

Working group 5:

The role of education in promoting inclusive societies: what works?

Background

Education, youth participation, intercultural dialogue and grassroots sports have a key role to play in strengthening the cohesion of European societies and in preventing radicalisation by transmitting universal values, fostering social integration, enhancing intercultural understanding and the sense of belonging to a community. Education can help equip young people with the social, cultural and civic competences, which are necessary to foster positive interaction, understanding and respect among individuals from diverse backgrounds. The need for this was underpinned by, for example, the results of FRA's EU LGBT survey which revealed widespread bullying of LGBT people at schools in all EU Member States. Educational professionals in the EU are aware of discrimination and prejudice on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in educational settings, ranging from verbal abuse to severe bullying.

Enhancing access to good quality education for all by combating inequalities on all grounds in educational systems contributes to social inclusion and social mobility. It can also contribute to enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, which is necessary to develop resistance to all forms of indoctrination. Youth work, sport and cultural activities are particularly effective in reaching out to the most disadvantaged young people, hence bridging the gap with mainstream society. The European Commission's first Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights (2015), concluded that education has a crucial role in preventing discrimination and hatred. Participants highlighted that schools offer a unique opportunity to transmit the values of tolerance and respect, since they reach out to all children from an early age. Teachers should therefore be better equipped to address diversity in the classroom.

Preliminary analysis of national education policies and programmes in FRA's project on social inclusion and migrant participation in society shows that only a few education systems make intercultural education a dedicated subject. It also found that the appreciation of cultural diversity in national curricula is almost absent, access to mother tongue tuition is rare and bilingual education is not widespread. The level and type of support for initial reception and ongoing language courses varies widely. Half of the countries provide evidence of school segregation. It is also interesting to note, that only a few countries have explicit outreach policies for immigrant parents and to specifically address the integration challenges of second generation children whose parents are immigrants, a group that seems to be particularly at risk of radicalisation.

Objectives

This workshop sought to share experiences on how to enable free, equitable and quality education for all children, to combat social exclusion and discrimination, and to create a school environment that appreciates cultural diversity and respect. They were examined from the perspective of teachers, parents, public authorities (local, regional and national level) and young people themselves. The workshop was an opportunity to present and discuss new initiatives and tools to facilitate the integration of children of diverse backgrounds, including children with disabilities and LGBTI children/youths. Preventing youth marginalisation and alienation was also discussed. The workshop followed-up on some of the conclusions of the Commission's first Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights. The discussions addressed measures taken at European, national and local level in the context of the objectives of the Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination in education.

Speakers

- Julie Ward, Member of the European Parliament (video message)
- Szilvia Kalman, Directorate-General Education and Culture, European Commission
- Lenka Felcmanova, Vice-Chair of the Czech Society for Inclusive Education, Open Society Foundation Prague
- Elin Liljenbladh, Board Member, International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer Youth & Student Organisation (IGLYO)

Main messages

1. Emphasis should now be put on the implementation of existing policies, tools and guidelines, the funding and the creation of demand for changes towards inclusive education by showing that diversity is a good thing through research and good practice examples.
2. There is a need for alternative forms of education, to move beyond formal education and set age brackets. For example, lifelong education is of crucial importance and we have to make sure that suitable forms and study materials are developed and are accessible to all groups. Practicing inclusion through democratic processes at school enables participation and open discussion, embraces everybody's needs, encourages intersectional work, focuses on communalities and a common identity through diversity.
3. There is a need for teacher support, peer learning and the use of role models to enable teachers and to create a diverse, inclusive work environment, including new ways of assessing teachers' performance. There should be full support systems linking different levels of authorities, businesses, civil society organisations involving communities that could facilitate the training of teachers, and help develop and provide, and use curricula and text books that address inclusion and diverse needs in all subjects.

Promising practices

- Training of patients to train other patients with mental health problems, Athens, Cyclades islands, led by EPAPSY, Greece.
- Creating space and bringing Russians and Estonians together to discuss a topic that is relevant for everybody: health education. It was reported that both nationalities learned not only about the subject but also about each other, Estonia.
- Youth de-radicalisation project where a neo-Nazi t-shirt changes its slogan into “if a t-shirt can change, so can you” after washing, ‘Exit Deutschland’, Germany.
- Teachers guide to inclusive education - resource specifically aimed at teachers in primary and secondary schools across Europe, International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Youth & Student Organisation (IGLYO).
- Youth centres for young people at risk of exclusion, Don Bosco Youth Centres.
- Inclusive school teaching focused on ethnic inclusion, Vukovar, Croatia.
- Training to raise disability awareness and providing services for people with disabilities, for example via an App with maps of accessible locations for young people, APEIRONS, Latvia
- Prevention and education of racism, xenophobia and other intolerance at school, all regions, Spain.

Next steps

- The European Commission and FRA should work on the four objectives of Paris Declaration. This would foster learning on social competence and human rights, enhance critical thinking and media literacy, encourage work on issues of disadvantaged groups, and enhance intercultural understanding through education.
- FRA should contribute to the European Commission working group’s online compendium of good practices.
- Educators and civil society organisations should use tools developed by different actors (UNESCO, IGLYO), particularly civil society organisations that are often EU-funded.
- Civil servants and civil society organisations should follow a bottom up approach when implementing national action plans.