



# POSITION ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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1. This document lays down the position of the European Youth Forum on inclusive education. It has been developed based on exchanges with Member Organisations and will serve as the basis in our advocacy work for quality & inclusive education.



# 1 INTRODUCTION

While policies such as the New Skills Agenda (2016) or the European Commission’s Communication on “Modernising Education” (2016) are more focused on ensuring that young people leave the education system with the right skill-set for a smooth transition into the labour market, new important policy processes such as **the Paris Declaration (2015), the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017), the Council Conclusions on “Inclusion in Diversity to achieve a Higher Quality Education for All” (2017), the European Commission Communication on “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture” (2017)<sup>2</sup>, the European Council Conclusion on Education and Culture of December 2017**, contribute to a renewed European debate on inclusive education.

2. European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture”, 2017. – <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2017%3A673%3AFIN>



## 2 OBJECTIVES OF THE POSITION

This position **outlines the vision of the European Youth Forum on the need for a shift in educational paradigm towards more inclusive education systems** that address diverse needs and circumstances of the learner and stresses the importance of involving all stakeholders, from both formal and non-formal education sectors, to achieve this goal. Quality and inclusive education, from childhood on lays the groundwork for social cohesion, social mobility and an equitable society. Inclusive education forms the basis for active citizenship and helps prevent populism, xenophobia and violent extremism. Education and training also represent a way to increase employability and help get young people into quality jobs. It offers the best protection against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Hence, inclusive education must be a priority on the education agenda on local, national, European and global level.

This document defines a clear vision of the European Youth Forum on what inclusive education means, what are the main barriers to inclusive education and what measures should be put in place by institutions and stakeholders **to ensure that all young people have access to inclusive education systems and that no one is left behind in these times of socio-economic changes and fast-changing technological developments**. Therefore, this document presents the European Youth Forum's main political demands towards Governments<sup>3</sup>, Member States of the European Union, European Union institutions, the Council of Europe and the United Nations for developing policies and strategies, as well as taking other necessary steps to ensure inclusivity of education for all. It includes:

- providing equal opportunities for all and on all levels of education and ensuring that neither personal nor social circumstances such as gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disabilities, ethnic origin or family socio-economic background as well as legal barriers become obstacles to access their right to quality education, and that all individuals reach a level of competences that allow them to become autonomous, motivated and responsible active citizens;
- developing inclusive education policies, using intersectional and norm-critical approaches, that respond to the diverse needs and circumstances of the learner as well as moving away from a 'one-size-fits-all' education model, towards a learner-centred approach to education<sup>4</sup>;
- encouraging and supporting stronger involvement and closer cooperation of all relevant stakeholders – being active in the formal or in the non-formal education sectors;
- ensuring long term commitment of Governments in providing adequate investments, training for educators, applying a learner-centred, lifelong learning approach in education practices.

3. Each country is responsible for its own education and training systems. Education policies could be under the responsibility of National, Federal Governments or Regional Governments. For the purpose of this paper we will refer to Governments as the level of governance in charge of education policies. This varies across countries.

4. European Youth Forum, Policy Paper on Quality Education, 2013. – [https://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/03/0317-13\\_POLICY\\_PAPER\\_QUALITY\\_EDUCATION\\_FINAL\\_withExSum11.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/03/0317-13_POLICY_PAPER_QUALITY_EDUCATION_FINAL_withExSum11.pdf)



## 3 KEY ACTIONS

Together with its Member Organisations, the European Youth Forum wants this position to:

- Feed into the upcoming proposal for a Council recommendation on common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching, expected in spring 2018 for adoption by the Council;
- Advocate towards the trio Presidency of the Council of the European Union (Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria) on the importance of streamlining inclusive education in all education related policies, particularly in the recently announced European Education Area;
- Advocate for an Erasmus+ successor programme that is accessible and inclusive for all young people and in line with the European Youth Forum Policy Paper on Erasmus+ successor Programme;
- Include in its advocacy on the post-2020 MFF elements to strengthen EU investments on inclusive education approaches across EU programmes;
- Contribute to the upcoming UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF 2019)<sup>5</sup> by:
  - Feeding into National Reviews in European countries on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with a focus on SDG4 in 2019;
  - Contribute to the European Commission report to the High Level Political Forum in 2019 on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the EU, with a focus on SDG4.

5. That will also conduct an in-depth review of SDG 4 “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”



## 4 WHAT IS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

Inclusive education represents a response to tackle increasingly complex challenges faced by our societies. It ensures that **all people have access to free, learner-centred, lifelong learning education opportunities that respond and adapt to their needs**, empower them as active citizens and as right holders. **It contributes to remove social, economic, structural and legal barriers to access quality education.**

Education is a Human Right. The right to quality education is enshrined in several legal instruments at both the European and the international level<sup>6</sup> and is stipulated as a target in both the European Union's growth strategy, Europe 2020, as well as in the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Inclusive education is also included as a key principle in the recently proclaimed European Pillar of Social Rights (principle 1)<sup>7</sup>, and it should be put at the heart of global economic and social progress to contribute achieving inclusive growth and a society that leaves no one behind<sup>8</sup>.

6. Article 14 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees the right to education, including compulsory education; Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education, and that it must be free, at least in the elementary stages. Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines education as crucial in the "development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential".
7. European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture", 2017. – <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2017%3A673%3AFIN>
8. European Youth Forum, Excluding Youth – A threat to our future, 2016. – <http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/05/Excluding-youth-a-threat-to-our-future.pdf>



# 5 SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Discrimination in access to quality education has a documented negative impact on the personal and professional development of many young people in Europe, particularly those belonging to vulnerable groups. It also hampers social cohesion, opportunities for social mobility, thus diminishes efforts to build equitable societies<sup>9</sup>. Discrimination in access to education also prevents overall sustainable development of societies.

School systems in Europe regularly fail to include young people from vulnerable backgrounds<sup>10</sup>. For example:

- One in four Roma youth have no formal education compared to only 3% among non-Roma youth<sup>11</sup>;
- Nearly two out of five people with disability attained “pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education” levels, compared with only less than 30% of those without disability were in this situation<sup>12</sup>.
- According to a recent UNHCR report on education published in 2016, only 50 % of refugee children have access to primary education (while the global average is 90 %), only 22 % of young refugees attend secondary school (while the global average is 84 %) and just 1 % of refugees attend university, compared to a global average of 34 %<sup>13</sup>.

- According to the European Commission Education and Training 2017 monitoring, pupils from a lower socio-economic background are almost five times more likely not to reach the basic level of competence in science, for instance, than those from a higher socio-economic background<sup>14</sup>.

Inclusive education needs to be incorporated in a holistic and coordinated approach to social inclusion, which promotes quality and accessible support services for young people and their families, such as income and housing support, to ensure that every young person can achieve their full potential. School segregation, as well as bullying and discrimination, are still a reality and remain largely unaddressed: discrimination on all grounds must be tackled at all levels, to ensure that all children and young people are able to make the most of the educational opportunities available to them<sup>15</sup>.

9. Researchers have found a correlation between low scores in maths and reading and inequality. <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/programme-for-international-student-assessment-pisa/33690904.pdf>

10. Ibid.

11. Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Activism, Participation and Security among Roma and Sinti Youth, 2015. – <http://www.osce.org/odihr/187861?download=true>

12. Eurostat, Disability statistics – access to education and training, 2011. – [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Disability\\_statistics\\_\\_access\\_to\\_education\\_and\\_training#Young\\_people\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_and\\_training:\\_twice\\_as\\_many\\_among\\_persons\\_with\\_disabilities\\_in\\_the\\_EU-28](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Disability_statistics__access_to_education_and_training#Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training:_twice_as_many_among_persons_with_disabilities_in_the_EU-28)

13. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Missing out: refugee education in crisis, 2016. – <http://www.unhcr.org/57d9d01d0>

14. European Commission – Education & Training Monitor 2017 – [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017-factsheet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017-factsheet_en.pdf)

15. European Youth Forum, Excluding Youth – A threat to our future, 2016. – <http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/05/Excluding-youth-a-threat-to-our-future.pdf>



## 6 THE ADDED VALUE OF YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Youth organisations, as non-formal education providers, have a big role to play in contributing to implement inclusive education systems. As defined in the European Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (2012)<sup>16</sup>, in their work youth organisations apply educational methods that are based on experiential learning, learner-centred approach and empowerment of young people through participation and ownership of activities. Using non-formal education learning methods youth organisations are able to provide education that reflects individual needs and circumstances of the learner that is at the core of inclusive education practices.

Non-formal education practices have shown to be a successful tool to engage a more diverse and large group of young people, including disadvantaged young people and young people who are currently not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and can furthermore complement formal education practices for the acquisition of 'life-skills' and the development of civic participation. Therefore, learning in non-formal settings, and particularly in youth organisations, is an integral part of inclusive education, particularly positively impacting youth coming from disadvantaged groups thanks to their capacity to reach out to those groups of young people.

Youth organisations being experts in applying non-formal education methods in their activities and reaching out to those young people that formal education providers usually are not able to reach, are an essential partner in developing inclusive education systems. Youth organisations are able not only to share their best practices and support formal education providers in obtaining necessary skills and knowledge on how to apply non-formal education methods, but with their activities can also complement formal education practices to ensure that no one is left behind. Hence, support to non-formal education providers is crucial in ensuring Europe reaches its education targets, and provides inclusive education throughout the life course for all. This should be complemented by a strong focus in fostering the complementarity of non-formal and formal education and supporting partnership between formal education providers and youth organisations.

16. European Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, 2012 – <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>





# 7 OUR DEMANDS

The European Youth Forum calls on Governments, Member States of the European Union, on the European Union Institutions, the Council of Europe and the United Nations system through a holistic approach to put in place coherent measures at all


levels to ensure that the right to quality and inclusive education and lifelong learning is guaranteed to all, that all young people can learn, move and exchange in schools, universities, and youth organisations, without any barriers.

## 7.1 TO GOVERNMENTS, THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM DEMANDS TO:

- provide to everybody access to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in a way that access to education is free for all and there are no hidden costs of education, including by removing physical barriers, through a sustainable increase in public investment in education – at least 6% of GDP – and by safeguarding it against any cuts to national budgets<sup>17</sup>;
- develop policies on inclusive education as part of a coordinated effort at national, regional and local levels to implement holistic approach to social inclusion, based on targeted measures and services tackling the specific needs and addressing the rights of the most vulnerable young people; this should include the recognition of youth organisations as essential partners in developing inclusive education systems;
- reform the approach on methodologies, contents and objectives of education policies, in order to provide all young people, regardless of their background, with the knowledge, skills and competences they need to thrive;
- implement evidence based education policies by collecting comprehensive and up-to-date and disaggregated data on the access to education of all young people, especially the ones from vulnerable backgrounds;
- take active measures to ensure to all those young people from the most vulnerable backgrounds, such as people with disabilities, refugee and asylum seekers, Roma youth, indigenous groups and young people from disadvantaged socio-economic background have full access to quality and inclusive education;
- implement fully Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning, notably by conducting voluntary national reviews;
- develop specific measures to support young women in accessing Vocational Education and Training enabling them to fully enjoy their right to education; and reflect on the efficiency of these measures by monitoring participation of youth and adults in Vocational Education and Training by gender;
- take necessary measures to guarantee flexible pathways in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 target 4.3<sup>18</sup>; and therefore contribute to countering the stigma of Vocational Education and training, often considered a second-tier education;

17. European Youth Forum, Resolution on EU Youth Strategy, 2016. – [http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/11/0233-16\\_Resolution\\_EU\\_Youth\\_Strategy\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/11/0233-16_Resolution_EU_Youth_Strategy_FINAL.pdf)

18. “by 2030 ensure equal access for all [...] to affordable quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university”

- 
- mainstream citizenship education, with a particular focus on education for sustainable development, as well as intercultural learning and digital literacy skills, in formal curricula programmes, to enable young people, including the most vulnerable young people, to meaningfully contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and;

- support continuous lifelong teacher training on citizenship education, with a particular focus on education for sustainable development, as well as intercultural learning and digital literacy skills for them to be able to apply learner-centred teaching methods and ensure inclusion of the most vulnerable young people.

## 7.2 TO THE MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM DEMANDS TO:

- ensure the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, especially its principle 1, to make sure everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning;
- take necessary measures to at least achieve the EU benchmarks for 2020 for education, which aim to reduce by 15% the proportion of 15-year-olds who are under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science;

- Member States must implement by the end of 2018 a national recognition and validation system for competences acquired in non-formal education activities as foreseen by the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>19</sup>;
- put in place all measures to ensure freedom of movement in the EU and removing legal obstacles that hinder cross-border mobility and cooperation with the aim of making learning and studying a right not be hampered by borders.

19. European Youth Forum, Resolution on EU Youth Strategy, 2016. – [http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/11/0233-16\\_Resolution\\_EU\\_Youth\\_Strategy\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/11/0233-16_Resolution_EU_Youth_Strategy_FINAL.pdf)



### 7.3 TO THE EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS, THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM DEMANDS TO:

- use the opportunity created by the announcement of the European Education Area to foster an on-going and Europe-wide dialogue on a common understanding of inclusive education to implement the necessary measures to ensure education is accessible for all, particularly for young people from the most vulnerable backgrounds, such as people with disabilities, refugee and asylum seekers, Roma youth, indigenous groups and young people from disadvantaged socio-economic background;
- use the European Semester to support structural reforms to improve education policy, using EU funding and EU investment instruments to fund education and set a benchmark for Member States to invest at least 6% of their GDP in education; EU level investment in education and training needs to be seen as complementary to Member States' investments;
- recognise the role of youth organisations and other non-formal education organisations as key quality non-formal education providers on an equal foot with formal education providers;
- support and promote the complementarity of non-formal and formal education by providing adequate funding and spaces for cooperation activities between formal and non-formal education providers.
- develop an Erasmus+ successor programme that is accessible and inclusive for all young people by providing them with opportunities to partake in more inclusive educational activities through the work of youth organisations;
- provide opportunities for learning mobility for all within formal and non-formal education and informal learning by increasing funding for Erasmus+ per ten in order to reach out to more young people and especially the ones from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### 7.4 TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM DEMANDS TO:

- foster cross-institutional cooperation with other key institutional stakeholders on European, national and local level to develop comprehensive strategies enabling inclusive learning environment for all young people across Europe;
- recognize, encourage and support non-formal education providers, notably youth organisations, in delivering inclusive educational activities for all young people;
- continue its work on promoting participation and inclusion of young Roma people, specifically with regards to developing strategies for inclusive learning environment that corresponds to specific needs and circumstances of Roma youth in Europe.



## 7.5 TO THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM, THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM DEMANDS TO:

- gather data disaggregated by age and gender, including intersex children and youth, as well as by other factors, on different indicators measuring the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” to be able to support United Nations Member States in acting upon developments to ensure that education is inclusive and does not leave anyone behind;
- to monitor the implementation of SDG4, target 4.6<sup>20</sup>, in line with EU benchmarks for 2020 for education, which aim to reduce by 15% the proportion of 15-year-olds who are under-skilled in reading, mathematics and science;
- encourage State Parties to the Convention on the Rights and Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to continue developing inclusive education systems at all levels and providing lifelong learning opportunities for all.

20. By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy (Target 4.6.1 – Percentage of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex.)



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