

CHAPTER 2

REGIONAL CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION

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1 INTRODUCTION

According to the Universal Declaration of Human rights (UDHR), article 26, everyone has the right to education. It further states that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups” (UDHR). In a rapidly developing world, marked by globalization and diversity, the issue of inclusion and education has become one of the focal points of research, innovation and practice. In fact, according to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring report, equity and inclusion have become the heart of the 2030 Agenda. However, unequal distribution of resources is still prevalent, success in achieving these goals has thus far been limited and colored with challenges. Some of these challenges stem from common inequality characteristics, which include but are not limited to disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, gender, and religion. Others are related to geographic and economic contexts and for example poverty, all of which have been enhanced by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This chapter will look into inclusive education (IE), seen as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (UNESCO 2017). It will focus on several of the main challenges that are prevalent in Europe, namely migration, poverty, giftedness, special needs and disability and the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to present and address some of these challenges, the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘equity’ must be clearly defined by referring to the UNESCO Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education (UNESCO, 2017):

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.

2 REGIONAL CHALLENGES TO INCLUSION AND EDUCATION

2.1 Migration

Migration has been prevalent in Europe over the recent years. Security conflicts and economic crisis have forced people to relocate in search for a new life. Some end up as asylum seekers and/or in refugee camps. Others are driven by global mobility and find work opportunities and integrate into the community. Entire families that come from other cultures, races, backgrounds and religious beliefs now live in Europe and their children study in the local schools. However, they all face challenges not only getting used to the new environment, but also being fully included in the education process. In fact, migration and all of its related aspects is deemed to be one of the highest risk factors in terms of exclusion. This produces new challenges for teaching, but also for assessment on which cultural biases may have far-reaching consequences for the students’ further careers in education, occupation and life. (Altrichter, 2020).

According to reports by UNICEF and UNESCO, the statistics related to education and migration are quite worrisome:

- 28 million children were homeless due to conflict in 2016,
- In 2017, 61% of refugee children were enrolled in primary school,
- In the same year, only 23% of refugee students enrolled in secondary schools.

According to the Green Paper, if education systems do not act to integrate migrants, they have the potential to exacerbate ethnic divisions, segregation and to contribute to the socioeconomic disadvantage experienced by many migrant groups. (Rashid, Tikly 2010). This calls for an update of the current standardized model of schooling and examination, as the goal of equity is not always achieved and because according to researchers the grades of students are correlated to categories of social background (Alcott 2017). This problem is further enhanced by the fact that many teachers do not have enough intercultural competence to address 'cultural' differences (Altrichter, 2020).

When looking more in depth, there are several leading risk factors/challenges related to inclusion in education, underpinned by migration.

2.1.1. Language barriers

The language barrier is considered one of the most prevailing challenges to IE. Studies show, that because students in the multicultural classroom are often learning content in a second language, this will badly affect the students' achievement if they do not have language proficiency (Cooper, Hemes & Ho, 2004) (Alsubaie, 2015). Language deficiencies are said to be a barrier in all levels of education. The inability to understand the material, and the need for repetition can be frustrating for the students themselves, the teacher, as well as the rest of the classroom. Furthermore, it is said to lead to diminished self-confidence, additional time spent after school hours to avoid falling behind on the material, and often to social struggles and exclusion. For instance, in a Belgium study sample, non-native students were at a higher risk of being victimised, especially in schools where they constituted a minority (Higgen, Mo'sko 2020).

Furthermore, the language barrier can affect the parent-teacher communication, which can be crucial for the child's progress and inclusion. According to research, parents often avoid going to the school, attend teacher-parent conferences or read/answer written communication from the school because of their knowledge level of the language. Even if family members know enough to understand written communications, their confidence to communicate their own thoughts, concerns, and suggestions could be limited. In many cases, the lack of translators who speak their native language leads to the need for the children to do the translations, which leads to miscommunication or lack thereof.

2.1.2. Culture

Culture includes everything that makes one group or community within a society distinctive from another. (Alsubaie, 2015).

When considering culture and IE, the related challenges are multifaceted. In terms of communication, what needs to be acknowledged is that there are significant variations between cultures in communication or interpersonal contacts of students in the multicultural classroom because they have a different style of nonverbal communication. This can lead to misunderstandings both between the teacher and the students, and among classmates. (Bohm, Davis, Meares & Pearce, 2002) (Alsubaie, 2015). Often, this can be a cause of exclusion, mockery, bullying from the peers, and frustration and confusion on the side of the teacher.

In most schools, specific cultural characteristics and diversities are not being addressed on regular basis and are often not presented in the curriculum. Hence, for many migrant students, they can represent their culture only on one-off projects or presentations, often leading to strengthening stereotypes, which may cause a feeling of not belonging and misrepresentation. This is formalized by researchers, who claim that from a broader perspective, for many, insecurities concerning their *social affiliation* also arise, where the new student, often new to the country as well, does not feel at home neither in his/her home or in the new environment. This can lead to alienation both in educational and social terms and in some cases, may lead to depression.

Both cultural and linguistic challenges that families face to communicate with the teacher and the school are often not considered. In the previous subsection, language was discussed as a challenge. However, the cultural aspect is multifaceted. There may be certain assumptions families have about communicated with schools based on their previous experiences or cultural values. In some countries, the teacher is highly respected and he/she should not be questioned about the used methods. In addition

to that, there is a high diversity in terms of how minority families are involved in the children's education, which needs to be taken into consideration and the right approach has to be implemented.

2.1.3. Mental health

The mental health of the student directly affects his/her performance. When looking at migration and mental health, what needs to be addressed is the stress that some of the children go through. Fleeing a country due to security risks and seeking asylum, leaving their home behind has long-term effects on the mental state of the child. According to research conducted with teachers, the strain caused by the experiences they have had in their home country or during their flight is obvious. If children experienced traumatic situations it can lead to difficulties in concentrating and in some cases even result in posttraumatic stress disorder. (Higgen & Mo'sko 2020). This in turn can lead to low educational performance, which is heightened by the previously indicated potential language barriers and having difficulty getting adjusted to the new environment. Feeling like an outcast, in emotional and mental distress unequivocally hinders opportunities for IE, as well as social inclusion. Furthermore, in some instances, children from troubled countries might not have learned how to solve conflicts without violence. (Higgen & Mo'sko 2020) Hence, when faced with a troubling situation, bullying or mistreatment, they may resort to anti-social and even aggressive behavior. This leads to yet another strain on the road to inclusion.

2.1.4. Race, gender and religion

At the center of effective teaching in a multicultural classroom is in fact racial awareness, where recognition of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in the classroom informs teaching strategies (Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning). A body of research confirms the ways that micro-aggressions in particular can affect academic performance (Sue, 2013), and instructors should consider ways to develop an inclusive class climate that respects all persons in the classroom (Poorvu Center).

Race is one of the predominant bases for discrimination. Migrant students that also have a different racial or ethnic background than the prevalent group in the class or school, are often excluded or become a target of bullying. This can lead to depression, conflicts, exclusion and even physical abuse all of which have a comprehensive negative impact on the child.

In terms of religion, it is also one of the most mentioned reasons for barriers between children and also a factor that can affect inclusion in education. Diverging public holidays or values concerning relationships for example, can cause conflicts and insults. (Higgen & Mo'sko 2020). The lack of understanding of practices and their acceptance, can lead to discrimination and exclusion from the educational process and can affect social relationships at the school. What is important to note in relation to that, is the issue of gender and the gap that still exists in regards to access, learning achievement and continuation in education. The evidence is that education systems often perpetuate rather than challenge gender inequalities (UNGEI, 2012). According to statistics, girls worldwide are more likely to have limited access to education than boys. This is due to, among others, both cultural and religious attitudes towards the gender roles, especially in developing countries. However, some migrant families after coming to Europe may hold back their daughters from school based on these attitudes or sometimes even fear about the new different environment. In some countries, due to culture or religion, boys and girls study separately especially after a certain age, however this is rarely the case in Europe, unless specialized schools are considered. This limits the opportunities of girls to access IE and it is a challenge that is difficult to overcome.

2.1.5. Teachers' preparedness

The diversity and inclusion strategy of the European Commission sets a target for the accepting of diversity, rejects discrimination and urges towards securing equal opportunities (Figure1) However, despite being a multicultural society and having a substantial track record in inclusive education and diversity, it seems that there are still some difficulties in transferring that into the classroom (Carballo, 2009), and teachers are and can be the real change actors.



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CHARTER

This Charter is a commitment in favour of diversity and inclusion among the Commission staff, which must benefit from equal treatment and opportunities, irrespective of any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation. The Commission commits to:

1. Implement a human resources policy where diversity is regarded as a source of enrichment, innovation and creativity and where inclusion is promoted by managers and all staff, through policies improving work-life balance and flexible working arrangements for both women and men, through appropriate support, particularly for the underrepresented sex, and through the implementation of the obligations enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
2. Secure equal opportunities at every step of the career, through selection and recruitment procedures and mobility. Selection and recruitment must always be made on the basis of merit, irrespective of any other factors. The process must be devoid of bias while respecting the specific measures and rules so as to redress the gender imbalance at AST/SC level and to achieve the goal of at least 40% female representation in senior and middle management within the present mandate of the Commission.
3. Exclude any kind of discrimination, and promote the enforcement of this principle at every level of the Commission, in line with the Staff Regulations. There can be no place for divisive or opaque behaviours, nor any form of bullying or harassment.
4. Heighten managers' and Human Resource services' awareness of any barriers that can prevent individuals from succeeding. Organise special events and training to fight against stereotypes and to foster inclusion as a corporate culture built on greater diversity and inclusion.
5. Communicate widely and to each colleague the commitment to implement a diversity and inclusion policy, and deliver regular and detailed follow-ups of the results.

This charter is part of the Diversity and Inclusion strategy of the European Commission, adopted on 19 July 2017.

Figure 1. Diversity and inclusion strategy of the European Commission (2017)

Many critical theorists argue that teaching is a political act. The politics of teaching involves the exercise of critical consciousness in a decision-making process regarding what to teach and how to teach (Freire, 1995; Hooks, 1994; McLaren 2003).

Since teachers are part of our society, they inevitably have stereotypes and prejudices, some of which they may not even realize or acknowledge. These could involve racial discrimination, gender roles, and cultural stereotypes among others. According to research, teachers who have prejudices related to diversity, have more difficulty teaching a multicultural classroom effectively or providing IE. Flores and Smith suggest that teachers need to go through the difficult process of reflecting their own feelings and attitudes, in order to provide children with an education that is free from prejudice (Higgen, & Mo'sko 2020). It is important that teachers are also aware that the so-called colorblind perspective, which views cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds as irrelevant, and assumes that treating all individuals the same will erase issues of inequity and injustice (Guo & Jamal, 2006) is not the solution. More often than not, it leads to a widened gap and further away from actual inclusion.

In fact, another challenge, and probably the most prevalent, that they face that also underpins the aforementioned is the lack of resources and training to work effectively in a diverse classroom and provide IE. In many cases, financial restrictions make it difficult to ensure the best environment for inclusion. However, research shows that teachers acknowledge the challenges that a diverse classroom presents, and respectively their need to obtain tools and training to work effectively (Carballo, 2009). It is important to note that there is a gap between the initial training that future teachers are provided, and the one necessary for addressing said challenges and the constantly developing environment. Furthermore, teachers need to adjust their teaching style when they are confronted with a diverse classroom, as in some instances they are expected to follow the curriculum while simultaneously teaching a new language to some students. According to interviews conducted with teachers, this, combined with the need for extra time to be provided to some of the new migrant students while the rest work independently, repeating the same information or having to explain it in different ways, can be perceived by the child's peers as "special treatment" and become a cause for teasing or bullying. Overall, there is a delicate balance that needs to be maintained.

2.2. Disabilities

According to the World Health Organization, at least one out of ten people in the world has a disability. Disability is not something that you are necessarily born with. A disability can be acquired over the course of one's life.

Definitions of disability vary a lot not only from country to country, but also within the different groups, but if we need to select and provide one simple and easy to understand definition, it would be that a disability is a *physical, mental, or psychological condition that limits a person's activities*.

There are no boundaries to disability. It affects children and adults regardless of their social, ethnic, economic status or geographic situation. Having said that, we need to take into consideration the fact that poverty does make people particularly vulnerable, because conditions, occurring with greater frequency in poorer countries, such as malnutrition, lack of or poor health care, the higher probability of accidents in risky working environments or the lack of early detection of illnesses and abnormalities are among the main causes, standing behind disabilities.

Disabilities can impose numerous challenges before a productive and satisfactory life. For people with disabilities, it is frequently hard to access various health services, employment and education, due to obstacles in the environment as well as due to the attitudes of other people.

The social model of disability has been created as an attempt to change the position of people with disabilities and change the perspective of both society and groups with disabilities towards disabilities. According to the social model, people with disabilities are seen as being disabled not by their impairments (e.g., deafness or mental illness) but by failure of society to account for their needs (Toolkit on disability for AFRICA INCLUSIVE EDUCATION). The understanding that being disabled is part of the normal spectrum of human life and society must expect disabled people to be there and include them, is an understanding, which also InCrea+ adheres to and is attempting to contribute to via artistic methods in school education. The medical model cannot provide disabled people with the access to the full range of educational, employment, social and other opportunities as well as to equal lives.

Considering that adequate education is the first step, which needs to be secured in order for one's chances for an equal and fulfilling life to be improved, here we will pay special attention to the provision of inclusion in quality school education. The first human rights treaty to call for such education is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, fixing the requirements in its Article 24: Education.

2.2.1. Disabilities, special education and IE

In the not-so-distant past, education of children with disabilities was implemented in special schools, which, regardless of the potential benefits, usually wore and still wear (in the places where they exist) an aura of stigma and isolation, as well as incur higher costs for the community. General education schools are cheaper and locally available. Preparing them for provision of inclusive education is however a complicated undertaking.

What inclusive education basically means is educating students with special educational needs in regular educational settings. Inclusive education is certainly not only limited to placement. It actually means facilitating the education of these students with a complex package of provisions, which include curriculum adaptation, adapted teaching methods, modified assessment techniques, and accessibility arrangements. In short, inclusive education is a multi-component strategy (Suleymanov, 2015),

To go a bit further, when speaking of inclusive education (IE) of children with disabilities, the UNESCO policy guidelines justify three main reasons in support of IE. According to the first justification IE aims at developing ways of teaching that respond to different needs so that all children can take advantage of the classroom process. The second social justification states that IE is an excellent instrument for changing attitudes toward diversity and forming the basis of a non-discriminatory and non-biased society. The third economic justification states that IE is cost-effective – it is cheaper to establish and maintain schools that educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of schools specializing in different groups of children (UNESCO, 2009).

The international principles of inclusive education are defined in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994):

1. The guiding principle that informs this Framework is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions;

2. Special needs education incorporates the proven principles of sound pedagogy from which all children may benefit;
3. The fundamental principal of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have;
4. Within inclusive schools, children with special educational needs should receive whatever extra support they may require to ensure their effective education;
5. Special attention should be paid to the needs of children and youth with severe or multiple disabilities;
6. Curricula should be adapted to children's needs, not viceversa;
7. Children with special needs should receive additional instructional support in the context of the regular curriculum, not a different curriculum.

2.2.2. *Benefits of inclusive education*

The benefits of inclusive education go far beyond the academic aspects, the opinions on which, in certain geographical locations, are actually quite controversial. The benefits, on which experts are unanimous, cover the *social benefits*, because learning in a general environment gives children with disabilities the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of peers and develop relationships with them. This allows them to improve their social skills and their behavior by having appropriate examples in the general education classroom. These examples and the careful behavioral corrections, which teachers and fellow students are encouraged to undertake, lead to social acceptability, which is one of the main advantages of IE.

Another benefit of IE is the overcoming of social prejudice. Exposure to inclusive settings leads students in general to obtain a better understanding of various aspects of life and hence a more tolerant attitude and acceptance of individual differences.

2.2.3. *Obstacles*

Inclusive education faces numerous **obstacles**. One of the main obstacles on the list is the *lack of proper teacher training*. Often teachers feel they are not prepared for teaching in an inclusive setting because appropriate training or professional development have not been delivered.

This is one of the reasons why many students with disabilities as well as their parents preferred special education programs over inadequately delivered inclusive programs.

Even if exposure of students with disabilities to age-appropriate curriculum materials may seem very beneficial, if these materials are not properly modified according to their needs, these students would not be able to keep pace with all the others and be successful. In contrast with this, if content is oversimplified in order to address the needs of students with disabilities, this will place average and high achieving students at a disadvantage.

Among the obstacles we can also list some of the most obvious – the *lack of physical accessibility* in all places where inclusive education is taking place. Numerous are the cases where schools are prepared with a ramp that can lead a child in a wheelchair in the school, but the accessibility ends there, i.e., all the remaining floors and school areas are out of reach.

Another obstacle or barrier to IE are the so-called *attitudinal barriers*. Negative attitudes and harmful beliefs place significant barriers before the education of persons with disabilities. There are cases in which children with disabilities are not allowed to attend school due to wrong beliefs on the side of school management and society. We are not speaking of cases where parents are trying to hide a certain medical condition, which imposes a real threat to both the affected child and the people around it in the school. The attitudinal barrier is related to the fact that according to certain groups children with disabilities are considered incapable of participating in education and any such ambition on the part of the child or its parents may face not only rejection, but also violence, abuse or social isolation.

We need to mention another type of barrier to IE – the *economic ones*. Families with children with disabilities have higher costs compared with other families. The constant need for rehabilitation, for coverage of certain medical services, for special treatments slim down the family budgets. All school fees that need to be paid by the families impose an additional burden. This is particularly relevant for families who are struggling financially and even in affluent countries this is often the case, considering

that one of the parents, usually the mother, does not pursue a paid career because of the need to provide support and care at home.

2.2.4. Overcoming the challenges

Considering the benefits of IE, educators and education specialists or programmers should focus on implementing strategies for **overcoming the challenges and obstacles**.

Before we even dip a toe into the educational aspects of IE, we can consider several simple steps a teacher can take in order to give IE a chance. The first thing would be to *place the students with disabilities adequately within the classroom*, setting them up in the front, accompanied on the desk or in the row by students without disabilities.

The teacher should also never forget how important *equal treatment* is to the social atmosphere in the class. If students with disabilities sense that the disabled student is given greater privileges and is not corrected when he/she misbehaves or fails to deliver, they will either turn upon them or avoid any relationships.

The process of inclusive education of a student with disabilities should be laid down in the form of an *individual education plan*, elaborated by teachers, educational experts, parents and the students themselves. The plan should include information on what is necessary in order for the disability-caused needs to be met in order for general education to be effective. Those involved in writing this plan should meet regularly to check whether the progress corresponds to what is envisaged.

The plan needs to include a statement of measurable goals, a strategy for the child's participation, a statement of the child's progress, guidelines for involving the parents and keeping them informed and updated about the progress, achieved throughout the year.

Considering that usually teacher with inclusive classes usually do not have third party support, provided by another teacher or external expert, for the sake of managing the classroom and making cohesion possible, he/she can create a *circle of friends* around the child or children with disabilities. This would make it possible for the child to get help even when the teacher is paying attention to a different group of students. The circle of friends could comprise of peers who do well in school and live near the child with disabilities. The members of this circle volunteer to help with assignments, thus helping the disabled child to make academic progress, but also breaking down the psychological and attitudinal barriers. The involvement of parents and community in this process is another must when we speak of overcoming attitudinal barriers, because the community would gradually accept the normality of both the disability and the fact that it is a part of the life of the community. Organizing training or info seminars for member of the community for explaining the various disabilities and the abilities and potential that go together with those add another step in the right direction for inclusive education.

Another effective idea for making inclusive education possible is the adoption and application of the so called *universal design for learning (UDL)*, which represents a framework that addresses both the physical aspects of the learning environment and the academic ones, meaning that it aims at arranging the classroom settings to be usable by all students without modifying and applying special design (thus taking care also of the social aspect of the classroom, where all students would feel comfortable) and at the same time catering for the instructional environments, which becomes flexible, providing curricula, which do not follow the "one-fits-all" approach. As far as the instructional component is concerned, the UDL adheres to three principles, namely: provide multiple means of representation (the "what" of learning); provide multiple means of action and expression (the "how" of learning); provide multiple means of engagement (the "why" of learning). (Suleymanov, 2015)

Considering that we already delved into the instructional aspects of IE, we need to mention that in order to make IE work, all teachers should be receiving training and it should be covering aspects enabling successful inclusion and gradual building up of skills and competences, as well as information on policies and strategies to promote the right of persons with disabilities to participate in the educational process at all levels. This knowledge and awareness would enable teachers to feel less powerless and inadequate when they need to adapt the educational environment to meet a range of learning requirements. Such training may cover utilization of accessible technology, where such is available, adaptations to the curriculum, ensuring physical accessibility (e.g., via UDL), parental involvement as well, because if the parents of both the children with and without disabilities are onboard, the chances of IE being effective are much higher. Involvement of parents of children without disabilities would be crucial for overcoming the attitudinal barrier, while involvement of parents of children with disabilities, who are in fact its first educators, can be crucial for overcoming isolation, as well as for filling in

knowledge gaps, related to their children’s conditions, interests and abilities, which the teachers would have no alternative way to obtain.

Teacher training would also necessarily include knowledge on how to work with students with mental issues and particularly those who demonstrate externalizing behavior, which could be extremely disruptive to the educational process and to the class atmosphere. Teachers should be aware also of the perils of withdrawing students, who bring no havoc to the classroom, but fall into isolation, lack an environment of friends and are therefore in danger of unlocking deeper long-term issues with unpredictable outcomes. A teacher with included student/s with mental health issues should rely on support from additional staff members and/or should form a circle of friends around the affected child or young person, ready to distract him/her from the disrupting behavior, provide support, mediate conflicts and lower the general distress level (Higgen & MoĚsko, 2020).

External to the power of the teachers remains solving the economic issues. The decisions to lower school fees and lift the financial burden on families with children with disabilities lie either with the school administrations, when we speak of private educational institutions, or with political decisions, when we speak of municipal and state schools.

One of the best ways to support IE would be if it is also inclusive in the educator domain, which means guaranteeing that persons with disabilities can become teachers. This would not only bring in specialist skills and understanding but can also make a strong contribution to reducing discrimination and giving all children role models of inclusion.

The simple placement of students with disabilities in the same classroom together with peers without disabilities is perfectly inadequate. All classroom members need to be engaged in meaningful learning and should be in this process together – pulling children out of the common classroom for additional instruction should be brought to a minimum and should not be the alternative. All students learn better if teaching is tailored to their abilities, interests and differences. It is the educators’ job to ensure that all students are receiving the attention and support they need in order to be successful. This would provide them with an equal and appropriate education. The question for education today and for the future must not be "should schools implement inclusive education?" it ought to be "how do schools implement inclusive education and make it successful?" (McMillan, 2008).

2.3. Poverty, financial challenges and digitalization

Another critical challenge to both access to and inclusion in education is poverty. Poverty is intrinsically linked to a wide variety of issues that either directly or indirectly affect education and related achievements - hunger, lack of home/shelter, access to medical care, security and many others.

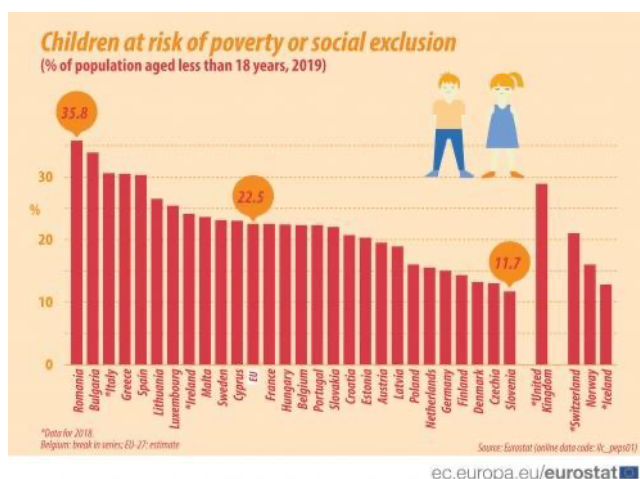


Figure 2. European data on risks for poverty https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20an%20estimated%2022.5,aged%2065%20years%20and%20over.

The official poverty line is 1.25 USD per day. According to Pritchett (2006), the idea was to make this lower level so low that it would be impossible to argue or disagree about the financial status of anyone living on such an amount. (Armstrong, 2009) However, in Europe, people may live on more per day and

still be considered poor. Statistics show quite worrisome figures in relation to children at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

There are several critical effects of poverty that have been selected to be discussed in this chapter. Taking the top to bottom approach, it is important to consider the fact that schools themselves face financial challenges that hinder their capacity to provide inclusive education.

As mentioned in the previous section, investments in school buildings' renovations and adaptations that ensure accessibility for children with physical disabilities are often limited or non-existent. Elevators, railings, handicapped bathrooms are often too expensive for the school, especially in poorer and more remote areas, which directly takes away the possibility for such children to have access to education at that particular institution.

In cases of some SEM, the environment can have either a positive and negative effect on their well-being, ability to focus, etc. Adaptations to the school rooms, class size and additional personnel also require funding that is often insufficient, hence inclusion of those students can rarely be fully achieved. School personnel are facing many challenges in their efforts to serve diverse families and children with disabilities. Inadequate human and fiscal capacity are usually driving factors for this issue. There have been a large of number of cases reported where a child in a wheelchair or with SEM does not have the ability to receive education at a certain educational institution, so they have to be home-schooled (the rate is especially high in remote areas), with different degrees of success.

2.3.1. Poverty and low academic achievement

According to a study conducted on special education, poverty alone can cause low academic achievement. Poverty, along with cultural and linguistic differences, tends to lower academic achievement and result in high dropout rates (Enwefa, Enwefa, & Jennings, 2006). According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018), 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.

Parents from low-income backgrounds may also affect the inclusion of their children in the education process. More often than not, they lack the availability, confidence or capacity to both engage in their children's studies and developing networks in the community. (Peters, 2007, cited in Sime, 2014). Parents sometimes feel inadequate in their knowledge to help their children with their homework or on matters related to higher education (Koshy et. al, 2013). This in turn affects the confidence and the preparedness of students to reach higher and achieve more at school.

In addition to that poverty presents a number of other challenges. The provision of food and the cost related to that can be a burden for some parents, thus not ensuring adequate nutrition for the students, which according to studies negatively affects both health and performance.

2.3.2. Education related expenses that present a challenge for low-income families

Furthermore, although education is free, there are a number of expenses that need to be covered by the family.

- Textbooks and other materials: for many parents that are poor or even living under the poverty line, acquiring textbooks and all other necessary materials for their children can be a struggle, especially for higher grades. Even though in some countries, or communities, exchanges or hand-me-down books are available, this is not the case for all.
- Clothing: there are schools that require uniforms (which are paid), but in most choice of clothing is up to the student. For poor families, this is another expense, often put at the back of the priority list. Studies have shown that the way a child dresses may lead to his/her exclusion from the social network at school and even bullying. In some severe cases, the latter has caused dropouts.
- Transportation: Especially in more remote areas, schools can be very far from the place of living of some children. Transportation, for example a school bus, is rarely available. Due to the low income of the parents, children may not be able to have physical access to the school.
- Digitalization: In an ever-changing world, we see the fast development of technologies and their integration in education. More and more we can see need for the use of internet, computers, application and so on. This digitalization in education has been more and more prevalent, and even more so during the Covid-19 pandemic, which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. However, it is important to note that poor or low-income families may not have access

to the technology tools, stable internet connection, etc. to ensure the inclusion of their child in the education process.

All of these factors can lead directly to exclusion from education. The risks related to poverty and limitations or overall lack of IE are complex, linked to a number of social constructs, fiscal barriers and are difficult to overcome.

2.4. Giftedness

Each school year begins with planning and organizing. Teachers, parents and students will all make a plan and try to estimate how the school years is about to progress. There is however one group of students who will probably attract less attention than usual and these are the gifted learners. Those who are talented, creative and innovative and at the same time, inexplicably ignored in their need to learn in a particular way.

Gifted students learn in ways, which differ and are more advanced than the ways regular learners do. Learning represents converting information into knowledge, which is then elaborated, broken down or reorganized in various ways. Gifted students learn more within a given period of time than other peers. They also form a broader, more detailed and differentiated knowledge of a topic. Furthermore, these students do not base their conclusions on explicit statements, which is the usual case, but rather on evidence and reasoning. Combining knowledge from more than one source leads towards an intuitive theory, which is not necessarily correct, but the gifted child is also able to validate its new knowledge, change it accordingly or reject it if it is wrong.

If giftedness is considered from the point of view of its manifestation in the classroom, we can identify *verbally gifted children*, who make conclusions about the direction of the teaching and leave the teacher and their peers with the impression that they are ahead of what is happening in the classroom, and *visual-spatially gifted children*, who formulate more lateral or creative concepts, which are often unexpected and questioning the teaching process or approach. The latter students – the visual-spatially gifted ones – are frequently not academically or socially successful, i.e., they often fall within the category considered as being twice-exceptional.

2.4.1. Giftedness and talent

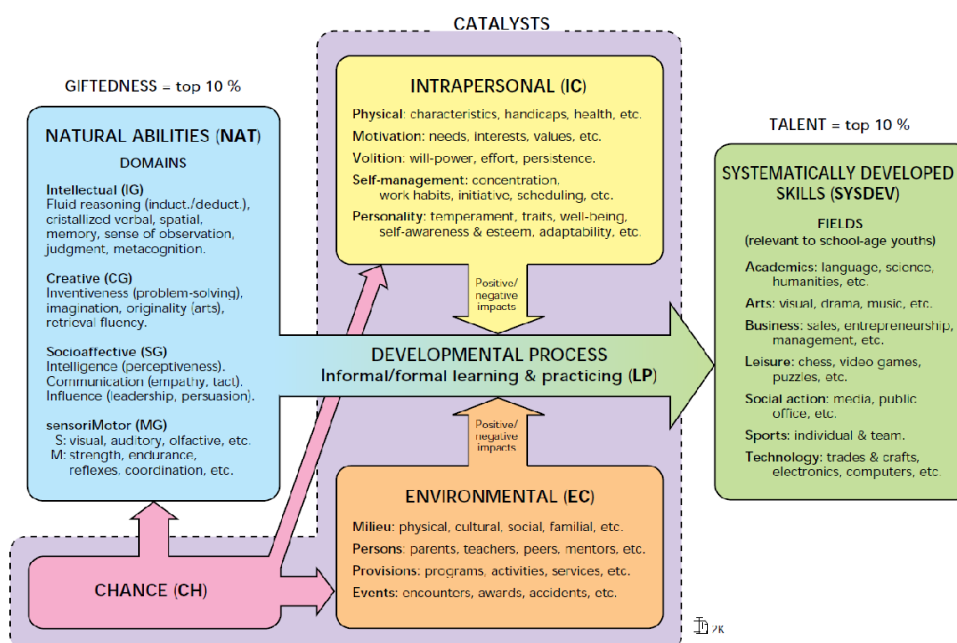


Figure 3. Gagne's Differentiated model of Giftedness and Talent (online). Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 23 July 2021 from <https://giftedstudentliteracy.weebly.com/gagnes-differentiated-model-of-giftedness-and-talent.html>

A clear description of the definition and the connection between giftedness and talent is given through Francois Gagné's "Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent". According to Gagné, human abilities are more general in early childhood and can be described as gifts, which can be creative, sensorimotor, intellectual and socio affective (see Figure 3).

These gifts, when they are systematically developed, evolve into talents through learning and with the aid of catalysts, which are of intrapersonal, environmental and/or genetic – Gagné (2004) calls it chance-character.

The only sphere, which the educational system cannot influence, either positively or negatively, is the genetic sphere. Proper educational interventions in the shape of adequate training programs and exposure to the necessary array of events, activities and services can help children discover the gift they could work upon and at the same time support the development of personal traits that accompany the process of transformation of gifts into talents.

2.4.2. *The twice-exceptional*

The so-called twice-exceptional children were already mentioned in this chapter, but they form a group, which is very much worth discussing in greater depth.

Certain children's status is easy to explain - some are highly gifted in math, writing or music, while others have challenges affecting their learning – be it ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia, autism or some sensory processing issues. The most complicated group however is formed by children who fit both of these categories. They are the so-called twice exceptional, i.e., they manifest a combination of exceptional abilities and learning or developmental challenges. The number of twice-exceptional bright figures in various scientific and creative fields is a clear sign of how important it is for the educational system to exert the necessary efforts and to introduce the necessary flexibility, which can aid the process of recognizing and understanding the twice-exceptional ones so that they are supported in the process of making the best possible use of their strengths and compensating for their special need.

Often, twice-exceptional children manage to mask their learning problems until they reach a certain educational level or they face a specific scientific field, which is hard for them to process or progress. It can also happen the other way around, having the special needs mask the giftedness, leaving it undeveloped. There are also cases when both the disability and the giftedness remain unrecognized.

In the not so frequent occasions when the twice-exceptional children are successfully identified, the support they need in school appears difficult to get, because one-fits-all gifted programs may present areas that are challenging to them and this is valid for all gifted children, because they do not represent a coherent, homogenous group, sharing the same educational needs (Sapon-Shevin, 2003).

On the other hand, when the giftedness remains unrecognized and the child is placed in a specialized programme this may not challenge them in any meaningful way, leading to frustration and anxiety.

Whichever the case, behavioral problems – whether those are manifested in the form of lack of confidence or anxiety and frustration - can be used as a clear sign that the programme offered does not fit the child's potential and status (Beth, 2021).

In order to demonstrate further the complexity of the topic, we should also mention that giftedness can often mislead experts to wrongly diagnosing children as autistic or having ADHD. In numerous cases, gifted children's hypersensitivity to various stimuli such as bright lights, noise or crowds, keeping a distance from their peers may make them look isolated and strange. At the same time, when a gifted child is into a certain topic, they dive in it with an intensity, which may be incomprehensible to their peers or even to some of the adults in their environment.

In the best-case scenario gifted children need to get the special attention and opportunities during the period of their school education. The possibilities for self-discovery and development must not be left to the greater freedom that college and university years provide, because the gifts need to be nurtured into talents at a much earlier stage of life.

2.4.3. *Identifying gifted students*

IQ tests have long ruled as the popular approach used for identifying giftedness. Still this approach is problematic for certain profiles and/or it only assesses a narrow band of culturally valued knowledge. General learning capacities and various types of giftedness often remain unchecked. Additionally, teachers are usually not qualified to interpret IQ assessments adequately.

Classroom assessments are typically designed to test how well students have learned what has been taught, not how they have expanded their knowledge.

Therefore, an alternative is necessary, allowing teachers to assess the quality, maturity and the level of sophistication of how students reason and what learning strategies they use, their capacity to enhance knowledge, as well as what they actually know or believe is possible concerning a certain issue.

Identifying a gifted student is not an exact science. It requires a teacher to have the necessary education and some relevant experience to be able to recognize certain behavioral features — both positive and negative ones — that outline a student as gifted or having the potential of a high achiever.

Here comes an attempt for a list of some general behavioral traits that gifted children may exhibit – not necessarily all of them - that can help experienced and attentive teachers identify a gifted student in order to ensure their academic success and personal development:

- Curious and motivated
- Asks many questions
- Has a good memory
- Quickly retains information
- Masters reading skills early
- Demonstrates strong math skills
- Thinks independently
- Expresses unique, original opinions
- Possesses higher level thinking and problem-solving skills
- Has a strong sense of justice and likes to engage in debates on current issues and real-life problems?

There are however also traits that can affect in a negative way the learning process if a gifted student's needs are not taken care of:

- Easily goes off task or off topic
- Impatient when not called upon in class
- Gets bored easily
- Resists repetitive work
- Takes on too much work
- Does not work well in groups
- Critical of others and themselves

“Giftedness is not always seen as a socially positive and valued trait”, According to Dr. Marianne Kuzujanakis, a pediatrician and a director of Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) “Many gifted kids are bullied, others underachieve to hide their abilities, and some experience anxiety and depression with increased risk for self-harm. As many as 20 percent may drop out of school,” she adds. Approaching a student in a non-threatening way is of key importance, as is the provision of a diversity of experiences in school, at home and in the community in order for areas of strength to be identified, self-knowledge to be integrated and the picture of the adult high achiever to be formed.

2.4.4. *Does education cater to the needs of the gifted?*

When questioned by educators and policy makers, gifted students share that their classrooms do not provide the most appropriate opportunities and conditions for them to learn or to demonstrate what they know. Students also noted that teachers have a limited capacity to spot and identify the multiple manifestations of giftedness. They also state that only the most obvious gifted profiles are prioritized in regular education, leaving the twice-exceptional profile uncatered for.

Considering that these students thrive and excel when they are given a chance to demonstrate their interpretations initially in formats they can manage, e.g., visual formats or via physical representations, the InCrea+ artistic approaches will come in extremely handy for this type of learners, leading them towards the use of more conventional ways of expression such as writing. Twice-exceptional children usually rely on alternative forms of communication such as building models, drawing pictures, acting their concepts out for example or even using such advancements in the IT sector as digital arts.

The lack of appropriate educational instruments or approaches, especially in middle to higher secondary years, leads to high levels of disengagement from regular education by some gifted students.

It is becoming more and more obvious, and this is relevant not only for gifted but also for children with disabilities and all children in general, that making sure that everyone is included in the educational process, achieving some basic levels or performance standards, is not what we need to target. The direction we should be making efforts in is that all children get a chance to utilize their emerging talents and abilities to the fullest, which requires specialized attention and support provision (Feldhusen, 2003).

One of the biggest issues with most gifted programs is that they aim at helping gifted children develop their general capabilities. The programs we need to be developing should help gifted students identify and expand or even sophisticate their special talents, because the future successful career and the potential benefits to society would come from the special talents and not from the general capabilities.

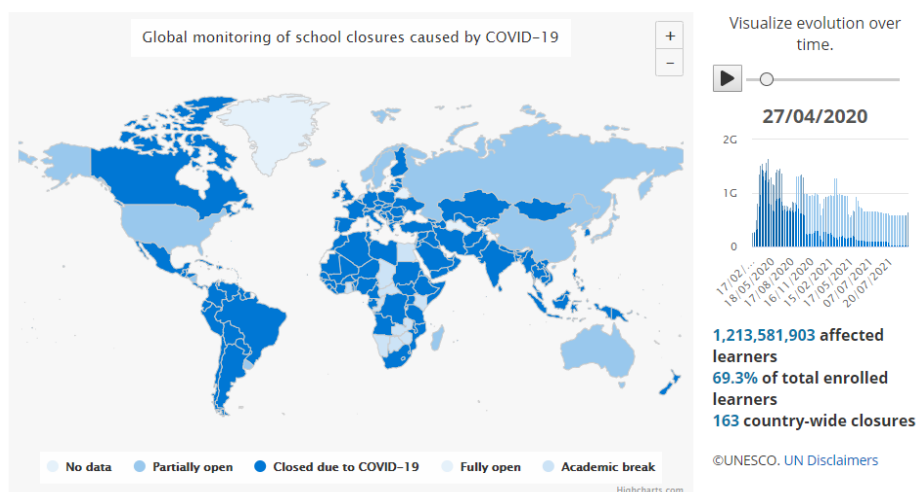
2.5. COVID-19 threats

The World Health Organization declared on March 11, 2020, that the disease caused by Sars-CoV-2 could be characterized as a pandemic. In this unusual and odd situation, schools had to scale back and suspend activity in order to reduce infection risks. The pandemic has given everyone a chance to understand better how social inequalities can manifest within the educational sector.

As several authors mention in the *COVID-19 as a global challenge: towards an inclusive and sustainable future* article (p. e312), COVID-19 also brought an education crisis, governments around the world have temporarily shut schools in an effort to enforce social distancing and slow viral transmission. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that 60% of the world's student population has been affected, with 19 billion learners out of school across 150 countries. Studies have shown that loss of access to education not only diminishes learning in the short term but also increases long-term dropout rates and reduces future socioeconomic opportunities.

2.5.1. The impact of the pandemic

The consequences of COVID-19 school closures are predicted to have a disproportionately negative impact on the most vulnerable and risk exacerbating existing global inequalities (see Figure 4, 5 and 6). Vulnerable children will have fewer opportunities to learn at home, face greater risk of exploitation, and may lack adequate food in the absence of access to free or subsidized school meals and could experience malnutrition. The responses of education systems to COVID-19 need to be particularly cognizant of cultural and contextual factors, including gender, socioeconomic, and geographical differences, to ensure that they do not exacerbate inequalities.



Note: Figures correspond to number of learners enrolled at pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary levels of education [ISCED levels 0 to 3], as well as at tertiary education levels [ISCED levels 5 to 8]. Enrollment figures based on latest UNESCO Institute for Statistics data. See [methodological note](#).

Figure 4. Global monitoring of school closure caused by COVID-19. Retrieved from the UNESCO website on April 27, 2021 from <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#schoolclosures>

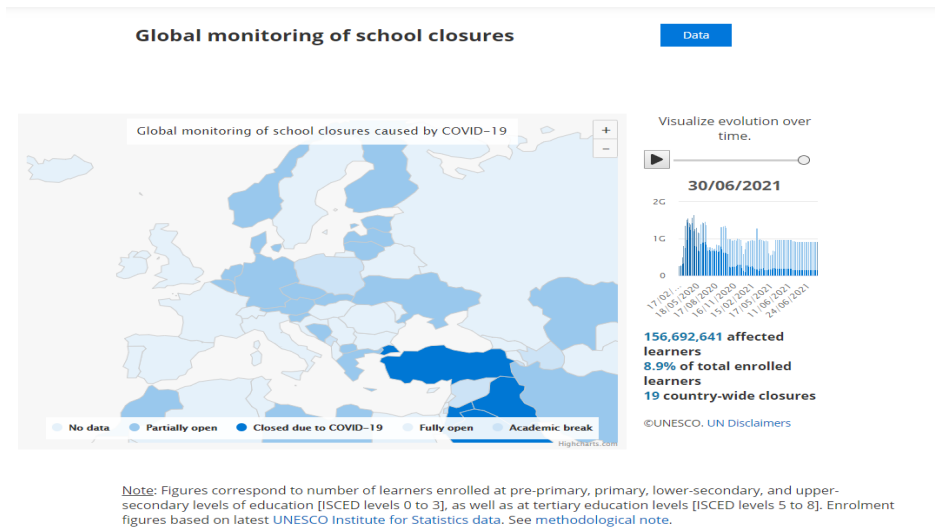


Figure 5. Global monitoring of school closure. European School situation on 30 July 2021, retrieved from the UNESCO website <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#schoolclosures>

As we've imagined, the extended closures of educational institutions could have serious consequences among young people population, across the world, whether we are talking about developed and/or developing countries, with the poorest and most marginalized children being impacted the most.

Total duration of school closures

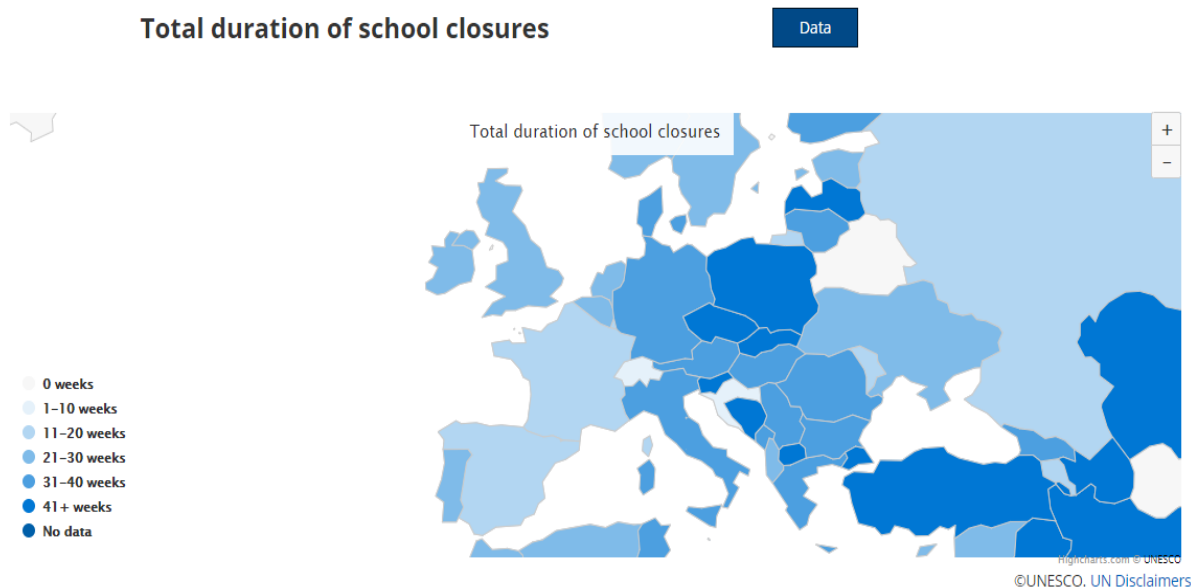


Figure 6. Total duration of school closure. European area. Retrieved from the UNESCO website on 30 July 2021 from <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#durationschoolclosures>

As shown in Table 1, full and partial school closures due to COVID-19 differently impacted school life in European countries for some grades, or with reduced in-person instruction.

Table 1. UNESCO global dataset on the duration of school closures (total for full and partial closure).
Data retrieved from the UNESCO website on 30 July 2021
<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#durationschoolclosures>

Country	ISO	Duration of FULL and PARTIAL school closures (in weeks) <i>Last update: 30 June 2021</i>
Bulgaria	BGR	41
Italy	ITA	38
Lithuania	LTU	38
Romania	ROU	32
Spain	ESP	15
Turkey	TUR	49

Many articles worldwide, like *Inclusive education during COVID-19: Lessons from teachers around the world* (2020), as well as teachers and researchers, mention that Covid-19 precipitated an education crisis, fueled by the deep and multiple inequalities, otherwise obscured in classrooms. Lockdowns and school closures suddenly brought them into sharp relief. The consequences of the health and financial crisis for inclusion in education were both immediate and gradual. For learners with disabilities and/or additional learning needs, the move to remote learning has presented additional challenges, including barriers to engaging with technology, reduced access to educational supports and individualized learning interventions, and a loss of social connections. For instance, many resources are not accessible for blind or deaf even if the technology exists. Children with attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, or learners who are sensitive to change such as those with autism spectrum disorders, may struggle with independent work in front of a computer.

The European Commission specialists mention that the impediments for the educational system include inaccessible infrastructure for students/schools/teachers, non-adapted materials and curricula, low teachers' preparation on inclusive education and IT&C and many others. Also, the economic shocks caused by COVID-19 have had devastating consequences by compounding the poverty and food insecurity many families were already facing, mentions the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action report (NO EDUCATION, NO PROTECTION, 2021).

Families were not in a financial and technical position to provide their school children with support, laptops, smartphones or internet access, and struggled to support teaching at home.

2.5.2. Covid-19, social isolation and distant learning

By increasing social isolation, the pandemic also increased the risk of marginalized students disengaging further from education and leaving school early (UNESCO GEM Report, 2020).

Outside the educational system, lockdown, self-isolation and social distancing put some children at greater risk, including stigma and discrimination, limited access to quality health care, family violence, neglect or abuse, household poverty etc. As in normal times children are seen by many different adults every day teachers, neighbors, grandparents and friends, in these difficult times there are fewer opportunities for adults to spot the signs, help or raise the alarm. In the situation where parents become the leading actors in their children's education, those children living in dysfunctional families are impacted along with all those mentioned above.

School closures are having a significant negative influence on academic attainment and on social and emotional learning (SEL). Education stakeholders tried quickly to disseminate online and other distance learning resources, offering lessons via internet, television, and radio, as well as printed study materials to cover up the loss of face-to-face instruction. Analysis of these global efforts, realized by INEE and

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (NO EDUCATION, NO PROTECTION, 2021), has produced several key findings:

- The content and quality of distance education varies widely, even within a country, and children’s ability to engage in learning depends heavily on the resources and support available in individual households.
- Many learners are struggling to access distance learning options, due to barriers related to information and communications technology, infrastructure, and digital literacy.
- Challenges in access to and the availability of education have been exacerbated for children and young people living in crisis-affected and post-crisis contexts, as well as those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- Accessibility for children and young people with disabilities has been extremely limited across available distance learning platforms, many of which were not designed to be inclusive.
- Other groups of children and young people have also been marginalized; girls in particular are less able to engage with the distance education offered, due to their household duties.
- Across contexts, parental engagement—including their individual availability, level of education, ability or willingness to support their children’s learning at home while juggling multiple priorities—is a significant factor in the success or failure of remote learning modalities.
- Without daily face-to-face contact with teachers, children and young people lose not only their teachers’ pedagogical expertise in facilitating participation and engagement with the content, including SEL, they also lose dependable routines and protective oversight.

2.5.3. *Limitations of services*

In the same report, it’s also mentioned that schools offer social services beyond academic learning, encouraging the enrollment and retention of young people who might otherwise be excluded from education and society. The essential services that were limited or lost due to school closures include:

- An estimated 396 million children and young people worldwide lacked access to school-based nutrition and nutritional supplement programs, which both combat malnutrition and incentivize parents to enroll their children in school.
- Children and young people with disabilities have lost access to specialized or rehabilitative care. This encompasses differentiated academic support and clinical services.
- Children and young people lack access to the formal mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services often provided in schools; integrating these services into the school day prevents stigmatization of those with mental health issues and “normalizes” the healing process, in particular for refugee children and young people.
- School closures mean children and young people have lost important informal social amenities and safeguards. Relationships with their peers and teachers can promote positive mental health, and the schools provide entry points into social networks for both pupils and their parents. This is particularly important for marginalized groups, such as lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, and/or intersex (LGBTQI) youth.

European Union (EU) has renewed The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) to support the sustainable and effective adaptation of the education systems of EU Member States to the digital age, facing the challenges and opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to the unprecedented use of technology for education and training purposes. According to this document the pandemic has demonstrated that having an education and training system which is fit for the digital age is essential. While COVID-19 demonstrated the need for higher levels of digital capacity in education and training, it also led to the amplification of a number of existing challenges and inequalities between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not, including individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. The pandemic has also revealed a number of challenges for education and training systems related to the digital capacities of education and training institutions, teacher training and overall levels of digital skills and competences.

Almost all countries introduced distance learning to ensure the continuity of education. Teachers had to email homework to students and parents, record classes and put them online, and use live educational apps or online platforms to communicate with students.

2.5.4. Identified priorities during the pandemic

Every country had to identify priority challenges when implementing measures to ensure continuity, equity and inclusion in education while face-to-face classes are suspended, these priorities can be included in the following categories (COVID-19 Report, ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020, p. 16):

- Equity and inclusion: focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized population groups — including refugees and migrants, the most socioeconomically disadvantaged populations and persons with disabilities— and on sexual and gender diversity.
- Quality and relevance: focus on improving the content of curricula (in relation to health and wellbeing, in particular) and on specialized support for teachers, ensuring appropriate contractual and working conditions, teacher training for distance learning and the return to school, and socio-emotional support in order to work with students and their families.
- Education system: preparedness of the education system to respond to crises, i.e., resilience at all levels.
- Interdisciplinary approaches: planning and implementation focused not only on education, but also on health, nutrition and social protection.
- Partnerships: cooperation and collaboration between different sectors and actors to achieve an integrated system, focused on students and education staff.

According to the Report of UNESCO online conference, a global picture of learning loss is hard to obtain, according to a study by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 100 million children and youth are projected to fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading because of COVID-19, erasing gains made over the past two decades.

UNICEF data reveals that school children with internet access at home have higher foundational reading skills than children who do not have access. Also, despite disparities in ownership, television is the main channel used by governments to deliver remote learning, Radio being the third most-used platform to deliver education while schools are closed.

2.5.5. The road to recovery

One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a UNESCO report Education: From disruption to recovery close to half the world's students are still affected by partial or full school closures, and over 100 million additional children will fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading as a result of the health crisis (UNESCO, 2021).

Marking this first “anniversary” of the largest disruption of education in recent history, the world's education ministers, led by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, decided to prioritize education recovery to avoid a “generational catastrophe”, the world population must simply prioritize and protect education, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The three themes of foremost concern on policy agendas were: reopening schools and supporting teachers; mitigating drop-out and learning losses; and accelerating the digital transformation (UNESCO, 2021) (One year into COVID: Prioritizing education recovery to avoid a generational catastrophe, 2021, p. 1-2).

Recovering education aims to ensure that:

- No child is left behind - ensuring all children and youth are back in school and receiving comprehensive support to succeed.
- Every child is learning - accelerating learning and breaking down the digital learning divide.
- All teachers are empowered - supporting the teaching workforce (One year into COVID: Prioritizing education recovery to avoid a generational catastrophe, 2021, p.15).

In order to stop the gap from widening as a result of this new kind of crisis, the situation requires immediate responses to ensure the quality of educational outcomes for all children, especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged ones.

As we've mentioned above governments need to mobilize resources, both human and financial, in order to foster inclusion and equity in education, forming partnerships among parents/caregivers; teachers/education professionals; trainers and researchers; national, local and school-level administrators and managers; social service providers (health, child protection); representatives of minority groups that are at risk of exclusion (Rodrigo Mendes Institute, 2021, p.21).

But above all we must highlight some of the positive outcomes of this pandemic. Migration to online teaching has forced teachers to speed up with technologies and improve their skills. Of course, many

of them still need training on how to use technology to ensure inclusion, and to involve children with special needs, but most teachers relied on technology not only to communicate with students but with students' families too, providing the opportunity to strengthen these partnerships, offering a greater way to communicate feedback and paying attention to their student's learning and emotional needs. The pandemic can also be a catalyst for a more supportive and inclusive education that allows students to access lessons remotely and provides a flexible educational offer, online or hybrid.

The Covid-19 crisis has shown all of us that the issue is not just about finding technical solutions to support education, but to focus on how to cover temporary loss of learning and to ensure inclusion.

3. CONCLUSION

There are numerous challenges to inclusion in education on a global level. Most of them can also be found manifesting on a regional level in Europe as well. This chapter attempted to look at some of the prevalent risks for the implementation of IE, some of which the project InCrea+ will be directly addressing.

Migration has been found by researchers and teachers to be one of the most prevalent challenges to inclusion, with all of its aspects presenting different types and degrees of risk. Looking into the cultural, religion, gender, racial barriers to inclusion that can stem from migration, as well as discrimination and stereotyping that can come with it, and not forgetting the mental health implications, we can safely argue that migration is a complex issue in terms of IE.

Disabilities present another major challenge to IE, whether we are considering physical or mental disabilities or students with SEN, the spectrum of challenges is quite vast and varies depending on the country context, disability, and often finance. In fact, when considering finance, it has been found that poverty is directly linked to exclusion in educational contexts. This stems from lack of facilities and investment in student environments, insufficient teacher training, increasing expenses, transportation, health care and many others.

Giftedness and talent are two categories that provide a basis for challenge to inclusion that were also discussed in this chapter and will be addressed through the InCrea+ project. Their way of learning, process and needs differ from the rest in the classroom and are often not properly taken care of. The model- one fits all, cannot cater to "gifted" children, thus becoming a challenge to inclusion.

All of the aforementioned challenges have been enhanced during the Covid-19 pandemic. We can really see now the gap widening in terms of inclusion with all the risks and barriers coming to the forefront and becoming even more difficult to overcome in an environment of social distancing and online education. What would be really key moving forward in terms achieving inclusion in education would be teacher training, improvement in resources and long-term and sustainable strategies to address challenges and prevent risks.

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Keywords: challenges to inclusion, regional data, inclusive education, benefits for students

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Affect, Cultural barriers and migration: Module 2 How to Overcome Language Barriers, as seen at:
<https://affect.coe.hawaii.edu/lessons/overcoming-differing-views-of-education/>

Affect, Cultural barriers and migration: Module 4 Ways to Overcome Cultural Barriers, as seen at:
<https://affect.coe.hawaii.edu/lessons/overcoming-differing-views-of-education/>