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‘Inclusive Education in the European Union’



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“INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION”

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INTRODUCTION

The right to education is a right that should be enjoyed by all people without any discrimination and is incorporated in a large number of international instruments and conventions. It is a right that has a multiplying role, as it is necessary for the exercise and enjoyment of the rights and obligations of citizens. Its relationship with the rest of the human rights is interconnected, as it is a necessary condition for the enjoyment of the other rights, but it is also a consequence of the other rights. The catalytic role of education in the lives of individuals and in the development of societies is indisputable, as it brings about a series of benefits concerning the moral, professional, and social appreciation of the individual, but also the achievement of social cohesion through the professional and social inclusion it brings its implementation. In modern multicultural societies with the cosmopolitan changes taking place on the international scene, education is called upon to play a key role in achieving a sustainable, cohesive, and just society, responding on the one hand to global challenges and on the other hand serving the 17 Global Sustainable Goals Development. It is an education that leaves no one behind, eliminates racism, and intolerance, breaks down stereotypes, and treats diversity as an element of diversity through the cultivation of tolerance and empathy, and in general the cultivation of an "inclusive" educational culture. It is an education, where the concept of inclusion, integration, and inclusion are used to avoid exclusion and marginalization in the school and social environment. The European Union, as a supranational entity, restructures and redesigns its policies in order to respond to the above education model.

This paper presents and clarifies the concept of "inclusive education", or "education without exclusions", which most faithfully captures the English term of the literature "Inclusive Education", as it is formulated and promoted in the European Union. The

work has a tripartite structure consisting of three chapters. The first chapter presents the legal framework for the protection of the right to inclusive education through international acts and conventions. In the second, the term is clarified, its definition, its basic characteristics, and the models and ways of approaching the concept of inclusive education are presented. Finally, the third chapter presents the institutional framework of inclusive education in the EU and the ways of its implementation by its institutions.

CHAPTER 1 HUMAN RIGHTS-LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The right to education is an indisputable, universally recognized right, directly linked to the inherent dignity of the individual. Its role is multiplier and guarantees all other human rights and freedoms (Sarigiannidis, 2020)¹, as "education must aim at the full development of the human personality and of dignity and must strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms...and further that education should enable each person to play a useful role in a free society..."². The first Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Katerina Tomasevski, studying the parameters that hinder the realization of this right, introduced the four "A's" in order to facilitate children's access to education.

According to Tomasevski education should be³: a) Available: free and available to all children and appropriately structured. b) Accessible: possible for everyone without discrimination. c) Acceptable: applicable and designed by the states taking into account the particularities of individuals, especially in terms of language, culture, and

¹ Sarigiannidis, M. "The Right to Education and the CESCR" in Anagnostopoulou, D., Naskou-Perraki, P., Skiadas, D. (edits.) "Right to Education and Educational Policies International, European and National dimensions" (Thessaloniki: Anikoula, 2020), p. 135.

² Article 13 of CESCR in Naskou-Perraki, P. "Protection of the Right to Education by UN Institutions and International Acts" in Anagnostopoulou, D., Naskou-Perraki, P., Skiadas, D. (edits.) "Right to Education and Educational Policies International, European and National dimensions" (Thessaloniki: Anikoula, 2020), p. 71-72.

³ Tomasevski, K. «Manual on Rights Based Education» (UNESCO Bangkok, 2004).

opinions. d)Adaptable: adapted to the changing needs of society and students based on their different social and cultural position⁴.

In addition, it is very important to emphasize that Human Rights-based education is governed by 3 basic principles⁵: First of all, Access to free and compulsory education, secondly Equality, Inclusion, and non-Discrimination and thirdly the right to Quality education, content, and procedures. So, it is completely understandable how the concept of everyone's access to education is a request of all societies and states at all levels, especially with the second principle, which becomes a cornerstone for the concept of inclusive education.

1.1. THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION THROUGH INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CONVENTIONS

The first International Act that enshrines the right to education is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, in article 26, where it is determined in relation to the subject under consideration: 1) Access for all to all levels of free public education throughout their lifetime. 2) The decisive role of education in the full development of the human personality and in strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. 3) The right of parents to choose the type of education they wish for their children⁶.

Also, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education in 1960, is a cornerstone for inclusive education, as it not only limits and prevents discrimination in education by promoting equality of opportunity and treatment in education, but contractually binds states to create, development, and implementation of a national education policy that meets the achievement of the above.

⁴ CESCR, General Comment No 13 (article 14), The Right to Education, E/C. 12/1999/10, 8.12.1999.

⁵ Tomasevski, op.cit. It' s about the Manual for Education on Human Rights, a joint project between the Special Rapporteur and the Regional Office about Education in Asia-Pacific.

⁶ Naskou-Perraki 2020, op. cit. p. 77.

More specifically, the Convention: 1) Defines the concept of discrimination as any "discrimination, exclusion, restriction or preference, based on race, sex, color, language, religion, political or another opinion, national or social origin, economic status or origin" (Article 1) which has as its aim or effect the non-implementation of equality in education. It also defines non-discrimination in education (Article 2). 2) Emphasizes equality of opportunity in education and the participation of foreigners residing in a country in educational processes (Article 3). 3) It states the purposes of education, emphasizing the full development of the human personality and strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms by promoting understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups (Article 5)⁷. 4) It speaks of the collective right of national minorities to participate in the educational processes of the country of residence (Article 5.3). 5) Points out the obligation of the member states to develop a state policy to achieve the above objectives regarding the right of admission to education, its level and quality as well as the conditions for its provision (Article 4)⁸.

Furthermore, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women states that: 1) States must enshrine in their Constitution and other relevant legislation the equality of men and women and ensure by legislative or other means the implementation of this principle" (Article 2, a). 2) The right to education is enshrined and obligates states to take all appropriate measures to ensure women's rights equal to those of men in terms of education and training (Article 10). 3) Mixed education is established, the elimination of stereotypes about the role of men and women at all levels of education by extending education also within the family in a way that respects motherhood as a social function and recognizes the role of men in the upbringing of children (Article 5)⁹.

⁷ It's a revision of Article 26, par. 2 UNDHR.

⁸ Chatzikonstantinou, K. "Discriminations on Education and the role of Unesco Convention against discrimination in Education" in Anagnostopoulou, D., Naskou-Perraki, P., Skiadas, D. (eds.) "Right to Education and Educational Policies International, European and National dimensions" (Thessaloniki: Anikoula, 2020), p. 175.

⁹ Naskou-Perraki 2020, op. cit. p. 90-92.

Subsequently, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1989, is the most basic international Convention that refers to inclusive education, as it provides all forms of protection to children in the most important period from birth to adulthood, given the globally recognized importance of the child and of childhood in creating a better world. This Convention aims at the "interest of the child", the prohibition of any form of discrimination, and the contribution of the family, and the natural environment to the development and well-being of the child. In particular, the CRC refers to the right to education with Articles 28 and 29, however, this becomes realizable through the combined application of other provisions of the Convention which are:

1) the principle of non-discrimination is a fundamental principle, with special reference to persons with disabilities (Article 2), 2) emphasizing the "interest" of the child (Article 3), 3) the inherent right to life (Article 4), 4) the right to free expression of opinion regarding the child and respect for the child's views (Article 12), 5) the behavior of teachers (Article 19), 6) the education of children with disabilities (Article 23), 7) the right to education for minority children (Article 31) and refugee children (Article 32).

In fact, according to Article 28, states undertake to provide free education, open and accessible to every child without any exception by offering financial assistance, special educational structures for children of vulnerable groups, children's school attendance, and reduction of school dropout rate.

According to Article 29 of the CRC, the aims of education are: firstly, the development of the child's personality and the full development of his physical and mental skills. Secondly the development of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the principles of the UN Charter. Thirdly, the development of respect for parents, identity, language, and cultural values of the child and for national values of the country of residence and country of origin for children with different cultural origins. Fourthly, the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society in a spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, gender equality, and friendship between peoples and nationalistic, ethnic, and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin. Fifthly, respect for the natural environment.

In the Committee's General Comments, it is emphasized that these educational goals take into account the child's special developmental needs, but also his different and evolving abilities¹⁰.

Furthermore, it is pointed out that states must provide child-friendly education, designed to strengthen their abilities and advanced education enriched with the values of human rights. In this sense, education should promote understanding, acceptance, and friendship between peoples, the child's cultural identity, his language, and the national values of the host country through dialogue and respect for the different, recognizing the unique role that children can play in bridging the differences that historically separate groups of people¹¹.

Additionally, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990, enshrines: 1) the right of access to education for the children of all migrant workers, "regular" and "irregular" without discrimination in relation to nationals (Article 12, 30), 2) the freedom of parents in the moral and religious education of their children (Article 12.4), 3) the right of access of all immigrants to educational institutions or services, to vocational training, subject to the conditions of entry of the institution (Article 43), 4) the right of the MS to cooperate with the country of origin of the immigrants to integrate the children of immigrant workers into the local school system, in particular through the local language and the mother tongue (Article 45).

Furthermore, the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasizes: 1) its purpose which is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities as well as the promotion of respect for their inherent dignity (Article 1), 2) the commitment of the member states to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels based on equal opportunities, with the ultimate goal of the participation of the disabled in a free society (Article 24), 3) the Application of the 4 "A's" for children with disabilities: a)

¹⁰ CRC Committee, GC No1, art. 29, para 1, The aims of education, Doc CRC/GC/2001/1, para 1, a.

¹¹ Ibid, para 15-17.

Availability: possibility of attending public or private schools, b) Accessibility: accessible to all without discrimination, c) Acceptability: obligation of states to implement facilities in the provision of goods and services taking into account their language, culture and opinions, d) Adaptability: obligation of states to adapt to changing needs of society and students in the context of their different social and cultural position.

Finally, at the European level, it is worth mentioning the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU, which in article 14, paragraph 1, defines the concept of education and access to it and clarifies the principle of non-discrimination. It is noteworthy that the concept of Education in Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (paragraph 1) declares all the educational institutions of the Member States for general education and describes both the process and the result of the educational process¹². It is important that the term "education" is adopted, in place of the term "education", which is referred to in Article 165 of the TFEU and indicates general education but also the private, institutionalized and selective transfer of teaching and knowledge¹³.

1.2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION THROUGH OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTS

The World Conference on Education in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990, was a landmark for education, as access to education no longer only concerns the primary level, but everyone, children, youth, and adults. "Basic education" includes nursery, primary, secondary, and adult education. With this conference, the "game changer" for

¹² Nikolakis, N. "Article 14 CFREU», in Skouris, V. (ed.) «Lisbon Convention, Εμμηνεία κατ' άρθρο» (Athens-Thessaloniki: Sakoula, 2020), p. 2160.

¹³ Anagnostopoulou, D. "Article 14 in CFREU and the protection of the right to education in the European Union legal order" in Anagnostopoulou, D., Naskou-Perraki, P., Skiadas, D. (eds.) "Right to Education and Educational Policies International, European and National dimensions" (Thessaloniki: Anikoula, 2020), p. 292.

education is observed worldwide¹⁴ and the right to education is now being transformed into a key national goal, into a national plan and action framework for achieving sustainable development¹⁵. Also in it, we have the first Universal Declaration "Education for All", which in essence emphasized the need to provide education to all children taking into account the culture and community in which they live, setting the framework for action to meet learning needs, giving priority to the provision of basic education, which includes early childhood, primary and secondary education and adult literacy (World Declaration, on Education for All, 1990). It is worth noting that in this declaration there is no reference to the concept of "inclusion", but there are statements about the importance of access to education for "marginalized people".

Subsequently, the Salamanca Declaration in 1994 set the framework for action on special education and inclusive education. More specifically, Article 2 of the Declaration it is pointed out that: First of all, educational systems must take into account the wide variety of different characteristics and needs of students and secondly, regular schools with their inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating communities of acceptance, and achieving an inclusive society and education for all.

Article 3 of the action framework emphasizes that "The school must include all students, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other situation...disadvantaged children and gifted children, street children and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups."

¹⁴ Osttveit, S. "The Jomtien Conference in 1990 was a game changer for education", (World education Blog, 2014).

¹⁵ Chabbott, C. "Constructing Education for Development: International Organizations and Education for All", (Psychology Press, 2003) in <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203055991>.

Then, at the World Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, the commitment to “Education for All” was reiterated, enriching it with the principle of quality this time¹⁶ and adopting the 6 Basic objectives for addressing the learning needs of children and adults with a common recommendation for the quality of education¹⁷: 1) Expand and improve early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and "disadvantaged" children. 2) Ensuring access to full, free and compulsory primary education of good quality for all children, and in particular girls, children living in difficult circumstances, and children belonging to ethnic minorities. 3) Ensuring equal access to appropriate life skills learning programs for young people and adults. 4) Achieve a 50 % reduction in adult illiteracy, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. 5) Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education and achieve equity in education, focusing on ensuring full and equal access for girls and achieving good quality basic education. 6) Improving the quality of education so that meaningful and measurable outcomes are achieved for all, especially in learning reading and writing, mathematics, and basic skills for everyday life.

The forum held at the initiative of UNESCO emphasized the importance and contribution of education systems in providing inclusive education as well as the need for the education system to respond to the needs of students¹⁸.

A result of the World Forum in Dakar was the creation of the Global Campaign for Education (Global Campaign for Education), which was created in 1999 with the participation of civil society and is an international movement of more than 100 countries with the participation of national educational organizations and associations with the ultimate goal of providing free and quality education.

Finally, with the World Forum in Incheon, Korea, in 2015, the Incheon Declaration and Agenda "Education 2030"¹⁹: Towards a quality education, equity and lifelong

¹⁶ Naskou-Perraki, 2020, p. 161.

¹⁷ World Education Forum, Dakar, 2000.

¹⁸ Education for All, para. 33.

learning for all" were adopted, in which the aim to ensure quality becomes evident and equality of education, without discrimination, by promoting lifelong learning by 2030. It is noteworthy that with this Declaration, UNESCO was designated by the UN as the "Lead Agency" ("Lead Agency")²⁰ for the achievement of Goal 4 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly²¹. In essence, this Declaration sets a new vision for Education in 2030²², which is based on²³: a) in ensuring the access of all, boys and girls, to a free, equal, and quality primary and secondary education with the corresponding learning outcomes. b) in the concepts of "Inclusion" and "Equality" in education. c) on the importance of equal access for men and women. d) in quality education with an increase in the literacy of young people and adults for employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship. e) in promoting lifelong learning and f) in the provision of training in emergency cases of crises.

In 2016, UNESCO created a Permanent Committee, consisting of 44 members, to monitor Goal 4 and to provide advice and coordination to achieve this Goal through 5 themes: access, tolerance, learning, quality, and reinforcement²⁴.

At the same time, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) is the official source of statistical data collection for education and the monitoring of Goal 4²⁵. In addition, the

¹⁹ UNESCO, World Education Forum 2015 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, 19 – 22 May 2015, Final Report.

²⁰ ²⁰ UNESCO, Leading Education 2030 στο <https://en.unesco.org/education2030-sdg4>.

²¹ ²¹ UNESCO, Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/FFA_Complet_Web-ENG.pdf.

²² The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Transforming the world, A/RES/70/1, 25-27 September 2015.

²³ ²³ UNESCO, Education 2030, op. cit., p. 6-7.

²⁴ UNESCO, Leading Education 2030 στο <https://en.unesco.org/education2030-sdg4> και <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education2030-sdg4/global-mechanisms> <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education2030-sdg4>.

Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) records annual progress towards Goal 4 (since 2002 with translation into 11 languages)²⁶. Finally, it is worth noting that UNESCO's work on education and gender equality is guided by the UNESCO Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education, as well as the Action Plan on Gender Equality (revision 2014-2021, 2019)²⁷. The aim is to transform the entire system for the benefit of all students and especially by empowering girls and women by setting three priority areas: the best data, the best policies, and the best practices²⁸. In the UNESCO Strategy for 2019-2025 in the context of the G7 conference in France, an Interactive Map (Her Atlas) was even adopted on the right of girls and women to education with the aim of informing about gender equality through education in the context of their education for the future²⁹.

CHAPTER 2 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION-MODELS-PROMOTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

So far in the first chapter, we have followed the reflection of inclusive education in International Acts, in this chapter, we will examine how it is reflected in practice and what it is about.

First, let us clarify that the concept of inclusive education is about giving all children the right to quality education and learning. Every child must have access to quality education regardless of who they are, where they come from and what are the family conditions in which they live, given that they all coexist in the same classroom, in the

²⁵ UNESCO and UIS, SDG4 Data Block Global Education Indicators & A quick Guide to Education Indicators for SDG4, 2018 και <http://uis.unesco.org/>.

²⁶ GEM: Global Educational Monitoring Report στο <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/>.

²⁷ ²⁷ From Access to empowerment UNESCO Strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019-2025 στο <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000369000>.

²⁸ UNESCO, Εκπαίδευση και Ισότητα φύλων στο <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-and-gender-equality>.

²⁹ UNESCO Interactive Atlas of girls' and women's right to education στο <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-launches-interactive-atlas-girls-and-womens-right-education>.

same schools.. Moreover, the framework of action to achieve Goal 4, based on the UN Agenda for the achievement of Sustainable Development, concerns the access of all students to a coherent, fair, and quality education by 2030. Ensuring an "equal opportunity, inclusive, high-quality education" and promoting "lifelong learning for all is a meaningful commitment, which promises to "leave no one behind", in order to achieve a "just, equal, tolerant, open and inclusive world, in which the needs of the less favored too".³⁰

But who does this implementation depend on? Its achievement is multifactorial, as a number of factors are involved and influential³¹. More specifically: α) Communities promote integration policies based on indigenous education. b) Activists and advocates who represent the rights of people who are basically "marginalized" or excluded in the field of education, such as people with disabilities, children, women, and national minorities. c) The promotion of quality education and the upgrading of educational systems in the North and South. d) The movement regarding Special Education and the adoption of the spirit of the Salamanca Declaration in dealing with students in an educational system that responds to a wide variety of diversity. e) International organizations and associations, coordinated by the UN, and UNESCO, develop methods and policies that promote inclusive education, in an effort to achieve the Global Sustainable Development Goals. f) The non-governmental organizations, movements, networks and campaigns resulting from a broad mobilization of civil society to involve as many stakeholders as possible, such as the Global Campaign for Education (GCE)³², which was founded in 1999 as an outgrowth of the World Forum in Dakar. g) In addition to all the above, the general situation prevailing in the world and the global challenges facing the North and the South and related to political

³⁰ GEM Report 2020 «Inclusion and education. When we say All ... we mean All», p. 12.

³¹ Stubbs, S. "Inclusive education. Where there are few resources". (Oslo, The Atlas Alliance Publ., 2008) in <https://atlas-alliansen.no/publication/inclusive-education-where-there-are-few-resources-2008-2/>.

³² Global Campaign for Education στο <https://campaignforeducation.org/en/who-we-are/about-gce/>.

stability, the spread of HRV/AIDS, social inclusion, epidemics such as COVID-19, as well as lessons learned and practices adopted in different cultures and settings contribute the most to the implementation of inclusive education.

2.1. DEFINING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

What is 'Inclusive Education'?

The term is a difficult term and first appeared in the English language³³. It is even remarkable that even today there is no widely accepted term for the translation of the English term³⁴ in Greek. In Greek, the most suitable is “education without exclusions”. It is a fact that it is translated variously, such as "integration" or "total integration", "inclusive education", "inclusive education" or "inclusion", "unified education" or "inclusive education". In the European Union, however, the term "Inclusive Education" has been established³⁵. In this work, the term "Inclusive education" will be used to present the models and ways of promoting it, and the term "Education without exclusions", given that the European Union's policy regarding its implementation is also presented in the next chapter.

At this point, before giving a clear definition of the term, it is important to differentiate it from some other similar terms with which it is confused; but presents differences³⁶. More specifically, the term "inclusive education" or "inclusive education" should not be confused with the concept of "special education"³⁷, although it was initially associated with it because of the two conferences in Zomtien and Salamanca, where the framework for the inclusion in schools of children with special needs. In the context of "special education" we have "children with special needs",

³³ Ainscow, M. “Towards inclusive schooling. British Journal of Special Education”, 24 (1), 1997, p. 3-6.

³⁴ Heissenbuttel, H. “Inclusive Culture in schools transforms communities”, 22 December 2014. YouTube: https://youtu.be/_gsbNR2plts.

³⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/inclusive-education_el

³⁶ Sidhu, R. K. «NextStep4U» (Dr Ramandeep Kaur Sidhu), 31.10.2017. Available in learningmaterialghg.blogspot.com: <https://learningmaterialghg.blogspot.com/2017/10/difference-between-special-integrated.html>.

³⁷ Ainscow, p. 3-6.

who need "special teachers" in "special schools"³⁸. Also, the term "inclusive education" is not the same, as it requires a change of the child in order for him to fit into the system, although the latter remains the same³⁹. In essence, the child succeeds in matching or failing. In "inclusive education" or "inclusive education", however, there is a flexible system where all students learn, as the system changes to suit children by valuing differences in age, gender, language, ethnic background, health, religion, or ability⁴⁰.

According to Booth, all children should enjoy equal opportunities in education and he even distinguishes 6 types of inclusion: 1. "Inclusion" as concern for students with disabilities or other students who have been categorized as having special needs. 2. "Inclusion" as a reaction/response/answer to disciplinary expulsions (mainly in secondary education). 3. "Inclusion" in relation to all groups which are vulnerable to exclusion (this includes many groups: minorities, children with a migrant background, children with a low socio-economic background, etc.). 4. "Inclusion" for the development of schools for all. 5. "Inclusion" for education for all. 6. "Inclusion" as a key approach to education and society. 7. "Inclusion" as increasing participation and reducing exclusion from curricula, societies and school cultures⁴¹.

It is important for Booth that the process of inclusion is a dynamic process, which evolves and is enriched through the tripartite: presence, participation, and successful learning. In essence, it is emphasized that the teacher should not only be interested in the school performance of his students; but should be interested in the marginalization or exclusion of his students from the school environment or even the extracurricular one and should focus on their participation and inclusion in the school environment. frame.

³⁸ Stubbs, p. 42.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 43.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 45.

⁴¹ Booth, T. "Improving schools, developing inclusion?" στο M. Ainscow, T. Booth, & A. Dyson, "Improving Schools, Developing Inclusion" (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 232.

UNESCO defines 'Inclusion' or 'Inclusive Education' as a process to address and respond to the diversity of needs of all children, young people, and adults by increasing their participation in nurturing learning and communities, and through reducing and eliminating exclusion in and from education. Its concept includes changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a shared vision to cover all children of the appropriate age range and the belief that it is the responsibility of the system to educate all children⁴².

It is, therefore, a process that concerns all children, and not a specific category only, and involves changes and modifications in the education system, in order to remove obstacles and achieve the participation and learning of all children in it⁴³. Inclusion as a process is about "a series of actions that embrace diversity while promoting a sense of 'belonging', a sense based on the belief that each person has their own value, their own potential and should be respected, regardless of his background, abilities or identity" ⁴⁴.

According to UNESCO, the main characteristics of the definition of the concept we are considering are the following⁴⁵: a) Inclusion is an evolutionary and not a static process, b) it concerns the identification and removal of obstacles, c) it aims at the attendance-participation and success of all students, d) 'Inclusion' refers to a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or degradation.

At this point, let us mention the groups of the student population that are more prone to exclusion and student leakage and to whom inclusive education is addressed: Girls,

⁴² UNESCO. «The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action On Special Needs Education», 1994 στο: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark/48223/pf0000098427>.

⁴³ Ainscow, M. "Developing inclusive education systems: What are the levers for change?", *Journal of Educational Change*, 6 (2), (2005) p. 109-124.

⁴⁴ UNESCO 2020 op. cit. p. 13.

⁴⁵ UNESCO. «Guidelines For Inclusion Ensuring Access to Education For All» (2006), available at:

http://www.ibe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/Guidelines_for_Inclusion_UNESCO_2006.pdf .

women, People with disabilities, Immigrants and Refugees, National minorities, and religious groups, Linguistic minorities, People with health shock, Nomads, Roma, Working children and children exposed on the street, Children who have suffered abuse and exclusion

Therefore, the concept of inclusive education implies by its definition the reformation of the education system first of all by adopting "inclusive" policies that are consistent with the needs of all learners, and also by changing the culture of classrooms, schools, regions, and universities. It is pointed out that this process requires the removal of obstacles, such as existing perceptions and values, lack of understanding, lack of necessary skills, limited resources, and an inappropriate educational organization⁴⁶. The key elements, however, for a successful change are clarity of purpose, realistic goals, the right motivation, financial resources, and evaluation, as, as Fullan points out, "The process of good change develops trust, relevance, and the desire for better results. Accountability and improvement are inextricably intertwined, but require great finesse."⁴⁷

Finally, they mention key measurable measures to achieve inclusive education: direct benefits to children, broad impact on policies, practices, ideas, and perceptions, increasing children's participation in the learning process, reducing discrimination (gender, disabilities, minorities, etc.), the strengthening of partnerships and collaborations in public and private bodies at the local and European or global level and the improved cooperation between ministries, at the national and local level of governments and at the level of local and regional communities, as well as the development and strengthening of the educational system with the use of technology and pedagogy for the inclusion of all learners⁴⁸.

2.2. MODELS AND APPROACHES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Fullan, M. "The New Meaning of Educational Change" (London: Cassell Educational Limited, 1999).

⁴⁸ UNESCO Guidelines ó.π., p. 19.

There are three models and approaches to inclusive education⁴⁹: Firstly, the *social model* which is the simplest and changes the system to suit the student and not the student to suit the system (difference with "Integration"). Secondly, the "*twin track approach*" emphasizes on the one hand the system and on the other hand the trainees, who are vulnerable to exclusion. In essence, it is a combination of system change and learner support. It is simple, a very useful for understanding the concept of "inclusion", but it does not give the answers to what focus should be on one or the other. And thirdly, the approach that is based on rights (*rights-based approach*) and focuses on education for all with main axes: a) The right of access to education, b) The right to quality education, and c) The right to respect in the educational environment (dignity, protection of individual rights, respect for language, religion, freedom from violence, etc.).

2.3. INCLUSION CIRCLES

The concept of "inclusive education" should be seen as a complex process of "inclusion", which takes place at different levels. More specifically, there are four cycles of inclusion in the literature⁵⁰: 1) Attending an inclusive school with specific educational policies and practices. 2) Inclusive education in the broadest sense as there are 3 forms of education (formal, non-formal, and informal) provided in a lifelong learning process involving beyond school, family, community, civil society, and global community. 3) An inclusive or "inclusive" society, which is also the ultimate goal of inclusive education, given that the individual's inclusion in education is a basic condition for their inclusion in the wider society. 4) Inclusive development refers not only to economic factors; but to deeper sustainability that can be achieved by involving and utilizing all the human potential of society through ensuring all human rights and resource sustainability in parallel with respect for the environment.

2.4. PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF EDUCATION WITHOUT EXCLUSIONS

"Inclusive education", therefore, presents three main characteristics: The first concerns its "nature": it is an unstable process, which is a daily effort to deal equally

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 41-42.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 49-50.

with the diversity of children with the burden falling on the teacher⁵¹. The second concerns all the children: it is addressed to all the children attending the school (not in groups) and in essence includes ways to properly deal with diversity⁵². The third concerns the changes and modifications in content, approaches, procedures, and strategies: that is, in the pedagogical approaches of the child's learning and participation, in order for the educational system to respond to the diversity of the children, but also in the restructuring and the measures that must be taken by schools to facilitate learning and achieve the removal of barriers⁵³.

What, then, is required to make 'inclusive education' a reality?

First of all, the education system needs to be made more "inclusive". Also, training and professional training of teachers is required, and finally, cultivation of an inclusive culture in schools, which is inspired by a spirit of democracy that provides equal and fair treatment of all learners⁵⁴.

Booth & Ainscow's 'framework of inclusion' is typical, which is a guide with guidelines on how schools can become more inclusive, a guidebook for all involved in the educational process, in order to achieve the creation of a "school for all"⁵⁵. This "Index for Inclusion" is based on three pillars:

1. Creating an "inclusive culture": it aims to create a single community through the interaction of principals, teachers, staff, students, and parents and the interconnection

⁵¹ Ainscow, M., & Sandill, A. «Developing inclusive education systems: the role of organizational cultures and leadership». *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14 (4), (4.7.2010), p. 401-416.

⁵² Hick, P., & Thomas, G. «Inclusion and diversity in education» (San Francisco: CA: Sage Publication, 2008).

⁵³ Schwab, S., & Hessels, M. «Achievement Goals, School Achievement, Self-Estimations of School Achievements and Calibration in students with a without special educational needs in inclusive education». (*Scandinavia Journal of Educational Research*, 59 (4), 2015, p. 461-477.

⁵⁴ Angelides, P., Stylianou, T., & Gibbs, P. «Preparing teachers for inclusive education». *Teaching and Teachers Education*, 22 (4), 2006, p. 513-522 και Heissenbuttel, op. cit.

⁵⁵ Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. «Index For Inclusion: Developing Learning And Participation». (Bristol, United Kingdom: CSIE Publications, 2011).

of the school's learners with society and the world in a climate of mutual dialogue. It also seeks to establish uniform values, such as respect for human rights, respect for the natural environment, democratic citizenship, non-violence, good self-image, and the preservation of children's health.

2. Formulating an "inclusive policy": aims to develop a school for all through a single policy by encouraging student and staff participation policies and by minimizing exclusion, while organizing support for diversity by coordinated work of all forms of support, with the need for professional development of the students and in general with the adoption of non-intimidating behaviors that combat racism, xenophobia by providing the required support and cooperation to the trainees, in order to carry out the learning process successfully..

3. Promotion of "inclusive policies": it aims at the one hand to adapt the curriculum to the needs of all students through the cultivation of respect for diversity as well as the adaptation of the program to the needs of students, and on the other hand to inclusive culture teaching practices and similar policies school. In essence, it promotes active, experiential, and participatory learning, with home learning and extracurricular activities, assessment based on promoting learning rather than admonishing. It is of interest to reward the efforts of all students and therefore they are encouraged.

2.5. THE INGREDIENTS OF AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

From all of the above, it became clear how important is the implementation of "inclusive education" or "inclusive education" through the understanding of this concept, its models and approaches, its origin, and its correlation with the institutional framework of human rights. However, in order for the "inclusive education" program to be realistic, sustainable, and effective it should contain three components⁵⁶.

These constituent parts of "inclusive education" are three and are very vividly likened by Stubbs, to a human being, consisting of the skeleton, a strong framework dealing with human rights and the practices and tools of the education system, the flesh,

⁵⁶ Stubbs, op. cit., p. 52-60.

which is its application in the local culture and context through community initiatives mainly, utilizing the forms of non-formal or informal learning, and the blood, i.e. the active, dynamic and effective participation with critical reflection of all relevant factors, activists, children mainly in an innovative and creative way.

Particularly, *the frame* includes a) Basic values and concepts, such as mutual respect, solidarity, tolerance, the feeling of "belonging", the possibility of developing skills and abilities, b) Basic principles, such as the right of everyone to education, the existence of the appropriate educational environment, the appropriate support, the holistic approach to the process of "inclusion", solving problems with the triangular cooperation of school, family and communities, c) Indicators of success through a holistic learning, participatory, with the preparation of the material, coordinated actions and consultations with "marginalized people".

The flesh contains a) The practical situation of the person regarding his level of work, the situation in which the marginalized find themselves and the way of dealing with those excluded by law, b) The available resources, i.e. people, financial and logistical infrastructure, knowledge and information with formal, informal or non-formal sources of learning, c) Cultural factors, such as the emphasis on local solidarity and a sense of social responsibility, or the level of poverty.

And finally, *"Life-giving" blood* includes a) Who will be involved, such as children from all walks of life, parents, teachers, managers, leaders, stakeholders, community members, professionals, non-governmental organizations, education, health, social welfare, labor professionals and especially the representatives of the people most prone to marginalization and social exclusion, as well as those involved administratively and financially in its management. b) In what way can he participate, primarily by showing a willingness to listen and put himself in the other's place, respecting his situation, developing knowledge and skills through participatory processes and the use of various types of techniques, such as painting, narrative techniques (storytelling), diagrams, role plays, theater techniques and modelling. c) When and in what, developing systems, processes, and indicators, collecting data, developing policies, identifying barriers to achieving "inclusion", promoting

indicators of success and its implementation at all levels through control, coordination, and monitoring⁵⁷.

CHAPTER 3 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The role of the European Union in the field of Education and Training is subsidiary and coordinating, as education policy is decided by the member states. The EU's complementary role is to facilitate communication, interaction, cooperation, and coordination of education systems to recognize and serve common goals and interests and to address common challenges such as population aging, competition between societies, the lack of skills, technological developments, dealing with crises (economic, health).

3.1. EUROPE 2020" STRATEGY

The EU's framework for education and training is the Europe 2020 Strategy, which underpins European policy in the decade 2010-2020, succeeding the Lisbon Strategy.

The new vision of the "Europe 2020" Strategy is determined by 3 priority areas, the achievement of "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth"⁵⁸. The concept of inclusive growth refers to the policies designed by the EU and the Member States in order to achieve social and geographical cohesion with high employment rates and to avoid the risk of marginalization and exclusion⁵⁹. It is typical that women, young people, the elderly, people with limited qualifications and low qualifications, as well as

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ European Commission, "Europe 2020 - Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth", COM(2010) 2020 final, Brussels, 3.3.2010, p. 10.

⁵⁹ Boutsiouki, S. "European Education Policy From the Lisbon Strategy to the "Europe 2020" Strategy", (Thessaloniki: Stamouli, 2017) p. 224.

immigrants, are presented as "vulnerable groups" and all these categories need specialized initiatives for their better integration into the professional and social space.

Based on the Council and Commission Report (2015) on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (EC 2020), Inclusive Education, equality, equity, non-discrimination and skills promotion related to citizenship were prioritized⁶⁰.

In addition, the challenges that determine the above second priority concerning "inclusive education" are recorded and it is established⁶¹: a) the high rate of inequality for the last 30 years and its connection with education; since the latter reproduces economic-social inequalities, b) the taking of measures by most member states for the access of disadvantaged students to education, c) the need to take measures to ensure the provision of education and training for all, with an emphasis on groups of disadvantaged people, such as learners with special needs, recently arrived immigrants, people from immigrant families, and Roma, d) tackling gender inequalities in education and training, which are due, among other things, to the perpetuation of stereotyping, bullying, harassment, and violence in the learning environment, e) the need for educational systems to create a learning environment, imbued with the values of inclusion, equality, equity, non-discrimination, and democratic participation in society, f) the necessity of creating open learning spaces, such as public libraries, open adult education centers, and open universities, as means of promoting social inclusion.

In addition, the importance of strengthening the role of education in promoting participation in society and the common values of freedom, tolerance, and non-discrimination, in strengthening social cohesion and supporting young people so that

⁶⁰ Council and Commission Report (2015) on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (EC 2020), 2015/ C417/04, 15.12.2015, pp. 26-27 at [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215\(02\)&from=EL](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215(02)&from=EL) .

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 28-29.

they become responsible, is highlighted. open-minded and active members of a multicultural society. The role of education in preventing and dealing with marginalization and radicalization is also emphasized as a key priority.

Finally, all four areas of good practices and measures financed by the Erasmus+ program are defined⁶²: 1) Ensuring that children and young people acquire social, political, and intercultural competencies through the promotion of democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and the fight against discrimination, as well as active participation in society. 2) The strengthening of critical thinking and familiarity with the means of communication. 3) The promotion of the education of disadvantaged children and young people. 4) The promotion of intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and other stakeholders.

Finally, with reference to the second priority which is "Inclusive Education", the Report details the specific issues that the member states choose to deal with in future work: 1) appropriately addressing the growing heterogeneity of learners and improving access to quality general education and inclusive training for all learners, including those from disadvantaged groups such as the disabled, newly arrived migrants, people from migrant families, and Roma, while combating discrimination, racism, segregation, bullying (including cyberbullying), violence and stereotyping. 2) combating inequalities in education and training and unequal opportunities between men and women and promoting more gender-balanced educational options. 3) facilitating the effective learning of the language or languages of education and work by immigrants through formal and non-formal learning. 4) the promotion of citizenship-related and intercultural and social competences mutual understanding, and mutual respect as well as the embracement of democratic values and fundamental rights at all levels of education and training. 5) the strengthening of critical thinking, as well as familiarity with IT and communication media.

3.2. EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

⁶² Ibid, p. 33.

At the European Summit held in Gothenburg, Sweden in November 2017 on the theme: "Education and Culture", the Commission's document entitled "Strengthening European identity through education and culture" was presented, leading to the adoption of the idea of the creation of the European Education Area, which was the vision of the European Commission, regarding the value of quality and inclusive education from pre-school age to achieve social cohesion, social mobility and fair society⁶³.

The aim of this vision is to create: "A Europe in which learning, study, and research should not be hindered by borders. A continent where staying in another Member State – to study, learn or work – is commonplace and where knowledge of two languages other than the mother tongue is the norm. A continent where people have a strong sense of their European identity and Europe's cultural heritage and diversity."⁶⁴.

It is worth noting that the basis of the European Education Charter is the common values of the member states of the European Union, as recorded in Article 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon, i.e. human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the state of law, respect for human rights and freedoms, even for persons belonging to minorities. It is also worth mentioning that within the four conditions set for achieving social cohesion is high quality and inclusive education and training at all levels. At the same time, it is pointed out that one of the 3 main objectives of the EEA is to support member states to improve inclusive lifelong education, through innovative education and training systems.

⁶³ European Committee of the Regions, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European, Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: "Strengthening European identity through education and culture. The European Commission's Contribution to the Gothenburg Leaders' Summit, 17 November 2017, COM(2017) 673 final, Brussels 14.11.2017.

⁶⁴ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European, Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, "Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies", COM/ 2018/268 final, Brussels 22.5.2018.

The importance of all the above initiatives in the context of EEA is: a) Investing in young people and their future, as young people have the opportunity to take a more active role in the project of European integration regardless of origin and social status. Building on previous actions, in particular the Youth Guarantee, the Youth Employment Initiative, the December 201 Investment in Youth initiative, the New Skills Agenda for Europe, the Upskilling Pathways initiative, and the European quality framework for apprenticeships. b) The participation of citizens in the cultural diversity and common heritage of Europe, which will contribute to the awareness of "belonging" and will facilitate a better understanding of the European project on their part, and c) A broader working vision for a European education area, which will help to promote mobility, remove barriers to mobility and cross-border cooperation and, building on previous initiatives, MS's effort to modernize and improve education systems and training.

In January 2018 the Commission under the EEA presented the first set of measures concerning: a) key competencies for lifelong learning, b) digital skills, and c) shared values and inclusive education⁶⁵.

3.3. EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

In December 2017 the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Council approved the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which consists of 20 guiding principles for a strong Europe, fair, inclusive, and full of opportunities. It contains three chapters⁶⁶. The Chapter I specifically includes the concept of "inclusive education", as it refers to four axes that are all inspired by the common component, inclusive inclusion. It is notable that the first axe is Education, training, and lifelong learning:

⁶⁵ European Education Area in <https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area>.

⁶⁶ Chapter I: Equality of opportunity and access to the labor market

Chapter II: Fair working conditions

Chapter III: Social protection and inclusion

"Every person has the right to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that will enable them to participate fully in society and successfully manage changes in the labor market."⁶⁷.

3.4. COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION TO PROMOTE COMMON VALUES, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF TEACHING

The Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching was proposed by the Commission and adopted by the Council in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure⁶⁸.

The recommendation aims to promote a sense of belonging — the transmission of shared values, the practical implementation of inclusive education, and teaching about Europe and its Member States to strengthen the sense of belonging in the school, the local community, the country, but also in the European family. The recommendation also aims to strengthen social cohesion, combat xenophobia, radicalization and divisive nationalism, and the spread of fake news.

It aims to achieve these goals in the following ways: the promotion of common values at all levels of education; promoting a less inclusive education; encouraging the European dimension of teaching while strengthening, at the same time, the capacity of national administrations in this field; offering a diverse range of support to teachers and educational institutions.

Ensuring effective equal access to quality inclusive education for all learners, including those from immigrant families, those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, those with special needs, and those with disabilities - in accordance with

⁶⁷ The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles in https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en.

⁶⁸ Council, Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching, 2018/C195/01, 7.6.2018.

the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - it is absolutely necessary to shape more cohesive societies.

In the context of this undertaking, the Member States can make use of the existing instruments of the Union, in particular the Erasmus+ program, the European Structural and Investment Funds, the Creative Europe program, the Europe for Citizens program, the rights, equality and citizenship program, the European Solidarity Corps and the Horizon 2020 program, as well as the guidance and expertise of the European Agency for Special Education and Inclusive Education.

With regard to the provision of inclusive education, it is suggested to:

1. promote inclusive education for all learners, in particular through a) the inclusion of all learners in quality education from pre-school age and throughout their lives, b) providing the necessary support to all learners according to their particular needs, including those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, those from immigrant families, those with special needs and the most talented learners; c) facilitating the transition between the various educational paths and levels and ensuring the provision of adequate educational guidance and career guidance.
2. to make effective use of the European Agency for Special Education and Inclusive Education, on a voluntary basis, in order to implement and monitor the successful implementation of inclusive approaches in their educational systems.

As implementing measures the council recommends: a) review and, where necessary, improve existing policies and practices in the field of education, training and non-formal learning, with a view to responding to these recommendations; b) identify needs and enhance public participation, using existing evidence or, where appropriate, collecting new evidence, in order to improve evidence-based policy-making on social and citizenship dimensions in the field of education and training, c) to continue cooperation based on EU strategic cooperation frameworks in the fields of education and training, youth, sport and culture, through peer to peer learning and mentoring and the exchange of good practice with a view to the promotion of common values, d) make effective use of EU financial instruments, in particular the "Erasmus+" program, the European Structural and Investment Funds, the "Creative Europe" program, the

"Europe for Citizens" program, the "Rights, Equality and Citizenship" program and the "Horizon 2020" program, in order to implement the aforementioned recommendations.

3.5. THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Education is monitored in the EU through the European Semester process⁶⁹ and the Education and Training Monitoring Report. This report is very important as it also provides evidence of the role of education in combating inequalities and promoting social inclusion. More specifically, the Report gathers data on the evolution of national education and training systems in the European Union⁷⁰:

- a) The report measures the progress of countries towards achieving the objectives of the strategic framework Education and Training 2020 (EC 2020) for European cooperation in the specific sectors. It also provides information on measures taken to address education-related issues within the European Semester process.
- b) The monitoring report makes proposals for policy reforms that will make national education and training systems better responsive to the needs of society and the labor market.
- c) The report helps identify areas where EU funding for education, training and skills should be directed through the next long-term EU budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).
- d) The follow-up report consists of a cross-country comparative presentation and 27 detailed reports per country.

⁶⁹ The European Semester provides the framework for coordinating economic policies across the European Union. It enables EU countries to discuss their economic and fiscal planning and monitor progress at specific times during the year. https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester_en

⁷⁰ Education Training Monitor in <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about-eea/education-and-training-monitor> .

Indeed, the 2020 Report was presented on November 12, 2020 by the Commissioner, Marija Gabriel, at the DigEduHack Conference⁷¹. According to her the latest report of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training – EC 2020 finds that European countries have made significant progress in expanding participation in education. Moreover, the main theme of the 2020 monitoring report is a digital education and digital skills. The effects of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic and distance education are examined.

- Around 20% of 15-year-old pupils across Europe are still at risk of educational poverty, as they do not have basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics or sufficient knowledge in science.
- The 2020 education and training monitoring report publications (EU and country reports, executive summary, EU factsheet, EU factsheets, EU benchmarks brochure, customized Eurostat datasets, maps and charts) are on the website of the Publications Office of the European Union.

B. The Commission has undertaken the establishment of an "ET 2020" working group on promoting shared values and inclusive education; this group has published a collection of good practices in this area, accessible on Yammer, an initiative to harness positive 'role models' to promote social inclusion and prevent exclusion and violent radicalization among young people, a toolkit for those working with young people at risk of marginalization, the European Prize for Social Inclusion through Sport⁷².

In particular, the Commission supports and promotes the following actions: a) Expansion of the European toolbox for schools, which is an online platform for schools and teachers. This toolkit contains examples of good practices and tools for fostering collaboration in schools to improve inclusion and provide equal

⁷¹ DigiEduHack 2020. "Together we redefine learning!", <https://dev.digieduhack.com/en/>.

⁷² European Commission. Education and training "Inclusive education" at <https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/inclusive-education>.

opportunities. b) Expansion of the e-Twinning online platform, which aims to connect teachers and schools across Europe, as well as support teacher training courses in citizenship education. c) Incentivizing higher education institutions to reward volunteering and develop curricula that combine academic knowledge and active citizenship. d) Operation of the European Solidarity Corps, an EU initiative that provides opportunities for those young people who wish to volunteer or work, in their country or abroad, on projects beneficial to the community or the region. e) further development of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiative, which enables young people from Europe and the Southern Mediterranean to participate in meaningful intercultural activities via the Internet, in the context of formal or non-formal education.

Finally, the Erasmus+ program, as can be seen from the above, supports initiatives and activities with the aim of developing innovative policies and practices, which prioritize social inclusion.

3.6. EU COUNCIL DECISION ON EDUCATION 2021-2030

Finally, in order to have a collective view up-to-date on the EU policy regarding inclusive education, it is worth referring to the EU Council Decision on Education 2021-2030⁷³. More specifically,

1. Until 2030 the EU's main political role is to promote VET as a focal point in the new Strategy for European Education and Training
2. On the road to the achievement of the EHR, assistance should be given to the Member States for a) personal, social, and professional development of all through democratic values, equality, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue, b) sustainable economic prosperity with the green and digital transition, c) European cooperation for the development of a strategic framework for education as a holistic, inclusive, and life-long educational process utilizing all forms of education (formal, non-formal, informal) at all levels and in digital environments, d) green and

⁷³ Council of the EU, Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021- 2030), 6289/1/21 REV 1, Brussels 19.2.2021.

digital transition, e) turning the EU into an attractive destination and partner to strengthen its geopolitical position by developing partnerships and in fact within the framework of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, f) effective and sufficient investment in education to promote equity and inclusion in education systems and improve outcomes to achieve sustainable development and sustainable societies, g) periodic monitoring of progress with indicators and targets (Indicators, EU level targets).

It is very important that one of the five priorities, and indeed the first one is to improve equality, quality, inclusion, and success for all in education and training. The cooperation of the EU with UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is recommended, while 2 work periods 2021-2025 and 2026-2030 are defined as working groups.

CONCLUSIONS

The concept of "Inclusive Education" is not a separate education. It is part of a wider plan aimed at the wider creation of an inclusive society and is based on human rights education, governed by the cultivation of respect for diversity and the development of cooperation to avoid discrimination. It is a complex and long-term process, which involves all those involved in the educational process, stakeholders, and local and international civil society with the aim of transforming the educational system into a more inclusive one, which provides equal opportunities to learn using all forms and modes of education. It is very important that its achievement is a key priority in the context of the EU, as it is part of the democratization of education policies and systems, it is financed by its mechanisms and the initiatives developed in collaboration with other international organizations are very important and interesting, such as UNESCO.

In conclusion, "Education is a Right, not a privilege for a few" as Ob. Geary had stated, and at the same time "Inclusive education and quality education are the foundation for dynamic and equal societies", as Desmond Tutu had claimed.

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