



**Doc. 15984**

08 May 2024

## Quality education for children with special education needs: challenges of the pandemic, war and digitalisation

### Report<sup>1</sup>

Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

Rapporteur: Mr Pavlo SUSHKO, Ukraine, European Conservatives Group and Democratic Alliance

### Summary

Inclusion is a core principle of the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) and of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine have revealed the weakness of a narrow understanding of inclusive education which resulted in sending children with complex needs to unprepared regular schools or exposing them to digital environments which were not appropriate for them.

Inclusive education should be based on respect for human rights, dignity, diversity, and social cohesion. Governments should not only set standards for their curricula, teacher competences, service provision and eligibility criteria, but also for responsiveness to the diverse situations of children with special education needs and flexibility to accommodate truly inclusive approaches that promote the potential of these children and respect their dignity and sense of identity.

The Council of Europe should develop guiding principles for a learner-centred and human rights-based approach to the education of children with special education needs. Moreover, a social and contextual assessment of disabilities should be used as a future key component of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, to identify barriers to participation in different educational settings rather than to unilaterally identify a child as having a problem. Disability assessments should be mutually recognised across national borders.

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1. Reference to the committee: [Doc. 15447](#), Reference 4637 of 25 April 2022.



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## A. Draft resolution<sup>2</sup>

1. The Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine have raised awareness of the price that children pay when they are exposed to inaccessible and fragmented learning environments, both physical and digital. Such extreme situations created a challenging environment for everyone, and it is often children with severe disabilities and children with learning difficulties and their families who have suffered the most.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls that inclusion is a core principle of the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) and of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Regrettably, this principle is not always properly interpreted and implemented. The crises that Europe has experienced in recent years have exposed the weakness of a narrow understanding of inclusive education which resulted in sending children with complex needs to unprepared regular schools or exposing them to digital environments which were not appropriate for them.
3. Inclusive education is a much broader concept embracing quality of education, participation, learning opportunities and support measures for children with special educational needs in all types of learning spaces, including digital learning environments.
4. The Assembly emphasises that inclusive education should be based on respect for human rights, dignity, diversity, and social cohesion. Governments should not only set standards for their curricula, teacher competences, service provision and eligibility criteria, but also for responsiveness to the diverse situations of children with special education needs and for the flexibility to accommodate learning spaces across physical and digital environments to respond appropriately to their needs. Education systems and schools need to develop truly inclusive approaches that promote the potential of children with special education needs and respect their dignity and sense of identity.
5. The Assembly considers that there is a need to redefine curricula and assessments of learners' progress, by adopting a learner-centred and human rights-based approach to the education of children with special education needs, by focusing on their abilities, talents, and interests, rather than their perceived limitations. Respecting and ensuring children's rights is a precondition to inclusive education, not its outcome.
6. Accordingly, the Assembly recommends that Council of Europe member States:
  - 6.1. adopt a learner-centred and human rights-based approach to the education of children with special education needs which should be established as mandatory and enforceable by law; this should be done by broadening the concept of inclusive education to focus on their individual needs, talents, abilities and interests, rather than on their perceived limitations, with a view to enhancing their well-being, motivation and self-esteem and to ensure that all learners have access to quality education tailored to their needs and according to their best interests;
  - 6.2. assess gaps in accessibility and equity in remote learning, and assess the impact of learning deficits and the exclusion of children with special education needs during the Covid-19 pandemic or other emergency situations, such as the war in Ukraine, and gather lessons from successful innovative solutions in order to use this analysis to build more resilient and responsive education systems;
  - 6.3. develop contingency plans to ensure continuity of support services, including access to counselling, therapy and other forms of assistance during distance learning periods; provide paid leave for parents of children with special education needs in the event of an emergency situation necessitating a switch to distance learning, to enable parents to fill in for the absence of support from teachers and assistants for children with special education needs, in order to help their children continue learning at home;
  - 6.4. implement the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health in accordance with its underpinning principle of universality, focusing on situations rather than on the limitations of the individuals in those situations, and use it as a human rights tool to provide an interactive and situational understanding of a disability or learning difficulties rather than focusing on a medical model of disability; facilitate international recognition of disability assessments for migrant and refugee children;
  - 6.5. build capacity of schools to reach out to all children, whether physically present or not; build bridges between different learning spaces such as regular schools, special schools, homes, hospitals, and other physical or digital learning spaces to ensure coherence between different support systems with smooth transitions between support structures, based for example on shared individual educational plans;

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 16 April 2024.

6.6. invest in infrastructure (including digital infrastructure), in teacher competences and flexibility of methods, and in accessible learning materials, in order to allow for innovative approaches which fully meet the diverse needs of children with disabilities and learning difficulties; support collaborative working methods between teachers and the use of digital media to promote adaptive teaching.

7. As regards the very difficult situation of Ukrainian children with disabilities or learning difficulties, the Assembly calls on member States to:

7.1. integrate access to quality education for children with special education needs in their humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, including financial support for the provision of training materials and psychological support services;

7.2. mobilise resources to improve internet connectivity within Ukraine, and provide the necessary devices and special equipment for distance learning, especially in rural areas and for families with limited financial capacities to mitigate disruptions and ensure continuity of education;

7.3. facilitate psychological support services including counselling, mental health services and trauma recovery support for children and families affected by the conflict and displacement in Ukraine and in host countries;

7.4. ensure education of displaced children with disabilities and learning difficulties who temporarily fled with their families from Ukraine, addressing their specific educational needs and possibilities to maintain their native language and culture to facilitate their future return to Ukraine; organise training programmes and professional development for teachers in host countries, to address those specific needs;

7.5. co-operate across borders to share best practices and resources in supporting education of children with special educational needs in crisis situations through funding mechanisms, collaborative research and learning initiatives;

7.6. commit to long-term support for the reconstruction and reform of the education system in Ukraine to rebuild infrastructure, institutional capacity, and support education of children with special educational needs.

## B. Draft recommendation<sup>3</sup>

1. The Parliamentary Assembly, referring to its Resolution ... (2024) "Quality education for children with special education needs: challenges of the pandemic, war and digitalisation", considers that valuable lessons could be learned from emergency situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine, to develop new guidelines on inclusive education, digital transformation and democratic citizenship and support member States in building more resilient and responsive education systems.

2. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the decision of the Ministers of Education to set new priorities and actions to implement the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy by adopting five resolutions and endorsing the Council of Europe education strategy "Learners First" 2024-2030. Well-being of learners is considered essential for their holistic, long-term development and academic success through a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Children with special educational needs must be an integral part of this strategy.

3. A human rights-based approach to education must be promoted to ensure access, participation, representation, equity, and fairness in everyday practice across the different settings where children with special educational needs study and learn, either in regular or special schools, at home, in digital, social, and physical learning spaces.

4. Therefore, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers develops Council of Europe guiding principles for a learner-centred and human rights-based approach to education of children with special educational needs, to make their education accessible, adaptable and acceptable to these children, considering *inter alia*:

4.1. teaching and learning strategies tailored to the specific needs of individuals and groups, to strengthen motivation, self-esteem, competencies, sense of autonomy and belonging, which would move away from educational programmes based on normative expectations that discriminate against children with special education needs

4.2. the interconnection between physical, social, and digital learning spaces, which should share a common vision of inclusion and learning;

4.3. training and practical guidance for teachers, and co-operation with professionals who work with children with disabilities and learning difficulties outside school, in order to develop well-adapted individual educational plans;

4.4. flexible curriculum as a key factor to promote inclusive education, allowing teachers to adapt content and respond to different needs;

4.5. innovative learning environments to provide opportunities for changes in beliefs, values, policies, and practices in inclusive education as alternatives to overcome the current restrictions imposed by rigid curricula, pedagogy, and assessment strategies;

4.6. teacher collaboration and use of digital media to promote adaptive teaching;

4.7. digitalisation of education in line with the principles of the Council of Europe Digital Citizenship Education Project, also seeking a co-ordinated improvement of accessibility, adaptability and acceptability of digital resources and platforms, and increased transparency of underpinning algorithms and premises on which the learning process is built, to ensure that these platforms include and do not discriminate against atypical learners or users with functional limitations; children with special education needs should be provided with special equipment which corresponds to their particular needs (for visual or hearing impairment, for autism, etc.).

5. The Assembly also urges the Committee of Ministers to co-operate with relevant international organisations including UNICEF, the World Health Organisation and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, to redesign disability assessments with the aim of avoiding discrimination and labelling, and preventing educational achievements from falling short of children's potential due to low expectations, discouragement and demotivation. In this respect, a social and contextual assessment of disabilities should be used as a future key component of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, to identify barriers to participation in different educational settings rather than to unilaterally identify a child as having a problem. Disability assessments should be mutually recognised across national borders.

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3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 16 April 2024.

## C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Pavlo Sushko, rapporteur

### 1. Introduction

1. The motion for a resolution (Doc. 15447) which initiated the present report stated that: “During the Covid-19 pandemic, distanced learning has become a new form of education, obligatory to everyone. Adjustment to this new reality was accompanied by serious difficulties experienced by children and their parents. Even though online learning created a challenging environment for almost everyone, children with severe disabilities (...) and their families suffered most.”

2. Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the learning and well-being of children around the globe. On a massive scale, it has thrown a spotlight on the consequences of inaccessible learning opportunities, resulting in learning deficits, social isolation, psychological problems and increased risk of violence and abuse. It has also shed light on the compromised ability of education and child protection systems to respond to the challenge, despite world-wide policy efforts to ensure “Education for All” by creating more “inclusive education systems”.

3. In this respect, the pandemic, but also the migration crisis and now the war have exposed the weaknesses of a narrow understanding of inclusive education as “all children in regular classrooms, rather than special classes or special schools”. If schools are closed due to a pandemic, damaged or destroyed by deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure, or simply out of reach for refugee children or children on the move, the limitations of such a narrow understanding become evident.

4. An initial analysis of the effectiveness of distance learning for children with special education needs (SEN) has shown that special educational institutions managed to cope much better than mainstream education. In mainstream inclusive classes, children with SEN tend to be left behind. The alternative with individual lessons, also has drawbacks as it hinders the development of their social skills and children feel isolated. Moreover, appropriate psychological support in times of crisis has become important for all children, with and without SEN. Access to and the quality of the educational material is another concern, and a balance needs to be established between the needs of pupils and the resources available to ensure optimal learning and developmental outcomes.

5. It is also necessary to highlight specific methods of teaching children with certain types of disabilities. For example, due to lack of tactile contact in online teaching, children with visual impairments require a more detailed audio commentary and more time to process the material. In contrast, children with intellectual disabilities struggle most with their attention, motivation to study, and time management.

6. The Parliamentary Assembly should recommend developing guidelines for Council of Europe member States to ensure an effective, high-quality learning process for children with SEN in times of crisis. The very idea of high quality and meaningful learning opportunities needs to be expanded beyond ordinary classrooms to embrace all effective learning spaces, including digital learning environments. It would be important to focus on the analysis of and possible solutions to common issues faced not only by teachers and children with SEN, but also their parents, who are often compelled to assume the role of teaching assistants.

7. I thank Dr Judith Hollenweger Haskell, Professor at the Centre for Teaching and Transcultural Learning in Switzerland, who has assisted me in preparing this report. I also wish to thank experts<sup>4</sup> who contributed to our work. A bibliography with listed reference studies and documents, which would be relevant for developing the proposed guidelines on quality education for children with SEN, was prepared in the context of this report.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Reconciling “special needs” and “inclusive education”

8. Inclusion is a core principle of the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); it is referenced as a goal with regard to the education of vulnerable groups such as children and youth with disabilities, minorities, migrants, Roma, girls, boys, the LGBT+ communities. To achieve better inclusion for these groups, various initiatives, programmes and

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4. Mr Sergii Gorbachov, Education Ombudsman of Ukraine; Mr Viktor Pendalchuk, Principal of Kakhovka's secondary school №1, Kherson region (Ukraine); Ms Lesia Prokhorenko, Director of Mykola Yarmachenko Institute for Special Pedagogy and Psychology (NAPS of Ukraine); and Ms Oksana Yakymiv, Director of the Vygoda Special School of the Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Council, Ukraine.

5. Bibliography: <https://rm.coe.int/bibliography-eng-for-sushko-report/1680af618b>.

policies are developed, often in parallel and without concerns about overlap or conflicting strategies. Since Covid-19, disparate teaching and learning materials, trainings and support systems have also expanded massively into digital space, resulting in excessive demands and uncertainty among teachers. The shortcomings of such unco-ordinated initiatives can be best exemplified through the lens of “disability, special needs or learning difficulties”, a group of learners identified in most European countries.<sup>6</sup>

9. According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education,<sup>7</sup> most member countries still focus primarily on the access and placement of learners with SEN and/or disabilities in mainstream classrooms, despite evidence that the quality of instruction is the decisive factor to ensure positive student outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Some argue rightly that “placement” is part of instruction in so far that it is considered as a learning ecosystem able to adapt to the specific learning situation of all students.<sup>9</sup> But the dilemma remains: is inclusive education for some students or is it for all students? Is it about the rights of children with disabilities to receive the highest quality education which may need to be delivered by specially trained and highly qualified professionals or is it about the rights of all children and their diverse needs to have the opportunity to learn together? Education systems seem to struggle to achieve a balance between these mutually exclusive visions of inclusive education. It may be the time to redefine the problem, not as an issue of placement, but solely of achieving the best education for all wherever it can be best provided. Clearly effective instruction and appropriate education should take precedence over the place of instruction.

10. The two conflicting visions of inclusive education are also reflected in the increasing percentages of students identified as having special needs. At the same time, higher percentages of children with SEN are being included in regular education. It seems that the attempt to consolidate diverse visions of inclusive education leads to identifying more students as having special needs or a disorder, impairment or disability. Labels do not only come with resources, but also with the risk of stigmatisation, they may lead to greater understanding, but also to lower expectations in teachers. Despite the evidence of harm done by labelling children, the practice continues and has been extended to cover other vulnerable groups as well.

11. The dilemma of labelling vs. generating accurate, helpful and unbiased information is still unresolved in most European countries which rely on lists of health conditions or impairments.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, disability assessment is not aligned with a social-contextual concept of disability, as disability status is attributed solely on categorical diagnosis. While most countries generally define disability in line with the CRPD and wish to leave behind the medical model, they fall short of achieving the human rights objectives.<sup>11</sup>

12. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)<sup>12</sup> is based on a non-categorical and multidimensional conceptualisation of disability in line with the CRPD. It enables policy makers to describe human functioning on a continuum and thus develop an inclusive approach across different policy domains (namely for prevention, intervention, compensation). The ICF offers a language to describe people, participation and environments – necessary components to focus on persons and the barriers they encounter. Consequently, it would be a better tool to assess barriers to participation in different educational settings than categories that unilaterally identify a child as having a problem.

13. However, the ICF only covers functioning in the context of health and environmental barriers that impact on functioning, and it does not consider participation restrictions due to social disadvantage, gender discrimination or migrant status, as well as educational achievements that fall short of children’s potential due to low expectations, discouragement and demotivation. Although the ICF has the potential of being used to assess the variety of factors that might lead to exclusion, isolation and an infringement of personal rights, its

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6. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, “Legislative Definitions around Learners’ Need: A snapshot of European country approaches”, Turner-Cmucha M., ed. and A. Lecheval, Odense, Denmark, 2022. <https://www.european-agency.org/Legislative-Definitions-around-Learners-Needs>.

7. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, “Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education: Lessons from European Policy and Practice”, Donnelly V.J and Kefallinou A., eds., Odense, Denmark, 2018, [www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/ra\\_lessons\\_from\\_european\\_policy\\_and\\_practice-web\\_0.pdf](http://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/ra_lessons_from_european_policy_and_practice-web_0.pdf).

8. Kauffman J. M., Anastasiou D., Badar J., Travers J. C., Wiley A. L., “Inclusive education moving forward” in Bakken J. P., Obiakor F. E., Rotatori A. (Eds.), General and special education in an age of change, Roles of professionals involved (Advances in Special Education, Vol. 32, pp. 153-178), Bingley, UK, Emerald Group, 2016 : Kaufman et al. 2016.

9. Agran M., Jackson L., Kurth J. A., Ryndak D., Burnette K., Jameson M., Zagana A., Fitzpatrick H., and Wehmeyer M., “Why Aren’t Students with Severe Disabilities Being Placed in General Education Classrooms, Examining the Relations Among Classroom Placement, Learner Outcomes, and Other Factors, Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities”, 45(1), 4-13, 2020.

10. “Legislative Definitions around Learners’ Needs: A snapshot of European country approaches”, op. cit.

11. UNICEF, “Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis”, A 2023 Global Outlook, UNICEF Innocenti, 2023: [UNICEF-Innocenti-Prospects-for-Children-Global-Outlook-2023.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/innocenti-prospects-for-children-global-outlook-2023) (6 October 23).

12. World Health Organization, “International classification of functioning, disability and health”, ICF, 2001.

applications still fall short of focusing on these interactions between person and environment. Functional profiles or other checklists, draw attention solely to the problem child and reinforce a medical and individualistic rather than an educational and interactive approach. Such an approach is not compatible with a human rights-based approach to disability assessment.

14. Last but not least, a “flexible curriculum” is understood as a key factor in promoting inclusive education as highlighted in a recent European report about promoting diversity and inclusion in schools.<sup>13</sup> But competency-based curricula set out expectations which are exclusionary by nature as certain learners will be unable to meet these aims. In reality, most countries provide “adjustments”, “modification” or “disapplication” of the curriculum for certain learners. There is a symbolic commitment to diversity, but an overriding rhetoric of normative expectations while problematising the learner. Although in theory, a human rights-based approach requires the system to progressively realise inclusive education and respect individual rights, in reality, resources are identified in the education system and problems in the child. Still today, “many young people leave school with no worthwhile qualifications, whilst others are placed in special provision ... and some choose to drop out since the lessons seem irrelevant”.<sup>14</sup>

15. Teachers are given little practical guidance on how to overcome these dilemmas and confusion around inclusive education. Rather, education systems so far have invested much in administrative procedures, adding to the workload of professionals, including writing individual education plans (IEP) which quiet parents down, but do not adequately guide a personalised instruction, since the different parts are often not aligned, and teachers feel unprepared to write high quality IEP goals. It is therefore not surprising that some teachers understand “differentiation” as achieving common goals with individual levels of support, while others understand the same concept as achieving individual goals with common amounts of support.

16. We can conclude that different notions of inclusive education have not yet been consolidated to ensure accessibility, participation, representation, equity and fairness in everyday practice, whatever the setting they are working in, in regular or special schools, at home, in digital, social and physical learning spaces. These learning spaces exist, and their quality should be evaluated against these human rights principles independently of narrow ideological conceptions of inclusive education as the placement of all children in regular classrooms at the expense of ensuring the individual rights of a person. So what can we learn from the experience of teachers, children and their families who were forced to find ways to maintain quality education in the absence of a regular classroom?

### 3. Disruption and fragmentation of learning

17. Children with disabilities have not been the focus of much discussion during the pandemic, despite ethical concerns about whether their needs can be met in times of crisis. Realisation of children’s rights require acknowledgment of the different life realities of children, yet this was not the case during the pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic overwhelmed the functioning and outcomes of the education system in general, but it affected the most vulnerable children the most, and worsened their opportunities. The shift to online learning created new barriers and challenges. Learning deficits arose early in the pandemic and persisted throughout the pandemic, and they were significantly more pronounced for disadvantaged children. Learning losses were observed in most children, but more so in vulnerable children, as well as in low-income schools. There is a need for more research to fully understand the effects of the pandemic on the education of children with special needs. But the need to redefine curricula, assessment procedures and learner progress has already been expressed by international organisations.<sup>15</sup>

18. The life experience of children with multiple vulnerabilities illustrates the limits of support systems fully relying on regular schools. With schools closed, the services provided within the schools were restricted or disrupted: the reduction, cessation or change of specialised support services or inadequate service provision demonstrated the need to build up services in the context of school closures. Schools mandated to implement multiple support measures for diverse student populations were faced with several challenges. There were deficits in schools’ adaptability to the situation of students suffering social exclusion and difficulties in monitoring when not attending school.

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13. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, “Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe. Eurydice Report”, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail>.

14. Ainscow M., “Promoting inclusion and equity in education: lessons from international experiences”, *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 6:1, 7-16, DOI: [10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587](https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587), 2020: [Promoting inclusion and equity in education](#).

15. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Inclusive Education at the European Level: Literature Review”, Popescu C., ed., Odense, Denmark, 2021b: [COVID-19-Impact-Literature-Review.pdf](#).



19. The disruption of routines affects children with disabilities more than less vulnerable children, including difficulties with home-schooling. In children with Down Syndrome in the UK, deterioration in speech, language, communication, emotional well-being and behaviour was observed. In low-income countries, children with disabilities were excluded from basic services such as education and health. For children with visual impairments or deafness, online educational provision was not compatible with the assistive technology upon which they rely in order to learn. Study findings provide clear evidence that greater pandemic-related stressor exposure was associated with greater discrimination, which in turn increased the psychologically distressing aspects of the pandemic for people with disabilities.

20. Covid-19 and other crises, including the war in Ukraine, have increased the diversity between students. How can teachers manage these individual learning demands, whilst “differentiated instruction” (or “personalised education”) remains an unclear concept.

21. The common denominator of recent innovative approaches is a child-centred, personalised and holistic approach to learning, with a focus on first ensuring physical and emotional well-being, addressing the need for safe and stable relationships, and creating sustainable networks of support that reach beyond schools. These strategies also proved effective in providing distance learning for children with disabilities. Personalised education should aim at ensuring access to instruction, promoting participation as well as nurturing talents and interests in all children, thereby respecting human rights, fundamental freedoms, and human diversity. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) puts it: there is a need for a framework for responsiveness and resilience, with “education actors nurturing resilient mind-sets that value people and processes over classrooms and devices”.<sup>16</sup>

22. In recent years, there has been a shift away from concerns about the organisation of teaching to creating personalised learning environments and learning pathways tailored to individual needs, abilities, and interests; often involving the use of technology, adaptive learning software, problem-based approaches to teaching and collaborative learning. Competency-based curricula support shifting from content to learning outcomes, from a teaching to a learning perspective. Yet these innovations seldomly consider the specific learning situation of children with disabilities while policies for “inclusive education” are still developed and implemented apart from such innovations. There were some exceptions, for example already before the pandemic, there were students with disabilities enrolled in online schools with very positive outcomes<sup>17</sup> who continued these practices successfully during Covid-19 school closures.

23. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed gaps in accessibility and equity in remote learning. Yet, there are actionable steps and resources available to improve the accessibility of remote learning activities for students with disabilities. The pandemic also created an opportunity to reevaluate what schools should look like and which new services and accommodations might be appropriate that are specific to remote learning. Four principles of accessibility are important here: perceivable, operable, understandable, robust.<sup>18</sup>

24. According to UNICEF only 22% of digital learning platforms contain features to make them accessible to children with disabilities. Even among the few, the provisions are basic, such as closed captions for videos. Most are not interactive and therefore do not enable personalised adaptive learning. The need for quality digital solutions is due to their inclusiveness, for example by using the principles of the Universal Design for Learning.<sup>19</sup> A study about barriers and enablers for teaching with technology in special education<sup>20</sup> identifies primarily structural barriers (for example decision making around teacher training and technology resources, structures for student digital literacy training) due to school-based structures for resource allocation amongst others. Research calls on key stakeholders to prioritise a holistic approach to education, empowering teachers, school leaders as well as learners and caregivers to meet children’s needs where they are in their learning. Reference is also made to the need for coherency across policy documents rather than contrasting inclusive education with “special educational needs and disability”.

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16. OECD, “Lessons for Education from COVID-19 : A Policy Maker’s Handbook for More Resilient Systems”, [doi.org/10.1787/0a530888-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/0a530888-en), 2020, p. 19ff.

17. Rice M.F, “Special Education Teachers’ Use of Technologies During the COVID-19 Era (Spring 2020–Fall 2021)”. *TechTrends* 66, 310–326, DOI.org/10.1007/s11528-022-00700-5, 2022.

18. [Website of the National center on Accessible Educational Materials](https://www.ncl.org/accessible-educational-materials).

19. UNICEF, “Pulse Check on Digital Learning”, New York, 2022.

20. “Barriers and enablers for teaching with technology in special education”.

#### 4. Inclusive education for social cohesion in diverse societies

25. In times of crisis, when social structures collapse, when key resources are no longer available, communication difficult, and priorities shift, key caregivers are challenged to protect the rights of children. For many children with disabilities and their families, such meltdowns are experienced without war, pandemic or displacement: for some they are an everyday experience. Insights into effective practices during and after the pandemic therefore may help to avoid exclusion, discrimination, and disempowerment of the most vulnerable in the future.

26. Equity in diverse societies starts with addressing micro-inequity in everyday life such as not hearing the voice of certain people, allowing interruptions of learning experiences, biases in assessment or with “forgetting” the needs of children when designing digital learning environments. As was learnt from school closures, negative effects on learning and well-being are immediate and hard to reverse. “Including” children with disabilities in unprepared learning environments has the same effects. The pandemic has raised awareness of the price that children pay when they are exposed to inaccessible and fragmented learning environments, both physical and digital.

27. Quality of education, participation, learning opportunities and support should be more important than achieving “inclusive education as physical presence” by sending children with complex needs to unprepared regular schools or exposing them to digital environments which are not accessible. The “reality issues” of limited educational funding, the power of attitudes and the fact that it is not absolutely clear whether some form of separate schooling is really unnecessary for certain students raise doubts about the practical validity of the claim that truly inclusive systems need to abolish specialised schools. Cohesion in societies should be supported by establishing linkages between diverse learning spaces used by individuals, whether online, in regular or special schools or in institutions like hospitals to create an open learning space for diverse student populations.

28. The experiences during the pandemic indicate that trusted leaders and positive social norms were critical for adherence to government recommendations as were social consensus and bipartisan agreement. The same applies also to education in times of crisis: keeping in touch with parents and students, acknowledging that learning can only be supported through close collaboration, proved to be of critical importance. Clearly, this was not the case for all children. The Disabled Children’s Partnership initiated the campaign “#LeftInLockdown” conducting research throughout the pandemic to track the experience of disabled children and their families, which included a report entitled “[Then there was Silence](#)”<sup>21</sup> highlighting how families felt isolated, abandoned and not listened to, how services stopped or were reduced, how mental health and well-being deteriorated and children’s conditions worsened.

29. Contrary to the education system, the charity sector demonstrated agility and flexibility. A report entitled “[Unseen and Unheard](#)”<sup>22</sup> provides evidence of the detrimental impact of Covid-19 on children with disabilities from ethnic minority backgrounds and their families and how they were exposed to even more stressors and discrimination than other families. All equity concerns and ideas of inclusive education seemingly broke down in this time of crisis – when the opposite should have been true.

30. The Council of Europe’s [Digital Citizenship Education Project](#) addresses the challenges and dangers that come with being closely connected to digital technology. The report entitled “[Artificial Intelligence and Education](#)” highlights the risks attached to “platform colonialism” or “platformisation” as the domination of the internet by a small number of large companies increased. “In combination, these digital platforms represent a fragmentation of the right to education”. The platformisation of education opens up numerous ethical questions:<sup>23</sup> who are the authors of learning platforms, who defines the content and who controls the algorithms that personalise and guide learning and consequently controls learning pathways?

31. Little is known yet about how the right to education will be transformed – for the better or worse – through technology-enabled distance learning. The power concentrated in digital platforms enables the State to have a direct impact on student learning, which up to now, was moderated by local culture and teachers’ personal approaches and personalities. This may have some benefits, but also harbours many risks. These

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21. Lunt C., “[Then there was silence, The impact of the pandemic on Disabled Children](#)”, Young People and their Families, Disabled Children’s partnership (DCP), Pears Foundation, September 2021.

22. Lunt C., Arif N. and Asif S. (parent consultant), “[Unseen and Unheard, The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on disabled children and their families from black and Asian ethnic minority backgrounds](#)”, Disabled Children’s partnership (DCP), Pears Foundation, July 2022.

23. UNESCO, “[The platformization of education: a framework to map the new directions of hybrid education systems](#)”, UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2021.

need to be better understood with regard to the impact on vulnerable students, especially students with disabilities. It is questionable if learning pathways managed by algorithms and educational content used globally will be beneficial for the social cohesion of school communities.

32. Research evidence points to new opportunities as well as new barriers that children with disabilities encounter in digital environments. The effects of remote learning forced by Covid-19 related school closures were not all negative, some children benefited from teachers starting to supplement their online instructions with links to videos that were really helpful to children with special needs. Also, children had greater control over making decisions about breaks, which improved their self-regulation. Advantages of online learning for children also include lack of bullying, peer pressure and social anxiety. Some innovations developed in response to school closures proved very effective, such as collaborative emphatic tele-intervention for children with disabilities or restorative practices. The ability to self-regulate seems to be an important factor in maintaining learning beyond the classroom.

## **5. Capacity building as a key strategy**

33. Inclusion needs to be conceptualised as something we seek to achieve for ourselves as a community, not for a small group of marginalised students or problem children. Diversity protects the democratic foundations of societies, and democratic communities only thrive through the debate of diverse opinions. Innovations of teaching and learning emerge where competent professionals accept the challenges of teaching children with diverse backgrounds. Why then vehemently oppose special schools, if they are centres of excellence and able to contribute meaningfully to the quality of education? Why not learn from the successes and failures of both, regular and special schools and integrate effective practices developed during and after the Covid-19 pandemic?

34. Covid-19 forced teachers to seek new ways of reaching their students, ensuring engagement and positive learning outcomes, including emotional well-being and the ability to self-regulate learning. What really made a difference to students was the resourcefulness of their teachers, commitment and determination, collegial support and solidarity. Also, the need was identified for special educational needs coordinators to get out of their theoretical and professional “bubbles” and build bridges. Co-operation between education leaders was identified as an important strategy. Teacher collaboration was positively associated with higher degrees of adaptive teaching and lower losses in adaptive teaching throughout the pandemic.

35. Collective efficacy of teachers is one of the key factors in achieving better student outcomes; schools with a high sense of collective efficacy are also more likely to foster inclusive practices. In crisis situations, the capacity of schools and teachers to act creatively, communicate and negotiate effectively, access available resources and integrate them into meaningful practice despite severe and limiting constraints is of key importance. Whether teachers are able to creatively react to constraints, grasp new opportunities and transition to other modalities of teaching (for example online, using sign language) is closely linked to teachers' agency. Teacher agency can be understood as the capacity of teachers to act upon their ideas and plans to transform current thinking or practice. Digital competencies are important in overcoming current emergency situations, but also for future sustainable teaching and learning practices. Teachers need to be able to manage digital content, tools, learning and assessment processes – rather than being managed by digital platforms. Humans are able to imagine an open future and explore the unrealised potential, talents and interests of their students, but algorithms cannot.

36. Education systems need not only to invest in (digital) infrastructure, competencies of teachers and accessible learning materials, but even more so in the resourcefulness of everyone involved. Schools and students who are more self-directed in their own teaching and learning managed better, but disadvantaged schools received less guidance and could apply fewer practices linked to digital devices. Clearly, there is a need to support teacher collaboration and use of digital media to promote adaptive teaching. Also increased practitioner agency and autonomy is of key importance but was not supported enough. Confronted with a crisis, people need the ability to analyse unexpected situations, acquire the flexibility to respond to new challenges as well as persist in pursuing goals despite the uncertainty of success. A human-centred approach to teaching and learning strengthens competencies, but also the sense of autonomy as well as belonging, both in individuals and communities.

37. Physical, social and digital learning spaces need to be closely aligned with our vision of inclusion and learning in order to not only be accessible and adaptable, but also acceptable. Teachers need to be empowered to effectively use diverse digital technologies and online resources suited to the needs and interests of students, identify barriers and find alternative approaches when learning platforms prove inaccessible or when lacking learning materials adapted to minimise the impact of functional limitations (for

example seeing, hearing, attention). By now, there are uncountable digital resources and guidelines available online that cater to the needs of children with diverse disabilities. But it requires teachers with a vision of fostering students' capabilities to become independent learners and responsible citizens to combine them meaningfully and maintain a strong relationship.

38. Schools need to become centres of excellence for learning able to reach all children in their catchment area whether they are physically present or not. Capacity-building activities should aim at providing a more meaningful and empowering learning experience for all, teachers, parents and students. Teachers need to improve their ability to identify talents, interests and potential not only in "average" students with similar social and cultural backgrounds to their own, but also of children with unusual learning biographies or living in very different life situations. Just like students, parents, teachers and other professionals also need to be approached with a growth-mindset, focusing on their specific talents, not their shortcomings, and with respect for their human rights.

## **6. The situation of children with special education needs in Ukraine**

39. Children across Ukraine are currently facing their fifth year of fragmented education; first Covid-19 forced them out of their classrooms, now Russia's full-scale war of aggression is damaging their schools, destroying their homes, with the learning process constantly interrupted due to alarms, power cuts and stress. According to UNICEF (2023),<sup>24</sup> 5.3 million children face barriers preventing access to education, including 3.6 million children directly affected by school closures. Moreover, 1.8 million children have left the country, struggling between integration into host countries' education systems and continuing their education in accordance with the Ukrainian curriculum. An additional 2.6 million children are internally displaced within Ukraine (UNICEF 2022).<sup>25</sup> UNICEF reported widespread learning loss in August 2023,<sup>26</sup> with "up to 57% of teachers reporting deterioration in students' Ukrainian language abilities, up to 45% reporting reduction in mathematics skills and up to 52% reporting a reduction in foreign language abilities".

40. Displacement and trauma are likely to have a long-term effect on well-being and learning; affected children and their families are in desperate need of specialist care and support. It can be anticipated that Ukraine's education system will need to provide personalised learning pathways and services to meet the needs of these children over the coming years.

41. A reform of the education system has been conducted in Ukraine. The "New Ukrainian School" reform is guided by the core values of (1) respect for human dignity, (2) democratic freedoms, (3) the right to self-determination, national identity, social cohesion, justice integrity and (4) mutual assistance. The reform focuses on a competency-based approach to learning, both for teachers and students, on safe learning environments, inclusion and the digitalisation of education. The nationwide roll-out was initiated in 2017 and is planned to be completed in 2030. Russia's war against Ukraine has not only delayed reform efforts, but has also required changes to the curriculum to ensure "everyday resilience, civil defence, addressing the war in instruction and the new position of Ukraine as a frontier State in the defence of democratic values".

42. Before the war, Ukraine created the necessary foundations for a high-quality education for all and developed a system of educational institutions, research institutes, and institutions for training specialists. To ensure a positive continuation of these efforts has been a most difficult task. So far, the country is trying to cope the best it can and the education of children during the war continues. Yet according to Save the children, since the start of the school year in autumn 2023, 1.7 million children in Ukraine (42%) have limited access to in-person teaching, with about 1 million students who need to rely solely on remote learning. The resilience with which Ukraine confronts all these tests is impressive. In Kharkiv, Ukraine's first underground school is being built, enabling 900 students to study in safety, in addition to the five metro stations which have already been converted into schools.

43. In 2020, the platform "All-Ukrainian Online School" was created as a national e-platform for distance and blended learning for students in grades 5-11. Osvitiora, a non-governmental organisation, co-operated with the Ministry of Education and Science in creating the platform and has since then developed, with the support of UNICEF, methodological materials on the organisation of distance and blended learning on the basis of the platform.

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24. UNICEF, "War has hampered education for 5.3 Million children in Ukraine", warns UNICEF, 2023.

25. "More than half of Ukraine's children displaced after one month of war" 2022.

26. UNICEF, "Widespread learning loss among Ukraine's children, as students enter fourth year of disruption to education", 2023.

44. Limited internet connectivity, lack of access to devices for online learning and inadequate public support for distance learning pose challenges, especially in rural areas and for families with fewer financial opportunities. The continued use of digital technologies is of special importance during wartime to ensure access to education through hybrid and/or remote learning. Distance schools provide free access to education during martial law, a list of schools and organisations is provided by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science.

45. For children with SEN in particular, their parents and teachers, distance learning was and remains extremely challenging due to the limited availability of websites, digital platforms, e-learning materials and lack of educational digital content specifically designed for children with SEN as well as a lack of direct social interaction with peers and opportunities to participate in projects with others. The problems of organising distance learning for children with special needs are caused not only by technical problems, such as lack of high-quality internet connection, computers and special equipment, but also by the lack of qualified support from specialists familiar with the specifics of teaching children with SEN. This leads to the fact that many children were left without qualified assistance and could not receive a full education.

46. Establishing and improving inclusive education practices is an important component of the New Ukrainian School reform. The Ministry of Education and Science opened a network of inclusive resource centres, regular schools hired assistance, and additional funding to accommodate children with disabilities was made available. The reform process was interrupted by the war, with a shortage of experts and funding. In some communities, civil society initiatives and non-governmental organisations stepped in trying to ensure continuity of services, especially for the most vulnerable.

47. Online learning remains a challenge as one survey showed: 62% of respondents declared a lack of support for a holistic educational process adapted to e-learning; 90% of children with visual impairments and blindness and 96% of children with hearing impairments or deafness face problems with access to information, and 87% emphasised that almost all children with special needs cannot process information on their own and are in need of constant help. This raises the issue of parents having to assume the role of teachers without the relevant knowledge and training (on methodology and pedagogy).

48. Despite all the difficulties in organising distance learning for children with SEN, there are initiatives in Ukraine to improve this situation. For example, the Mykola Yarmachenko Institute of Special Pedagogy and Psychology of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine has developed materials to help organise the training and adaptation of children with SEN during the war for children with visual impairments, with hearing impairments and with intellectual disabilities. There is evidence<sup>27</sup> that in the context of the rapid transition to distance learning, teachers of special general secondary education institutions coped much better with this challenge than colleagues providing educational services in inclusive environments. Children with special needs and disabilities are especially vulnerable in the current situation in Ukraine. There is a danger of fragmentation and discontinuity of education, of child trafficking and irregular adoptions, especially as the war continues.

49. A significant share of displaced families included at least one family member with disabilities or a serious medical condition.<sup>28</sup> Four EU+ countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland) reported having received a number of children with disabilities evacuated from facilities in Ukraine. Support in the host country was organised by various stakeholders, including international organisations, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations in collaboration with national authorities. But according to the European Disability Forum (EDF),<sup>29</sup> data is not identifying refugees with disabilities; leaving them invisible as a result. Under the conditions of distance learning, it is difficult or impossible to support children with speech therapy, physical therapy and work with psychologists, to name just a few support measures needed for children with disabilities to ensure their readiness to learn. Most children with disabilities have difficulties adjusting to new routines and lack the ability to effectively self-regulate.

50. In the event of an emergency situation (pandemic or war), when there is a need for distance learning, governments should consider providing a form of paid leave for parents of children with SEN, since in the absence of support from teachers and assistants for children with SEN, parents must fill in the gaps and help their children to continue their education at home.

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27. Prokorenko L. and Prokhorenko D., "Distance education of Children with Special needs".

28. European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), "Displaced Ukrainians with disabilities seeking Temporary Protection in Europe", 2024.

29. European Disability Forum, "Bridging the Gaps-Four studies on Ukrainian children with disabilities", 2023.



## 7. Required policy actions

### ***7.1. Rethinking inclusion and quality education for children with special education needs***

51. A rights-based approach to education implies that every human being should be given the opportunity to develop competencies needed to enjoy personal freedoms, rights and responsibilities while fully participating in social life and contributing to values such as equality, fairness and solidarity. The negative effects of Covid-19, war and other crises are exacerbating pre-existing inequalities.

52. Seven years after the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted General Comment No. 4<sup>30</sup> to define and clarify Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, still no country in the world can claim to have achieved an inclusive education system. Various experts see recent changes in international educational policy and provision towards innovative learning environments as an opportunity for systematic changes in beliefs, values, policies and practices in inclusive education. Inclusive innovative learning environments emerge as a result of transformative processes through the interaction of policy, pedagogy and space. Such learning environments hold great promise to overcome the current restrictions imposed by rigid curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies, – and one may add “rigid learning environments”.

53. Why not think across physical and digital spaces to ensure a coherent learning experience? Why not start with providing inclusive learning opportunities where children are? Why not learn from effective practices developed and tested for emergency situations, for children on the move or learning at home, or in institutions such as hospitals? Why not implement the lessons learned from Covid-19 to build more resilient education systems<sup>31</sup> and to enhance learning through the provision of accessible and meaningful digital learning resources?

54. In order to do justice to the complex life situations of vulnerable children, education systems and schools need to develop truly inclusive approaches that primarily promote their abilities, potential, talents and respect their sense of dignity and identity – as requested by the CRPD. During the last few years, Covid-19, migration crises and war have highlighted the limits of today’s conceptualisation of “inclusive education”, the unresolved dilemmas, unclear definitions and contradicting practices.

55. Education needs to be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable: “Functioning institutions and programmes must be available in the State, but also physically and economically accessible for all — without discrimination in law or in fact. Acceptability requires that its form and substance, including curricula and teaching methods, are relevant, of high quality and culturally appropriate. Adaptable education is flexible enough to meet the changing needs of societies, communities and students”.<sup>32</sup>

56. The key outcome for all students should be that they can enjoy the rights a democratic society endorses them with. Therefore, inclusive education should be understood as something that empowers children and youth to develop their capabilities, rather than being guided by pathologised ideas of difference and a misguided focus on technical compliance that is dismissive of lived experience and emotions.

57. Respecting and ensuring children’s rights is a precondition to inclusive education, not its outcome. Maybe more important than prescribing teachers training courses with the hope that they will become more inclusive practitioners, international organisations and national policy makers should aim at turning the elusive concept of “inclusion” into a human rights-based vision of a coherent and equitable approach to address diversity which puts humans – and not technology or ideology – at the centre of its attention. Essentially, inclusion should be understood as a concept just as dynamic and individualised as the diverse group of people it represents.

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30. [General Comment 4: Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education](#).

31. OECD, “[Lessons for Education from COVID-19: A Policy Maker’s Handbook for More Resilient Systems](#)”, OECD Publishing, Paris, DOI.org/10.1787/0a530888-en, 2020a.

32. Kristin Bergtora Sandvik and Ingunn Ikdahl, “COVID-19: Towards a Digital Fragmentation of the Right to Education?”, Yale Journal of International Law, 22 January 2021. See also Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment no. 13 (1999), The Right to Education (Article 13 of the Covenant), para. 6, U.N. Doc. E/CN.12/1999/10.

58. Learning knows no boundaries. The concept of inclusive education needs to be expanded beyond the physical classroom into digital space. Bridges need to be built between existing learning spaces, whether in regular schools, special schools, in hospitals, at home or elsewhere (for example refugee centres) to ensure learning without interruption, by taking a learner-centred approach. Schools should be conceptualised as centres of excellence able to reach out to all children, whether physically present or not.

### **7.2. Council of Europe member States: general policy actions**

59. Member States ought to redefine “inclusive education” as an evidence-based, transformative process to ensure resilience, responsiveness, and adaptive capacity of the education system at every level (national, regional, school, classroom, individual levels) to prevent future breakdowns of education, whether they affect individuals, a specific group or all children and youth. This process would strengthen operational resilience and the resourcefulness of all stakeholders to ensure meaningful opportunities to learn, socio-emotional well-being, development of talents, creativity and a sense of dignity and self-worth. High quality education requires primarily investments in the resourcefulness and agency of teachers, families and children, not only in additional resources or personnel. Knowledge and capacities within special education should be used more broadly to ensure that all children with SEN receive adequate quality education. Moreover, improving the capacity of all stakeholders, but especially of school leaders and teachers, should take priority over establishing separate support structures.

60. Public authorities should implement the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health in accordance with its philosophical underpinning of universality, describing situations rather than people, structuring information in a meaningful and interrelated way. ICF should be used as a human rights tool, rather than to promote a medical model of disability. An interactive and situational understanding can prevent disabilities from being characterised as problematic and the labelling of children and their families. This approach should focus on the improvement of all learning environments.

61. Inclusive education cannot be achieved by structural reforms alone, targeting pre-identified groups of children. Ministries of Education, non-governmental organisations and international organisations need to ensure that their various support measures, programmes, projects, and initiatives create coherent, high quality and inclusive learning opportunities for all children, especially vulnerable children. The quality of all learning spaces should be a priority, as well as ensuring smooth transitions between support structures (for example in regular schools and special schools) and modes of instruction (for example onsite and distant instruction, traditional and digital learning).

62. Programmes that take a personalised approach towards learning loss and learning recovery should be developed, rather than relying on algorithms embedded in digital platforms or normative assumptions on what needs to be learned first. Initiatives towards digitalisation of education should be in line with the principles of the Council of Europe’s Digital Citizenship Education Project. These programmes should take the most vulnerable children into account without infringing on their rights.

### **7.3. Ukraine**

63. Due to the pandemic, and now due to the war, most children in Ukraine are experiencing an unprecedented disruption of their education, with devastating effects, especially on the most vulnerable. The Government of Ukraine, together with its non-governmental and international partners, needs to do everything in their power to create meaningful and safe learning opportunities wherever children are, respecting their human rights and dignity. Supported by expertise from within Ukraine and abroad, the priority now should be to ensure consistency, a person-centred approach, and flexible support systems that make use of all quality learning spaces, whether in special schools, regular schools, or in the digital space. This may include financial support for parents of children with disabilities restricted to remote learning in the absence of teachers or other available support.

64. When implementing education reforms, the authorities in Ukraine must take action to prevent unjustified measures that lead to violations of children’s rights to education and their safety. They must prevent closures of special schools and structural divisions of preschool education that would limit the access to education of children with SEN. The Government of Ukraine should instead develop a broader understanding of the concept of “inclusive education” and establish the right of parents of children with SEN to independently choose the most appropriate solution in accordance with the needs of their child and according to the institution’s ability to provide children with SEN with quality education in a safe environment. The war has led to an increase in the number of families forced to live in unstable conditions, which makes it difficult for

children with SEN to receive quality education. It would therefore be important to strengthen the capacity of the education system to provide high-quality education in its various forms to all children, and in particular, children with disabilities who are most vulnerable.

65. It is necessary to provide adequate funding for special schools and other structural subdivisions, where children with SEN study, as well as to ensure necessary training for relevant specialists. Continuity in education and the welfare of children must be prioritised over structural reforms to avoid learning fragmentation and to prevent further trauma. Moreover, it is important to build adequate safe shelters in all educational institutions in Ukraine and particularly in institutions of special education. During the construction of such shelters, it is necessary to take into account the physical characteristics of children who require special technical means and the conditions of stay in the shelter.

#### **7.4. Council of Europe**

66. The experiences of Ukraine and Ukrainian children in host countries could be valuable for Council of Europe policies and guidelines, especially in the area of inclusive education, digital transformation and democratic citizenship, to support member States in building more resilient and responsive education systems.

67. An evidence-based rather than ideologically driven implementation of inclusive education should be promoted in member States based on the principles of good governance, respect for human rights, democratic values and social cohesion. Governments should not only set standards for their curricula, teacher competencies, service provision and eligibility criteria, but also for responsiveness to diverse learner situations and flexibility to accommodate learning across physical and digital spaces.

68. The Council of Europe could assist governments and international partners in identifying weaknesses and gaps in the provision of services by supporting research into the facilitators and barriers encountered by Ukrainian children with disabilities or special needs and their families in their host countries. This includes a critical appreciation of the effectiveness and adequateness of the systems' response to crises and emergencies. This information will be critical to improve services for children with disabilities and special needs.

69. A co-ordinated improvement of accessibility, adaptability, acceptability of digital resources and platforms should be promoted as well as increased transparency regarding underpinning algorithms and premises guiding the learning process, to ensure these platforms do not exclude or discriminate untypical learners, minority groups and users with functional limitations.