

Re-thinking Policy and moving towards Inclusion in Education

Policy Brief based on the #MultInclude Analysis of more than 70 micro innovations

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Introduction

Diversity, equity and inclusion are important core values for the EU and similarly for their respective member states and organizations in Europe. The interpretation and implementation of these values within educational systems and society differ from country to country and is related to their specific national, regional and institutional context. The #MultInclude [analysis](#) of more than 70 evidence-based ideas for inclusion in education highlighted that: Context Matters¹ when developing strategies for equity and inclusion in education. In a policy paper, which was part of the EU funded project IDEAS², (the precursor of #MultInclude) the conclusion stated that ‘context’ could be seen as one of the most important elements to be mindful of. When the specific context is taken into account and is specified in multiple dimensions (social, political, demographic, regional etc.), a more targeted intervention is developed, implemented and replicated and as findings suggests, this contributes to the success of that the intervention³. One of the recommendations of the IDEAS policy paper pointed out that EU policy that focusses solely on social dimensions as a strategic aim is too general and too broad, especially in relation to dealing with the complexity and various dynamics which are prevalent in Europe.

Governments can play an important role in developing strategic policies that aim to improve both equity and inclusion in education. This can be enhanced by providing necessary conditions, infrastructures and funding to transform policy intentions toward actual impact. A recent exploratory study⁴ on migration related to diversity and urban policy in Europe shows why policies and practices should be intentional and specific. Generic policy alone is a risk for meeting policy targets: “This exploratory study shows that urban policymakers increasingly opt for a generic approach that is not geared towards specific groups of migrants, but rather towards the entire urban community”.

¹ Tupan-Wenno, M., Van Marlen, J., Aumaj, S., [Rethinking Pathways towards Inclusion in Education](#), An analysis of more than 70 perspectives, practices & strategies from #MultInclude Database, MultInclude, 2020

² Tupan-Wenno, M., King, S., Camilleri, A., [Making inclusion in Europe a reality](#). Analysis of case studies in the IDEAS Database,

³ Tupan-Wenno, M., [Making inclusion in Europe a reality. Policy paper](#) on creating an inclusive environment in Higher Education, IDEAS, 2016

⁴ Engbersen, G. en P. Scholten (red.) (2018) De wereld in een stad: migratiediversiteit en stedelijk beleid in Europa ([The World in a City Migration-Related Diversity and Urban Policy in Europe](#)), Den Haag: Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR).



This #Multininclude policy brief elaborates on the importance of intentional and specific policy in relation to practice. The goal of this policy brief is to illustrate how good practices on the one hand, work on improving inclusion in education (with a focus on superdiverse urban contexts) and on the other hand, on top of existing challenges, prove to be incredibly resilient in facilitating support in times of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. The central question of this policy brief is: To what extent can successful programmes like the ones from the #MultInclude database be of added value and complementary to existing policy that lack a specific and intentional focus? Most of these cases were developed with targeted communities in mind and with the intention to improve educational development and empowerment of students and parents from marginalised and underserved communities.

When mentioning students, we refer to students attending (pre-)primary, secondary and tertiary education in formal, informal and non-formal education settings.

Covid and inclusion in education

In the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2010, the European Union defined headline targets⁵ in the field of education to be achieved by 2020 (the ET 2020 framework). This framework addresses outcomes from early childhood to adult, vocational and higher education, and is designed to cover learning in all contexts: formal, non-formal and informal. There was no indicator back in 2010 that in 2020 the world would be confronted with a major health crisis: a global pandemic due to Covid-19. The pandemic did not just impact health challenges for citizens, young and old. It had and still has an immense impact on the social lives of students in regard to their development in education, as well as desired pathways to progress and succeed in education and society.

Covid exposed and further deepened existing inequities in society and made invisible gaps more discernible. Disparities in access to online learning illuminated by a lack of accessibility to technology, devices and physical learning spaces for students from underprivileged and marginalised communities, became painfully visible. In a recent policy brief⁶ of the OECD on the impact of Covid-19 on student equity and inclusion, the OECD stresses that “a holistic approach to education that addresses students’ learning, social and emotional needs, is crucial, especially in times of crises”. Acting holistically refers to the importance that solving issues with regards to inclusion in education need a broader scope than education alone. Taking the broader scope into regard means also looking at the socio-economic situation of families, socio-emotional developments of student, healthcare facilities in neighbourhoods, access to technology and unemployment due to Covid of students and family members. This is necessary to look at a student as a whole within their specific context.

⁵ [European policy cooperation \(ET 2020 framework\)](#)

⁶ OECD, [The impact of COVID-19 on student equity and inclusion: supporting vulnerable students during school closures and school re-openings](#), November 2020

According to the OECD: “School closures have a very real impact on all students, but especially on the most vulnerable ones who are more likely to face additional barriers”. Students from vulnerable and marginalised communities “risk falling further behind and becoming isolated with school doors closed. These students are likely to lose the most in terms of educational outcomes and the support provided by schools if countries take insufficient measures to promote educational equity and inclusion”.

The projected 2020 Education and Training (ET)-targets, which were meant to mark the end of a 10-year trajectory, has become the baseline of a new reality that is still unfolding itself. The long- and short-term impact of Covid-19 on the lives of Europeans is still unclear. The same can be said in terms of opportunities for learning, skills development and success of *all* students. Earlier projected and expected disparities in educational outcomes will hopefully not increase. If these disparities increase it will also impact opportunities to social and economic upward mobility. In 2017, the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights⁷ were endorsed by the European Council, European Parliament and the Commission: “they are the beacon guiding us towards a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive and full of opportunity”. Local policy ambitions in European countries however will determine to what extent social rights of students in the EU can be met. The first principle of the European Pillar of social rights underlines that: “Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market”. So, how can national and local governments live up to these pan-European aims and intentions? What is needed to transform them into practice and results to those in society who needs them the most? The current situation asks for an intentional approach to transform (policy) aims to real impact with a multi stakeholder focus on strategies for local and regional collaboration. This confirms the major importance of equitable and inclusive education as a priority area for European cooperation in the field of education and training.

Global social movements and inclusion in education

During the global pandemic in 2020 we have also seen the impact of the resurgence of a global anti-racism movement. The murder of George Floyd in the United States mobilized and unleashed a stream of protests from the end of May 2020, an event that transformed the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement to a global/international movement leading to intentional conversations and opportunities that raised awareness and acknowledgement of similar experiences of individuals and communities of colour in Europe. More recently, protests from Asian (diasporic) communities have drawn attention to experiences of racism in society against citizens with Asian features. These developments are not only invoked by the fact that the first confirmations of Covid were identified in Asia. A recent special report of Euractiv on discrimination in Europe⁸, mentions anti-Asian hate in France, a high increase of cases of Islamophobia in France, the UK, Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands, disproportional distribution of for instance housing and education for the Roma community and also elaborates on other forms of race discrimination in Europe. A growing far right political pressure in many countries is feeding the narrative

⁷ [The European Pillar of Social rights in 20 principles](#)

⁸ Euractiv, [Where is discrimination in Europe?](#) March-April 2021

of ‘the other’. Many ‘others’ though especially of school and university going ages are in fact Europeans by birth and nationality. So, what Black Lives Matter and Asian Lives Matter achieved is a confirmation and growing awareness that racism is also a European phenomenon.

The importance of strategies for inclusion in education including a structural approach to acknowledge racism and ‘color blindness’ has become more evident since these events. A color-brave approach to diversity and inclusion policy is needed, as well as recognising that institutional racism is central to this work. “The statement “I don’t see color, because everyone is equal to me” is often heard in discussions regarding diversity and inclusion in education. Although this statement is often made with the best intentions, it is in fact not acknowledging a person’s ethnic and cultural identity⁹. Color refers literally to a person of color or to racialized or to other marginalized identities.

In June 2020 the mayor of Amsterdam agreed to a peaceful Black Lives Matter demonstration in the city during the pandemic. She was criticised on different levels since 5000 persons joined. She understood the importance of allowing a peaceful demonstration as part of a larger, global, social movement despite a global health crisis and given the controversy it created. This decision of the mayor was intentional and bold. With her decision she challenged the majority view on national safety by giving room to expressions of solidarity to a movement that did not represent the dominant view. The decision of the mayor is an example of being color-brave, of understanding that although citizens have equal opportunities not every citizen is treated the same. Education systems are designed from a foundational vantagepoint that they are egalitarian but the gaps in access and educational outcomes show that some groups are systematically doing better than others, hence the EU targets as part of the ET2020 framework.

#MultInclude

In January 2018 the EU funded project #MultInclude, Multiplying Evidence Based Strategies for Inclusion, started with a consortium of seven partners from different regions of Europe. These partners, who each worked within different educational sectors, developed a [database](#) with evidence-based ideas for inclusion in education. The project was conceived to promote, develop and disseminate these ideas, with the purpose of creating educational pathways that are more inclusive. The #MultInclude consortium collected data from over 70 cases representing the networks and social capital of partners with cases spanning from (pre)primary to secondary and tertiary education. General, vocational and research focussed education, provided by formal, non-formal and informal education providers.

The increasing diversity in society in combination with unequal opportunities and systematic exclusion in society - are reasons for education institutions, local and national authorities to develop policy and practice. There is a need for sustainable solutions that address the needs of all individuals and communities to be successful in existing systems and institutions. Those solutions relate to the respective worlds and communities of youth in Europe on the one hand and the changing context due to external developments on the other hand. The changing context, whether driven by political, societal,

⁹ Van Marlen, J., [The need for a colorbrave approach to education](#), ECHO

economic or public health factors, influences the complexities in society in general and education in particular. Making education inclusive is a collaborative effort in- and outside of education institutions. Creating inclusive pathways in education for all in current European societies requires a comprehensive and holistic strategy with multiple regional partnerships, dedicated public or private resources, structural and intentional goals, monitoring, data collection, and successful programs and methodologies.

4 C's: Context, Coherence & Commitment, Content

Because of the many factors that contribute to the success and level of impact of a programme, inclusive education cannot be guaranteed by one separate intervention or strategy alone. Based on the analysis of the #MultInclude cases strategies ideally should be envisioned by a combination of intentions taking into account *Context, Coherence & Commitment and Content*. These 4C's are interrelated and complementary variables necessary to develop strategies for improvement. Context relates to four identified approaches to impact interventions of inclusive practices. Coherence & Commitment are preconditions to ensure sustainable impact and Content relates to the identified conditions to improve the learning environment.

4 Complementary approaches

After a thorough analysis of the cases, four approaches that contribute to impactful inclusive educational practices. An underlying condition to enhance the combined strength of these four approaches is collaboration from a value-based perspective, which is a foundational driver for success. The value-based perspective focusses on qualitative indicators of success as accelerators for change, rather than on measurable quantitative effects only, such as early school leaving rates or attainment rates. The main benefit of such a perspective is that it takes intentionality into consideration and highlights the differences between initiatives and how they are valued in by different people in different contexts.

- The first approach is the *color brave* approach. The color brave approach is a condition that urges the acknowledgement of (cultural) differences, which is particularly important in relation to the tension between generic - and specific policies aimed at inclusive education.
- The second approach, the *holistic* approach, acknowledges the different facets of student life and their societal context into consideration. By looking at both study environment as well as private and family context of the students, this approach tries to provide support within all these environments and contexts.
- The third approach, the *intersectional* approach, can increase understanding of what elements of a project are important to specific and sometimes overlapping target groups. In this approach in-group differences are thus taken into account. Dimensions such as socio-economic background, gender, religion, (mental) health and so forth can create divisions in education systems and in society and must therefore be considered carefully, while bearing in mind the reality of how these identities manifest in different educational institutions.

- Finally, the *pathway* approach shows that many cases in the #Multininclude database aim to increase educational success by developing equitable and realistic pathways to education as well as within educational systems. The data shows that there are many ways in which the pathways can be designed to guide the students towards success in education from primary all the way to tertiary education. Some of the cases involve collaboration with policymakers and grassroots organizations or NGO's and show that these collaborations can make a great impact

Inclusion policy on a city level

The #Multininclude project also focussed on a city level. The database has a combination of cases from different cities such as Amsterdam (4), Malmö (5), The Hague (4), Turin (3) and Vienna (8). These cases together represent a scope of what is necessary and possible to create inclusive and accessible pathways to learning. Although, many of these cases were developed in response to social, economic and educational inequities - and some of them as a response to a political reality like the influx of many refugees in the past years - most of the cases can also be seen as micro innovations in education.

Education is the whole of formal-, informal and non-formal education with education institutions as main drivers but one of many stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for all, greater social upward mobility and social cohesion in cities. There are cases in the database that were developed to create successful pathways from primary and secondary to tertiary education. There are also cases that were initiated by local grassroots organisations since specific policy was lacking. Cases from these cities are the result of a combination of policies and programs, initiated by local governments, schools, universities and informal and non-formal education providers. Education institutions from the respective cities share not only a responsibility to provide quality education but are also very much aware of their role towards the greater society. The cases in all five cities are more or less developed in close collaboration with their municipalities and other regional stakeholders. Each case, as well as the different cases combined, show the potential to add to the transformative growth and development of the city in total.

Rethinking policymaking for inclusion in education on a city-level

It was earlier mentioned that based on a WRR study “urban policymakers increasingly opt for a generic approach that is not geared towards specific groups of migrants, but rather towards the entire urban community. They choose to embed issues relating to diversity and integration in more general policy, e.g. education, housing and job market policy.” This is challenging for urban leaders of cities with a broad diversity of communities and policy that is often not capturing the essence of needs of those communities.

City of Turin

One of the #MultInclude partners, DSchola, organised an online policy workshop¹⁰, with the Deputy Mayor of Education of the city, the Vice Rector of the University of Turin and the coordinator for the Inclusion of the Regional branch of the Ministry of Education in Piemonte, broadly attended by school principals and teachers from different regions in Italy. The conversation focussed on the process of Awareness to Action. In this policy conversation the deputy mayor mentioned that several initiatives have been developed to implement national legislation on the responsibility of local governments to provide services to support fragile students (with disabilities, migrant backgrounds, socio economic difficulties, etc.). The city of Turin supports two initiatives to enhance inclusion in education. These cases are part of the #MultInclude database: *the School in Hospital* ([Scuola in ospedale](#)) and [Try again Sam](#). The city is taking a proactive approach in developing interventions with city- and private funding to improve educational outcomes of vulnerable groups.

In the conversation it was argued that a *Culture on inclusion*, as well as the necessary policy to facilitate a culture on inclusion, is missing. The importance to define the connection between education and inclusion was mentioned, just like the epistemological dimension of inclusion and therefore the importance of “the process of self-analysis to change practices”. School principals expressed the need to define measurable objectives and concrete actions. This conversation shows the struggle of translating broad defined policy to the micro context of communities and what it takes to develop solutions that matter in the context of communities and individuals in these communities. Too often policy and practice are developed from the perspective and frame of reference of the developer without having consulted representants or experts who are actually working within these local communities.

City of Amsterdam

In Amsterdam the city council also supports similar initiatives like the one mentioned in Turin. One of the cases in #MultInclude, [Studyhalls](#), is an example of a grassroots initiative that started 10 years ago with the aim to support students in primary and secondary education with their development in education. The vision of the founder was to support children holistically, taken their family life into account, the neighbourhood challenges, understanding their social and economic boundaries and centering their values regarding culture, religion and family in the methodology. For the professionals and volunteers of Studyhalls it is crucial to provide a safe and engaging learning environment for students to grow and dream about their future in education and in life. They have high expectations of every student and accommodate their needs and aspirations. At the start of the pandemic, Studyhalls continued to mobilize support in different ways. Studyhalls almost immediately searched for partners to fund necessary means such as providing food supplies for the families of students, emotional support for students and their families as well as laptops for students.

Organisations like Studyhalls facilitate a crucial connection with local communities and are an added value to the formal education system. The combination of formal and non-formal education suppliers actually co-creates equitable opportunities for underserved and marginalised communities in a very diverse city like Amsterdam.

¹⁰ DSchola Policy Workshop, [The challenge of inclusive education during the pandemic: from Awareness to Action](#), November 2020

What makes Studyhalls unique is that they look at what students need, through the perspective and voices of their students. This way they are able to be more effective in supporting students in their pathways to success. Success meaning progressing from primary education to higher education or from primary education to VET education. Providing support for students and their families, so they can sleep well at night, are seen as preconditions for student's well-being and success. A grassroots initiative that started as an intervention with one group of students at one location, has been scaled up to a city-wide program and now operates in 26 locations in Amsterdam for a total of 650 primary and secondary school students on a weekly basis, which multiplies to almost 30.000 support opportunities on a yearly basis. The work of Studyhalls, especially their pro-active role during Covid was therefore also [filmed](#) as one of the deliverables of #MultInclude.

During the #MultInclude Policy roundtable, organised by The Hague University of Applied Sciences and ECHO, Center for Diversitypolicy, the valuable work of Studyhalls was acknowledged as an example for policymakers to learn from. Policy for inclusive education can be better informed and inspired by taking perspectives of students, parents and schools into account. Constant changing contexts ask for innovative approaches. Who do we hold responsible when students cannot excel in education just because they represent social identities that do not represent the majority view? Using qualitative and ethnographic research can develop transformative knowledge that includes a diversity of perspectives. Policy is too often top down driven. But in the current context with many known and unknown parameters, proven inequities in education, policy should provide room for developments that are developed from a bottom-up approach and provide room for flexibility and innovation. In this policy roundtable the importance of culture was also mentioned, more specifically the culture in a classroom as a parameter for inclusion. How can policy contribute to facilitating a safe and inclusive classroom 'climate'? And how can teachers and lecturers be supported in a better way, providing them with knowledge that is based on transformative research and 'color brave' practices to improve their awareness raising skills?

Conclusion

Not everyone has the same opportunities given their upbringing or background. Not everyone has the same level of support, nor the required social capital. Also, not everyone automatically feels a sense of belonging in existing educational contexts. Education is a transformative means to develop the knowledge base and skills of youth in urban regions. Cities play an important role since they are 'hubs' with concentrations of human- educational- and financial capital. Cities have the potential to perform as an equalizer for the diversity of their population in providing opportunities for *all* citizens to progress through education, work, social and cultural activities. The tendency to rather develop generic policies instead of intentional and specific policies is also a reality on a city level, which is not favourable in case of cities with many migrant communities, socio economic disparities and different perspectives of citizens on belonging.

The #MultInclude analysis shows that education systems provide many possible pathways to guide students towards success. From primary to tertiary education and from graduation in education to a professional life. The analysis shows what the value is of non-formal and informal education to systems of formal education. Although formal education still plays a major role in policy development and funding while meanwhile, on a city and regional level, it has become equally important to also look at the complementary outcomes of multi-stakeholder collaborations. These collaborative efforts can make a great impact and are expected to be better than the results of individual cases.

Many cases in the #MultInclude database started as micro innovations, to support and accommodate targeted social issues. They can however transform to scalable and sustainable innovations on a macro level as part of city-level-, regional- and national policy. Complex societal situations ideally need tailor-made solutions that respond to actual needs and take into account the most important contextual parameters into account. A city level strategy with the purpose of creating an inclusive education ecosystem needs an intentional, holistic, multistakeholder and community driven focus in addition to systems and structures that are already in place.

With regards to the future, we suggest that design thinking and public design should become integral parts of European policy development. When moving towards an inclusive European society with a specific focus on its educational systems, the perspective of those who are members of underrepresented and marginalized communities should be structurally included.

Notes

- DSchola Policy Workshop, [The challenge of inclusive education during the pandemic: from Awareness to Action](#), November 2020
- Engbersen, G. en P. Scholten (red.) (2018) De wereld in een stad: migratiediversiteit en stedelijk beleid in Europa ([The World in a City Migration-Related Diversity and Urban Policy in Europe](#)), Den Haag: Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR).
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- Tupan-Wenno, M., King, S., Camilleri, A., [Making inclusion in Europe a reality](#). Analysis of case studies in the IDEAS Database, IDEAS, 2016
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