should be seen as an integral part of the efforts for promoting inclusion and equity in education, not as a separate policy.

1.3 Supporting educative developments

Like all major policy changes, progress in relation to inclusion and equity requires an effective strategy for implementation. In particular, it requires new thinking which focuses attention on the barriers experienced by some children that lead them to become marginalized as a result of contextual factors, as opposed to the categories a learner may or may not fall into. The implication is that overcoming such barriers is the most important means of developing forms of education that are effective for all children. In this way, **inclusion is a way of achieving the overall improvement of education systems**.

During the period prior to and after the Salamanca conference, a series of resources were produced to support inclusive developments. Whilst these resources were developed some twenty years ago, much of their content remains relevant to current concerns, particularly those described in the boxes below.

Box 1. Special needs in the classroom

The resource pack of teacher development materials (Saleh, 1993) was developed on behalf of UNESCO through a programme of action research carried out by a resource team in eight countries. In the period following the Salamanca conference the materials were expanded for use throughout the world, with initiatives in over 80 countries. The approaches recommended in the resource pack are consistent with the Salamanca orientation. Specifically, they involve a move away from an integration perspective, focused on the placement of individual students, towards an inclusive approach, which is concerned with school reform. Within the project, this shift came about as a result of a realization that the ways in which earlier attempts were made to develop integrated arrangements had been largely unsuccessful. These attempts to integrate students seen as having special needs into mainstream schools were often based on practices derived from earlier experiences in special provision. Many of these approaches are simply not feasible in primary and secondary schools, particularly in economically poorer countries with their massive classes and scarce resources. Consequently, the resource pack concentrates on finding ways of making lessons relevant to all class members, whatever their characteristics or backgrounds.

Box 2. Open File on inclusive education

The Open File materials (UNESCO, 2011) were developed by UNESCO to support policy-makers, managers and administrators in promoting inclusive education within their countries. They offer a means whereby decision-makers in different countries can draw on international experience in guiding their own countries' systems towards inclusion. The users of the Open File are likely to be staff with leadership responsibilities working in national education ministries, local government, district services and resource centers, voluntary organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and so on. The Open File is not primarily concerned with national policy-making, or with classroom practice, although both of these are essential considerations in the development of inclusive education. However, national policy is largely a matter for politicians, while classroom practice and issues of internal school development and organization are dealt with effectively in UNESCO's earlier teacher education resource pack: Special Needs in the Classroom, which is drawn upon throughout the Open File.

> **Box 3. Index for inclusion**
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> Developed originally for use in England by the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE, 2002), this school self-review instrument has been translated into more than forty languages and used in countries in the Global South and North. It enables schools to draw on the knowledge and views of staff, students, parents/carers, and community representatives about barriers to learning and participation that exist within the existing 'cultures, policies and practices' of schools in order to identify priorities for change. In connecting inclusion with the detail of policy and practice, the Index encourages those who use it to build up their own view of inclusion, related to their experience and values, as they work out what policies and practices they wish to promote or discourage.

The years following Salamanca led to a series of regional initiatives in relation to the theme of inclusion. Information sharing regarding these developments was facilitated by the Enabling Education Network (EENET), established in 1997 with technical and financial support from a group of concerned international non-governmental organizations and UNESCO (EENET, 2020).

In Latin America, for example, although accurate data is still scarce, the effect of international commitments and national legislations in favour of inclusion in education for all students led to slow but positive progress (Marchesi, 2019). In Africa, too, there was evidence of positive developments, although concern has been expressed about the problems of importing ideas about inclusive education from the Global North in ways that fail to take account of indigenous forms of education (Pather, 2019).

In Asia, India, after becoming a signatory to the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, saw a significant push towards increased enrolment in schools, and children with disabilities have featured prominently in government policy documents (Singal, 2019). Significant developments also occurred in the countries of the Pacific region, where inclusive education has been identified as a regional priority by all member nations (Sharma et al., 2019). And in Europe, an extensive range of initiatives have been introduced through the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020).

Whilst these encouraging developments from around the world provide an impressive range of strategies to build on, they also reinforce the argument that **context matters**. Promoting inclusion is not a matter of importing practices from elsewhere. It requires an analysis of the situation in each country in order to identify and address barriers experienced by some learners. Such an analysis is likely to identify local examples of good practice that can be built upon.

2. What is the current situation across the world?

Having summarized the many developments that occurred in the years following the Salamanca conference, this second section provides a summary of its more recent impact in relation to the promotion of inclusion and equity globally. It recognizes the progress that has been made; for example, the number of children, adolescents and youth who are excluded from education fell steadily in the years following 2000 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, UIS, 2018). However, the UIS data show that this progress has slowed in recent years, leaving **some 258 million children, adolescents and youth still not in school, and more than 617 million children and adolescents not achieving minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics** (UIS, 2019). It is also important to note that only half of the world's children receive pre-primary education, a failure that limits children's futures and deepens inequities in later learning (UNICEF, 2019).

Significantly, the disadvantaged are least served by quality early childhood care and education, although they benefit most from such interventions. It is also worth mentioning the high rates of student dropout, particularly at the secondary level, and the challenges experienced by many marginalized groups in the transition to higher education.

In developing and least developed countries, the low access to higher education of young people living in socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts and/or who are vulnerable for various reasons, is one of the most dramatic gaps in unequal opportunities. This holds back the overall development of these nations. The gross enrolment rate in higher education worldwide was 38%, with huge disparities within and between countries and regions (UIS, 2018).

It is necessary, too, to recognize that in a global context of expanding conflict and increasing displacement of people these figures understate the challenge. For example, UNICEF reported that 28 million children were homeless due to conflict in 2016 (Deutsche Welle, 2016). In 2017, 61% of refugee children were enrolled in primary school, compared to 92% globally, and at the secondary school level, the situation is even worse, with 23% of students enrolled in schools compared with 84% globally. This means that only two-thirds of refugee children transition from primary to secondary education. Meanwhile, at the tertiary education level, the figure for refugees is 1%, compared to 34% globally (UNESCO, 2019a).

It is also vital to recognize that large gender gaps continue to exist in regards to access, learning achievement and continuation in education in many settings, most often at the expense of girls, although in some parts of the world boys are at a disadvantage. The evidence is that **education systems often perpetuate rather than challenge gender inequalities** (UNGEI, 2012).

Girls' disengagement from education is due to many factors, such as child marriage, early pregnancy and discriminatory gender norms in society. Yet, research shows that girls with higher levels of education are less likely to get married at an early age. It is estimated that if all girls had a primary education, there would be 14% fewer marriages (UNESCO, 2020).

Whilst these challenges are most acute in the developing world, there are similar concerns in many wealthier countries, as noted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018), which reports that, across its member countries, almost one in five students do not reach a basic minimum level of skills to function in today's societies. It also states that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are twice as likely to be low performers, implying that an individual's social circumstances present obstacles to them achieving their educational potential.

As a result of such concerns, the inclusion agenda internationally has now broadened to focus on equity, which points to the importance of fairness in relation to educational opportunities. This also reminds us that **there are many children marginalized within school**, some of whom choose not to attend regularly or drop out completely.

2.1 Education 2030

The year 2016 was particularly important in relation to the legacy of Salamanca. Following the Incheon Declaration endorsed at the *World Forum on Education* in May 2015, UNESCO published the *Education 2030 Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2015). Building on earlier developments, the Framework for Action emphasizes inclusion and equity as laying the foundations for quality education. It stresses the need to address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation, and learning processes and outcomes. It also calls for a particular focus on those who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities, such as students from the poorest households, ethnic and linguistic minorities, indigenous people, and persons with disabilities. In this way, it is made clear that the agenda of **Education for all has to be about 'all'**.

As the United Nations' specialized agency for education, UNESCO is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to '**ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**'. The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

2.2 Cali Commitment to equity and inclusion in education

A new commitment towards reinforcing inclusion and equity in education was expressed at the *International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education*. Co-organized by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education of Colombia in September 2019, this event celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Salamanca Declaration.

Focusing on the theme 'Every learner matters', the Forum was an opportunity to revive the broadened notion of inclusion as a general guiding principle to strengthen equal access to quality learning opportunities for all learners. It examined strategies needed to accelerate the progress instigated at Salamanca to foster inclusive and equitable education systems.

The outcome statement, called the *Cali Commitment to equity and inclusion in education* (UNESCO, 2019b), reaffirms the importance of inclusion in education as a transformative process that ensures full participation and access to quality learning opportunities for all children, young people and adults, respecting and valuing diversity, and eliminating all forms of discrimination in and through education. This comprehensive vision of inclusion highlights the notion of intersectionality (i.e. the recognition that a disadvantage is compounded when it intersects with other characteristics associated with discrimination and oppression), and emphasizes the magnitude and complexity of the transformations required at the educational, social, and cultural levels.

2.3 Promising developments

The situation across the world in relation to this challenging policy agenda is complex, with some countries making great strides, whilst others continue to have segregated provision of various forms of education for some groups of learners.

Regarding the development of policies for promoting inclusion and equity, it is encouraging to see the progress made in certain countries. For example:

√ For more than 30 years, **New Brunswick in Canada** has pioneered the concept of inclusive education through legislation, local authority policies and professional guidelines (Porter & Aucoin, 2012). More recently, New Brunswick adopted Policy 322 on Inclusive Education (Dept. of Education and Early Childhood, New Brunswick, 2013) the first province-wide policy mandated by the Minister of Education. This policy defines the critical elements of an inclusive education system that supports students in common learning environments and provides supports for teachers. It sets clear requirements for school practice, including procedures for the development of personalized learning plans, inclusive graduation, as well as strict guidelines when a variation of the common learning environment may be required.

√   The **Italian government** passed a law in 1977 that closed all special schools, units and other non-inclusive forms of provision (Lauchalan & Fadda, 2012). This legislation is still in force and more recent amendments have further strengthened the inclusive nature of the education system. Not only did this close segregated educational facilities but, starting with pre-schools, it removed the possibility of exclusion from school as a corrective sanction. Whilst practice varies from place to place, there is no doubt that the principle of inclusion is widely accepted. There is, however, recent concern about an increase in students being withdrawn for periods outside the regular classroom for additional support (Ianes et al., 2019).

√   Having enacted legislation making disability discrimination in education unlawful, **Portugal** has gone much further in enacting an explicit legal framework for the inclusion of students with and without disabilities in education (Alves, 2019). Recent legislation requires that the provision of support for all students be determined, managed and provided at the regular school level, with local multidisciplinary teams responsible for determining what support is necessary to ensure all students (regardless of labels, categorisation or a determination of disability) have access and the means to participate effectively in education, with a view to their full inclusion in society. It is also significant that Portugal has developed progressive assessment practices to support the achievement of all learners.

√   In **Finland**, a country which regularly outperforms most other countries in terms of educational outcomes, education is viewed as a right and not as a privilege. The country's success is partly explained by the progress of the lowest performing quintile of students who out-perform those in other countries (Sabel et al., 2011). This has increasingly involved an emphasis on support for vulnerable students within mainstream schools, as opposed to in segregated provision. There is a particular focus on prevention of learning difficulties in Finland, and a high level of resources are directed at this in primary schools. For example, all Finnish schools are assigned specialists to support any student who requires additional help.

In drawing attention to these examples of policy development, it must be stressed that they are not seen as being perfect. Rather, they are countries where there are interesting developments from which to learn. They are also varied with respect to the approach being taken and what they have achieved.

Consequently, whilst lessons can undoubtedly be learned from these countries, they must be replicated with care and adapted to the context at hand. There are many sources of inequity in education related to political, economic, social, cultural and institutional factors, and these vary across countries. This means that what works in one country may not work elsewhere. An emphasis on system change strategies being contextually sensitive is one of the pervading themes of the recommendations made in the third section of this report.

2.4 Other global trends

In some countries, increasing pressures to improve the rankings of education systems on global league tables is creating new barriers to progress in relation to inclusion and equity. This arises because of an increased emphasis on school autonomy, competition between schools and parental choice, and takes a variety of forms (Meyland-Smith & Evans, 2009). The schools involved have different titles, such as charter schools in the USA, free schools in Sweden, academies in England and independent public schools in parts of Australia. Implicit in these independent state-funded schools is an assumption that greater autonomy will allow space for the development of organizational arrangements, practices, and forms of management and leadership that will be more effective in promoting the learning of all students, particularly those from economically disadvantaged and minority backgrounds.

This global trend is a matter of considerable debate and there are varied views as to the extent to which it is leading to the desired outcomes. In particular, there is a concern that the development of education systems based on autonomy, coupled with high-stakes accountability and increased competition between schools, will further disadvantage learners from low-income and minority families (Salokangas & Ainscow, 2017). For example, parental choice and competition between schools has widened the gap between schools that are seen to be more successful and those that are perceived to be less so in countries as varied as Chile and Sweden.

In relation to these concerns, the OECD reports on the success of certain education systems that rank highly on measures of both quality and equity (OECD, 2012). It argues:

> **"The evidence is conclusive: equity in education pays off. The highest performing education systems across OECD countries are those that combine high quality and equity. In such education systems, the vast majority of students can attain high level skills and knowledge that depend on their ability and drive, more than on their socio-economic background."**

Further encouragement for this view is provided by the recent Report Card prepared for UNICEF by the Innocenti Centre (UNICEF, 2018).The report focuses on educational inequalities in 41 of the world's richest countries, all of which are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and/or the European Union (EU). It argues that there is no systematic relationship between country income and indicators of equality in education. For example, it is notable that some of the economically poorer countries in the comparison, such as Latvia and Lithuania, achieve near-universal access to preschool learning and curb inequality in reading performance among both primary and secondary school students more successfully than countries that have far greater resources. The Report Card concludes that Finland, Latvia and Portugal have the most equal education systems.

The implication then, is that **it is possible for countries to develop education systems that are both excellent and equitable**. The question is: how can this be achieved?

2.5 Useful resources

Looking to the future, UNESCO has developed further resources to support inclusive and equitable educational developments.

UNESCO Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. This guide offers practical support to Member States to help review how well equity and inclusion currently figure in existing policies, decide what actions need to be taken to improve policies, and monitor progress as actions are taken (UNESCO, 2017). An assessment framework is presented to accompany countries in this review exercise based on four key dimensions: concepts, policy statements, structures and systems and practices.

Drawing on international research and on good practice related to equity and inclusion in education systems, the guide was developed with the advice and support of a group of international experts, including policy-makers, practitioners, researchers, teacher educators, curriculum developers and representatives of various international agencies. The evidence presented in the guide allows Member States to learn from the progress made by other countries towards more inclusive and equitable education systems. For example, it includes an analysis of how:

- Ghana assesses the inclusiveness of its mainstream schools.
- Denmark is developing a unifying sense of community by listening to the views of children.
- Students help teachers to innovate in Portugal.

Examples such as these advance the right of every learner to inclusive and equitable education.

This guide is relevant to all countries and educational systems. While targeting improvements in formal education, it recognizes that education occurs in many contexts – in formal, non-formal and informal settings – and across one's life. The guide can either be used independently or it can be incorporated into other policy review processes and tools to ensure attention to equity and inclusion.

Reaching Out to All Learners. Those involved in taking this challenging agenda forward may find it helpful to use the related resource pack, Reaching Out to All Learners, developed by UNESCO (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2016). Drawing on international research evidence, these materials are intended to influence and support inclusive thinking and practices at all levels of education. Consequently, they are designed to be relevant to teachers, school leaders, district level administrators, teacher educators and national policy-makers.

The resource pack consists of three inter-connected guides:

Guide 1. Reviewing national policies
This provides a framework for reviewing national policies in order to create a policy context in which the other two guides can be used effectively to foster more inclusive schools and classrooms.

Guide 2. Leading inclusive school development
This focuses on organizational change and the role of leadership in supporting inclusive school development.

Guide 3. Developing inclusive classrooms
This guide supports teachers in developing more effective ways to engage all children in their lessons.

This *Resource Pack* is intended to be used flexibly in response to contexts that are at different stages of development and where resources vary. It emphasizes active learning processes for those using the materials, encouraging them to work collaboratively and helping one another to review and develop their thinking and practices. Extensive use is made of examples from different parts of the world to encourage the development of new ways to reach out to all learners.

Source: UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2016, p.8-9

Other relevant resources have been made available by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, such as those developed through the *Raising the achievement of all learners in inclusive education project* (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). These materials provide a synthesis of country information and findings from the project's practical work. They also discuss the particular challenges of raising achievement amongst all children.

In addition, the European Agency has worked with UNESCO to produce a collection of case studies in order to support stakeholders (e.g. policy-makers, teachers and educators, researchers, development partners, NGOs) in developing and implementing inclusive and equitable education policies, programmes and practices (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and UNESCO, 2020).

3. What are the implications for future policy development?

As explained in the first two sections of this report, significant efforts have been made to promote quality education for all since 1990. However, the reality in many countries does not show significant transformations of educational systems, nor in policies. The momentum of reform must be increased, by finding more effective ways of addressing barriers to progress.

At the same time, **new challenges are emerging globally**, all of which make the need for an emphasis on inclusion and equity in education essential. Important new challenges are being created by climate change, pandemics, increasing numbers of refugees and migration, new skills required by the changes in the labour markets due to structural changes in economies, and the digital revolution. It is also vital that education powered by Artificial Intelligence is accessible for all, whatever the individual's environment, nationality, culture, gender, disability status, sexuality or age (UNESCO, 2019c). Despite the opportunities these technologies may offer, there is a real risk that without thoughtful intervention they may exacerbate structural, economic, social, and political imbalances, and further reinforce inequalities based on different demographic variables (Ashar & Cortesi, 2018).

Taking account of these new challenges, and drawing on lessons from the experiences and research summarized so far, this third section points to actions that are needed in relation to this challenging policy agenda. These recommendations are guided by the idea that **inclusion and equity should not be seen as separate policies**. Rather, they should be viewed as principles that inform all national policies, particularly those that deal with the curriculum, assessment, supervision, school evaluation, teacher education and budgets. They must also inform all stages of education, from early years through to higher education. They are, therefore, concerned with system-level change.

3.1 Managing change

International research regarding educational change (e.g. Fullan, 2007) suggests that policies for reform should take account of the following assumptions:

- **Clarity of purpose is essential in order to mobilize widespread support**
  Progress requires a shared understanding of the rationale and purposes of the changes that are being introduced.

- **Policy is made at all levels of a national education system, not least at the classroom-level**
  Strategies for change must seek to influence as many stakeholders as possible.

- **Educational change is technically simple but politically and socially complex**
  Efforts have to be made to convince stakeholders of the value of proposed changes.

- **Evidence is the catalyst for successful change**
  In particular, stakeholders' knowledge about the current situation must inform planning processes.

With all of this in mind, six recommendations are made to inform actions that should be taken to promote inclusion and equity within education systems. It is important to stress that these recommendations do not imply the need for a massive investment of additional resources, although such investment is always helpful. Rather, the recommendations are intended to promote the more effective use of resources that are already available within the system, particularly human resources. This means that there are implications for all stakeholders: policy-makers, administrators, teachers, students, families, civil society organizations and researchers.

3.2 Recommended actions

Action 1: Establish clear definitions of what is meant by inclusion and equity in education

In many countries, inclusive education is still thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. However, internationally it is increasingly seen more broadly as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. This means that the aim is to **eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, migrant status and ability**. As such, it starts from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society.

Box 4. Reaching the hard-to-reach in Lao People's Democratic Republic

A policy of inclusive education aimed at reaching the hard-to-reach became the entry point for the idea of child-friendly education in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. This focuses on greater sensitivity to each learner's needs, more concern for getting the fundamentals of learning 'right' and greater attention to the difficult transition from one level of schooling to the next. This policy, involving a systematic programme of advocacy, situation analyses and pilot projects, has led to the development of national standards and sector development plans based on child-friendly education. It has also fostered strong partnerships that have helped the principles guiding the policy to become internalized throughout the education system.

Source: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and UNESCO, 2020.

For more information: https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/case-study/reaching-hard-reach-lao-peoples-democratic-republic

As noted above, policy is made at all levels of an education system, not least at the school and classroom levels. The promotion of inclusion and equity is not simply a technical or organizational change. Rather, it is a movement in a clear philosophical direction, requiring a culture of inclusion that permeates the education system.

The creation of such a cultural change requires a shared commitment amongst staff at the national, district and school levels. It is, therefore, crucial that those who need to be involved in this change have a clear sense of what is intended. In particular, the terms 'inclusion' and 'equity' must be clearly defined in ways that will speak to a diverse range of stakeholders. The definitions provided in the UNESCO *Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education* (UNESCO, 2017), described above, are particularly helpful.

- « **Inclusion** is a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners

- **Equity** is about ensuring fairness, where the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance »

The central message is therefore simple: **every learner matters and matters equally**. The complexity arises, however, when we try to put this message into practice. This will likely require changes in thinking and practice at every level of an education system: from classroom teachers and others who provide educational experiences directly, through to those responsible for national policy and the wider community.

Action 2: Use evidence to identify contextual barriers to the participation and progress of learners

Individuals can be excluded across different dimensions:

- **Physical** resulting, for example, from issues related to geography and access to facilities;

- **Social** within a group, not everyone may be heard or encouraged to participate;

- **Psychological** regardless of the external environment, individuals may perceive themselves as included, marginalized or excluded;

- **Systemic** requirements may exist that exclude the poor (such as fees), or migrants and refugees (Source: Adapted from UNESCO, 2019d.)

In order to address problems of access and equity in education systems, it is important to know who is included, who is segregated and who is excluded from schooling. It is also essential to understand that **exclusion has many forms and expressions**, such as:

- **Exclusion from having the life prospects needed for learning**
  For example: living under conditions inadequate for health and well-being, such as inadequate housing, food, and clothing; living with limited security and safety.

- **Exclusion from entry into a school or an educational programme**
  For example: being unable to pay entrance fees and tuition fees; being outside the eligibility criteria for entry; dressed in ways considered inadmissible by the school.

- **Exclusion from regular participation in school or an educational programme**
  For example: being too far to attend regularly; being unable to continuously pay for participation; being sick or injured.

- **Exclusion from meaningful learning experiences**
  For example: teaching and learning process not meeting the learners' needs; the language of instruction and learning materials not comprehensible; learner goes through uncomfortable, negative and/or discouraging experiences at school or in the programme, e.g. discrimination, prejudice, bullying, violence.

- **Exclusion from a recognition of the learning acquired**
  For example: learning acquired in a non-formal programme not recognized for entry to a formal programme; learning acquired is not considered admissible for a certification; learning acquired is not considered valid for accessing further learning opportunities.

- **Exclusion from contributing the learning acquired to the development of community and society**
  For example: learning acquired is considered to be of little value by society; the school or programme attended is seen to have low social status and is disrespected by society; limited work opportunities; discrimination in society on the basis of socially ascribed differences that disregards any learning acquired by the person.

Source: UNESCO, 2012, p.3

To ensure accountability, engagement should be based on evidence in relation to all of these forms of exclusion, without which there can be no accountability. However, when data collection efforts are only focused on particular categories of learners there is a risk of promoting deficit views of those students who share certain characteristics, or come from similar home backgrounds. This also distracts attention from more fundamental questions, such as: Why are we failing some learners? What are the barriers experienced by some of our students?

Engaging with evidence regarding these challenging questions has the potential to stimulate effective ways of promoting the participation and progress of all learners. Data on contextual factors are therefore needed, including an analysis of policies, practices and facilities, and also attitudes and social relationships.

Box 5. Developing indicators for measuring inclusion in education in the Pacific Islands

International principles that emphasize the rights of all children, including those with disabilities, to access mainstream schools have been endorsed by ministers responsible for education in the Pacific Islands (Sharma et al., 2017). The Pacific regional strategy on disability emphasizes that less than 10% of children with disabilities in the Pacific Islands have access to any form of education. This means that 90% of these children are out of school. The Pacific Islands Forum Education Ministers' meeting in May 2012 endorsed upgrading the Education Management Information System and including indicators on children with disabilities. The rationale for the initiative was to work collaboratively with the countries to develop a set of contextually-appropriate indicators to measure progress towards inclusive education effectively.

Source: adapted from European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and UNESCO. 2020

Most importantly, **the views of young people must be sought and valued**, particularly those from at-risk groups. Their voices can challenge policy-makers and practitioners to find more effective ways of ensuring that all children are included (Ainscow & Messiou, 2017). Here, it is necessary to recognize that certain groups are particularly vulnerable to being overlooked - such as learners with disabilities, those from ethnic or minority backgrounds, those discriminated against based on their gender, and others from low income families. Action plans must take account of all these students and remove barriers to their participation and learning.

With the growing technological capacity to handle large amounts of different types of data, it is increasingly possible to generate information about the many influences that affect the inclusion, segregation and exclusion of students within education systems. Focusing on these factors can help to create the conditions for promoting inclusion and equity. In this sense, **evidence is the lifeblood of educational change**.

All of this has important implications for the way countries establish national systems of accountability regarding education. Commenting on this, the 2017/2018 Global Monitoring Report argues that lack of accountability risks jeopardizing progress, thus allowing harmful practices to become embedded within education systems (UNESCO, 2017/8). It goes on to suggest that when public systems do not provide an education of sufficient quality, the marginalized groups lose out. Therefore, accountability must involve acting when something is going wrong through policy, legislation and advocacy, including arrangements to protect citizens' rights. The Report concludes that **there is a need for stronger mechanisms to enshrine and enforce the right to education and hold all governments to account for their commitments**.

Action 3: Ensure that teachers are supported in promoting inclusion and equity

There is not one single model of an inclusive school. However, **what is common to highly inclusive schools is that they are welcoming and supportive places for all of their students**, not least for those with disabilities and others who experience difficulties (Dyson & Roberts, 2004). Research shows the potential of approaches that encourage cooperation between students for creating classroom conditions that can both maximize participation, whilst at the same time achieving high standards of learning for all members of a class (Johnson et al., 1998).

Evidence from the OECD suggests that **countries where teachers believe their profession is valued show higher levels of equity in learning outcomes** (Schleicher, 2015). Schools need to be reformed and practices need to be improved in ways that will lead teachers to feel supported in responding positively to student diversity – seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for enriching learning. In this way, a consideration of difficulties experienced by students can provide an agenda for change and insights as to how such changes might be brought about. This kind of approach is more likely to be successful in contexts where there is a culture of collaboration that encourages and supports problem-solving.

The development of inclusive practices must involve those within a particular context in working together to address barriers to education experienced by some learners (Ainscow et al., 2006).

Box 6. Promoting inclusive school development in Kenya

Embu Diocese organized a pilot project with the aim of promoting inclusive education in 30 schools. A key feature of the programme was the involvement of local communities in the inclusion of all children. Different groups defined their roles and worked to develop their own policies which complemented national policies. The education office provided relevant support, but this only remained at the local level, so there were sustainability challenges. During the three years of the project, the number of children with disabilities enrolled in the pilot schools increased from 0.8% to 8.0%.

Source: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and UNESCO, 2020.

For more information: https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/case-study/ implementation-inclusive-education-and-community-based-rehabilitation-embu-diocese-kenya

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Since UNESCO's 48th International Conference on Education, *Inclusive education: The way of the future*, there has been a growing interest in reforming teacher education to ensure that teachers are prepared and supported to meet the participation and learning of all students (Florian & Pantic, 2017). This starts with the initial education of teachers and should continue throughout their careers.

Box 7. Intercultural approaches and inclusion in the pedagogical practice of pre-service teacher education in Peru

The project aims to strengthen the capacities of principals and teachers of teacher training colleges to incorporate inclusive and intercultural approaches in their curricula. The goal is to influence the curricular design of initial teacher training with both approaches. The framework is the international human rights agenda established in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Education 2030 Framework for Action. It is expected that pedagogical practices will value diversity in order to eliminate all forms of discrimination, and thus ensure access to quality learning opportunities for all. This project has been supported by UNESCO Lima and has benefited approximately 2,000 teacher-trainers and student teachers. An academic event was held in 2019 where principals and teachers of teacher training colleges presented their experiences to the Ministry of Education and to the educational community in general, generating a space for reflection on these topics.

For more information: https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/lima

As systems become more inclusive, teachers will have to respond to a greater diversity of students. **Continuing professional development** therefore becomes particularly important . However, understanding how well teachers are prepared for inclusive education, and the role they play in reducing inequalities, needs to take account of regional disparities in teacher qualifications, supply and deployment, and broader issues regarding the quality and content of teacher preparation. These global disparities put different pressures on national systems of teacher education. This means that a model of teacher education that works well in countries where teaching is a high-status occupation with good salaries is less likely to work where there are acute teacher shortages. Special educators, who will find the context and focus of their work changing in major ways, will also need on-going professional development so that they can contribute to inclusive developments.

Box 8. Preparation of teachers for inclusive education in Lebanon

Continuing professional development is one facet of the teacher training programme at the Al-Mabarrat Association. It aims to prepare teachers for inclusive education as the main vehicle to address diversity in classrooms. In parallel, teacher training contributes to learners' acceptance of diversity and the right of education for all. As regards newly qualified teachers, the process includes an induction programme and a coaching process to determine training needs and refine skills. For experienced teachers, professional development is conducted through workshops in school, and at universities and various organizations inside and outside of Lebanon. The major learning outcomes of professional development are to: promote a coaching process in accordance with professional development; equip teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to align practices; apply active learning strategies, such as critical thinking, co-operative learning, inquiry and problem-solving; contribute to strengthened collaboration with various learning institutions; ensure that the school environment is responsive to research-based strategies for teaching; and train learners on self-regulation and self-evaluation strategies.

Source: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and UNESCO, 2020.

For more information: https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/case-study/preparation-teachers-inclusive-education-lebanon

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Another important implication is that senior staff in schools must provide effective leadership by addressing these challenges in a way that helps to create a supportive climate within which teacher professional learning can take place. While the form and structure of teacher education varies, the common issues and challenges of meeting SDG4 create an agenda for teacher development at all levels.

Action 4: Design the curriculum and assessment procedures with all learners in mind

In an education system based on the principles of inclusion and equity, all students are assessed on an on-going basis in relation to their progress through the curriculum. This allows teachers to respond to a wide range of individual learners, bearing in mind that each learner is unique. In particular, there has to be sensitivies regarding the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of students. At the same time, **it is essential to create safe and inclusive learning environments**, which are free of violence and discrimination of any kind.

This means that teachers and other professionals must be well informed about their students' characteristics, interests and attainments, while also assessing broader qualities, such as their capacity for cooperation. However, the ability to identify each student's level of performance is not enough. **Teachers in inclusive systems need to gauge the effectiveness of their teaching for all of their students** and should know what they need to do to enable each student to contribute and learn as well as possible.

> ### Box 9. An inclusive approach to early years education in Croatia
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> Early childhood inclusion in the Republic of Croatia is based on values and practices that support the rights of each child and their family, regardless of their abilities. The aim of the initiative is to increase the number of children with disabilities included in kindergartens in the Republic of Croatia and increase professional support for educational staff. Participants have been trained on how to implement and improve quality and innovative inclusive content in educational work with children from the earliest age. The initiative recognizes that in order to build an inclusive standard, professional development of professional staff, targeted professional development, availability of support and community participation are important quality factors.
>
> *Source*: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education and UNESCO, 2020.
>
> For more information: https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/case-study/kindergarten-sopot-centre-excellence-inclusive-approach-children-disabilities-early

For assessment activities to enhance the learning of each and every student, information that recognizes the importance of the inter-relationship of the curriculum, the learner, the pedagogy and the community within which learning takes place is needed. Personalization of teaching and learning is therefore crucial. This means that assessment should focus not only on the students' characteristics and attainments, but also on the curriculum and how each student can learn within and beyond it. The use of information and communication technologies could be useful. There is also a need to avoid the use of tests that have biases which may harm girls and women, the poor, migrants, learners with disabilities and indigenous peoples and their descendants.

Teachers need to have professional development opportunities that enhance their skills to conduct assessments. They also need to work with special educators, psychologists, social workers and medical professionals, where they are available. However, the most important partners are their colleagues, parents and the students themselves, who are positioned to see things from unique points of view and can offer varied perspectives on what is needed to help all learners make progress.

The recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity is also important to further promote inclusion in schools. Developing an intercultural and multilingual curriculum enhances cultural diversity, strengthens learning for all, and contributes to openness and respect for other cultures. Initiatives to preserve and revitalize indigenous languages are crucial for the transmission of the cultural heritage and world view of indigenous peoples and minorities, whose cultural practices and knowledge are valuable educational resources.

Box 10. Indigenous knowledge and education policy in Latin America

In 2017, UNESCO's Regional Office for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean launched the first study on indigenous knowledge and practices in education in Latin America: an exploratory analysis of how indigenous cultural worldviews and concepts influence regional educational policy. It was oriented towards contributing to cognitive and epistemic justice through the redistribution of learning opportunities, the recognition of culture and languages and the formulation of public policies to incorporate indigenous knowledge in plans and programmes. In 2019, a second regional study on Indigenous knowledge and education policies in Latin America: Towards an epistemic dialogue explored more deeply the incorporation of indigenous knowledge via intercultural and multilingual education in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru.

For more information: https://on.unesco.org/2VtK0KR (first regional study) and https://on.unesco.org/2RhvEJW (second regional study).

Box 11. Mother tongue-based multilingual education in the Asia-Pacific region

The Asia-Pacific region is home to half of the planet's 7097 languages, and over half the world's displaced peoples. Over the past 20 years, interest in first language/mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) had grown dramatically. This has resulted in numerous pilot projects in linguistic minority communities across the region, yielding rich longitudinal evidence for the validity of the MTB-MLE approach. Spearheaded by UNESCO Bangkok and endorsed by 16 Asia-Pacific countries in November 2019, the Bangkok Statement on Language and Inclusion represents a key development in governmental commitment to including languages spoken by minority, migrant and refugee communities in the formal and informal sectors, with particular relevance to early childhood literacy.

For more information: https://bangkok.unesco.org/theme/mother-tongue-based-multilingual-education

Box 12. Strengthening the Rapa Nui language in Chile

Concern about the endangered Rapa Nui language encouraged UNESCO and the Chilean Ministry of Education to undertake a participatory diagnostic study with the Rapa Nui community. In 2016, a sociolinguistic survey, led by UNESCO, showed the language to be still alive but under threat. Among the most relevant challenges for its revitalization is the promotion of the intergenerational transmission of language and culture. UNESCO is currently supporting the development and implementation of early childhood education programmes in Rapa Nui and promoting intergenerational learning. One of the most significant ongoing initiatives on the island involves the creation of 'language nests', where learning spaces with full immersion in the Rapa Nui language are promoted by a local NGO.

For more information: https://webarchive.unesco.org/20200108194914/http:/www.unesco.org/new/en/santiago/press-room/our-stories/the-rapa-nui-language-is-alive-but-endangered

Action 5: Structure and manage education systems in ways that will engage all learners

Moving toward inclusion and equity in education is likely to require some restructuring of the way education provision is provided within a country. Such changes may be resisted by some of those involved, not least parents who understandably want to do the best for their own children. In particular, parents who have fought to acquire additional support for their children may be concerned that moves towards inclusion may see such support disappear.

Dealing with difficulties such as these means that it is essential to have a **shared commitment amongst senior staff at the national, district and school levels**. In particular, they must value differences, invest in collaboration, and commit to providing educational opportunities that are equitable. Leaders at all levels of an education system have to be prepared to analyse their own contexts, identify local barriers and leveraging factors, and plan an appropriate process by which to promote inclusive attitudes and practices.

Box 13. Analyzing national contexts to promote inclusive education in Latin America

The Organization of American States and the International Organization of Telethons is coordinating a series of national initiatives to promote inclusion within a regular educational system respectful of diversity. In each of the nine participating countries, up to 300 people take part in seminars during which participatory processes are used to review the national situation regarding inclusion and equity in education. The participants include parents, young people and professionals. During the seminars, those involved take part in activities which lead them to analyse and reflect on examples of good practices from within their own and other countries. They also examine the associated challenges and how these should be addressed. All of these debates are systematically recorded and analysed.

For more information: https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-063/17

In some countries, the existence of parallel private and public education systems is likely to limit the impact of policies for promoting inclusion and equity. Meanwhile, as noted above, there is an increasing emphasis in some countries on the idea of school autonomy within policy contexts based on competition and choice. On the other hand, there is evidence that **school-to-school collaboration can strengthen the capacity of individual institutions to respond to learner diversity** (Muijs et al., 2011). Partnerships between schools can help to reduce the polarization of schools, to the particular benefit of those students who are marginalized at the edges of an education system. In addition, when schools seek to develop more collaborative ways of working, this can have an impact on how teachers perceive themselves and their work. Comparisons of practices in different schools can lead teachers to view underachieving students in a new light. In this way, learners who have learning difficulties within the school's established routines are not seen as 'having problems', but as challenging teachers to re-examine their practices in order to make them more responsive and flexible.

Box 14. A network of schools in Queensland, Australia

Principals from a network of schools worked with a university research team, with each school engaged in action research projects related to the promotion of equity for all their students (Harris et al., 2017). Network schools were also encouraged to strengthen their relationships with other local schools in order to engage in collaborative inquiry. University researchers supported each school to identify challenges, share progress in their action research, and learn from and support each other. Over time, teams of school staff used action research processes to gather evidence and develop analytic approaches to reviewing initiatives aimed at improving the presence, participation and achievement of all students. School leaders valued this approach, which helped to generate a language of review and reflection on practice that supported the promotion of greater equity for all of their students.

Local coordination is needed in order to encourage collaboration. A recent report noted that four of the most successful national education systems – Estonia, Finland, Ontario (Canada) and Singapore – have well developed systems for coordinating local school districts, regardless of their differing extents of school autonomy or devolution of decision-making (Bubb et al., 2019). In particular, they all have district level structures that seek to ensure equity as well as excellence.

Leadership at all levels of an education system is therefore a crucial factor for progress. Particular forms of leadership are known to be effective in promoting inclusion in education (Riehl, 2000). These approaches focus attention on teaching and learning; create strong supportive communities of students, teachers and parents; nurture the understanding of the importance of education amongst families; and foster multi-agency support.

Meanwhile, most countries still have various types of separate special provision for some students, although as local schools become more inclusive, **the need for separate special services should diminish**. Given this diversity of provision, encouraging cooperation between different sectors is important, not least to minimize social isolation.

The way financial support is distributed within education is another crucial factor in promoting inclusion in education. Research carried out in Europe suggests that here is no ideal way to fund inclusion (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020).

The findings connect funding mechanisms for inclusive education systems to decisive levers supporting the implementation of efficient and cost-effective inclusive education policies. This involves: preventing costly and inequitable exclusionary strategies; providing incentives for a school development approach that supports schools' social responsibility towards inclusive education; ensuring innovative and flexible learning environments through capacity-building; and developing transparent and accountable systems.

Action 6: Involve communities in the development and implementation of policies that promote inclusion and equity in education

In order to foster inclusion and equity in education, governments need to mobilize human and financial resources, some of which may not be under their direct control. Forming partnerships among key stakeholders who can support and own the process of change is therefore essential. These stakeholders include: parents/caregivers; teachers and other education professionals; teacher educators and researchers; national, local and school-level administrators and managers; policy-makers and service providers in other sectors (e.g. health, child protection and social services); civic groups in the community; and members of marginalized groups that are at risk of exclusion.

Particularly crucial is the **engagement of families**. In some countries, parents and education authorities already cooperate closely in developing community-based programmes for certain groups of learners, such as those who are excluded because of their gender, social status or disability. A logical next step is for these parents to become involved in supporting change for developing inclusion in schools.

> ### Box 15. Disabled Children's Action Group (DICAG), South Africa
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> DICAG was established by a group of parents of children with disabilities. The main aim is to empower parents to educate their children in an inclusive environment. It was initially affiliated to Disabled People South Africa, the national disabled people's umbrella organization, but is now independent. DICAG is a campaigning organization which helps to raise the level of awareness about disability, and challenges stereotypes and perceptions of disabled people in South Africa. The aim is to ensure equal opportunities for disabled children, especially in education. A member of the organizing group commented: 'We found that visiting families door-to-door and talking to parents on a one-to-one basis was the only way to gain their trust, engage their interest and mobilize their commitment.'
>
> For more information: https://www.dicag.co.za/home

A further pattern that emerges from international research is the way in which greater school autonomy within systems based on competition and choice is reducing connections between schools and their local communities (Salokangas & Ainscow, 2017). The work of schools with families and communities is important to break the link between disadvantaged home backgrounds and poor educational outcomes.

There are many examples of what can happen when the work of schools is linked to the efforts of other local players – employers, community groups, universities and public services. This implies partnerships beyond the school, where partners multiply the impacts of each other's efforts. It also means ensuring that all children receive effective support from their families and communities, which in turn means ensuring that schools can build on the resources offered by families, and support the extension of those resources.

Efforts are being made in the United Kingdom to promote the development of 'children's communities' (Dyson & Kerr, 2013). These area-based initiatives, modelled on the Harlem Children's Zone in the United States of America, involve efforts to improve outcomes for children and young people in areas of disadvantage. They encourage coordinated efforts to tackle the factors that disadvantage some children and enhance factors that support support their progress. This requires multisectoral partnerships (e.g. education, health, social affairs, planning and finance) across all aspects of their lives, from conception through to adulthood.

Box 16. A secondary school in England working to improve outcomes for children, families and communities

This school was set up to serve one of the most disadvantaged inner-city neighbourhoods in England. From the outset, the school's sponsor, a large employer in the city, wanted to help create a vibrant and sustainable neighbourhood, explicitly committed to challenging the many inter-related economic, social and physical issues which characterize the area. This mission explicitly shaped the school's own improvement strategy, leading it to invest equal importance in teaching and learning and social investment. It has also committed the school to work in partnership with local primary schools, and other services and organizations, to develop a neighbourhood-wide approach (Kerr & Ainscow, 2017).

Children's communities involve a wide range of partners working together in a coordinated manner. Schools are key to these partnerships and may be their principal drivers. The aim is to improve a wide range of outcomes for children and young people, including but not restricted to educational outcomes – much less, narrowly-conceived attainment outcomes. Health and well-being, personal and social development, thriving in the early years, and employment outcomes are as important as how well children do in school. This arises not from a down-grading of attainment but from a recognition that all outcomes for children and young people are inter-related, and the factors which promote or inhibit one outcome are very likely to be the factors which promote or inhibit outcomes as a whole.

4. Moving forward

In summary, the six recommended actions that have emerged from this review of international experiences, research and policy documents are as follows:

Action 1: Establish clear definitions of what is meant by inclusion and equity in education

Action 2: Use evidence to identify contextual barriers to the participation and progress of learners

Action 3: Ensure that teachers are supported in promoting inclusion and equity

Action 4: Design the curriculum and assessment procedures with all learners in mind

Action 5: Structure and manage education systems in ways that engage all learners

Action 6: Involve communities in the development and implementation of policies that promote inclusion and equity in education

These actions have major implications for leadership practice within schools and across education systems. In particular, they call for coordinated and sustained efforts, recognizing that changing outcomes for vulnerable students is unlikely to be achieved unless there are changes in the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of adults. This requires long-term advocacy by key civil society players, including parents and representatives of traditionally excluded groups.

The starting point must be with policy-makers and practitioners: enlarging their capacity to imagine what might be achieved, and increasing their sense of accountability for bringing this about. This may also involve tackling negative assumptions, most often relating to expectations about certain groups of students, their capabilities and behaviours.

It is also important that inclusion and equity in education are studied, encouraged and evaluated with an intersectional view that covers early childhood care and education, primary, secondary, technical and vocational training and tertiary education.

This will only be possible if governments and civil society recognize that talents are equally distributed between rich and poor in all cultures, genders and nationalities (UNESCO, 2019e).

Most importantly, this means that governments must make a clear and genuine commitment to inclusion and equity, emphasizing the benefits for parents and children, and for the community at large, whilst recognizing that social inclusion and inclusive education go hand in hand. Here, it is useful to **distinguish between needs, rights and opportunities**. While all learners have needs (e.g. for appropriate teaching), they also have the right to participate fully in a common social institution (that is, a local mainstream school) that offers them a varied range of relevant opportunities. Too often, parents are forced to choose between ensuring that their child's needs are met (which sometimes implies placement in a special school or separate classroom) and ensuring that they have the same rights and opportunities as other learners (which means placement in a mainstream school).

The goal is to create education systems where these choices become unnecessary. These systems should strive to support local schools and teachers by assisting them to develop their capacities to respond to diversity and by fostering collaboration across sectors. In this way, the legacy of Salamanca will continue to be influential. The argument made in the Salamanca Statement that inclusive schools are an effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities and building inclusive societies continues to be highly relevant.

Together the recommendations made in this document represent a radical and challenging approach to educational development. They are based on the idea that enhancing inclusion and equity are the means of achieving excellence within national education systems. In so doing, they provide a means of **taking action** to achieve the aspirations stated in SDG4. In particular, they reflect its argument that high quality education is the foundation for creating sustainable development and a way of developing innovative solutions to the world's greatest challenges.

As noted earlier in this publication , educational improvement is technically simple but socially and politically complex. It is not that difficult to define the actions that are needed in order to provide high quality education for all children and young people. The big question is: do we have the will to make it happen?

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Towards inclusion in education:

Status, trends and challenges

The UNESCO Salamanca Statement 25 years on

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses on leaving no one behind with its Goal 4 on education calling upon education systems 'to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. With ten years remaining to the target date of 2030, countries need to step up efforts to reach out to all learners, respect their diverse needs, abilities and characteristics and eliminate all forms of discrimination in the learning environment. This requires adopting an inclusive approach whose foundations have been laid by the UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994.

The publication looks at the past, present and future since Salamanca. It provides examples from around the world and make recommendations to guide the further development of inclusive national policies and practices.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Sustainable Development Goals