



Resolution 2550 (2024)¹

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

Parliamentary Assembly

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. These 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 (United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development) and of the United Nations 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 the 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 curriculums, teacher competences, service provision and eligibility criteria, but also for responsiveness to the diverse situations of children with special educational 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 educational needs and respect their dignity and sense of identity.
5. The Assembly considers that there is a need to redefine curriculums and assessments of learners' progress, by adopting a learner-centred and human rights-based approach to the education of children with special educational 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 educational 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 ensuring that all learners have access to quality education tailored to their needs and according to their best interests;

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee*, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 24 May 2024 (see [Doc. 15984](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Pavlo Sushko).
See also [Recommendation 2278 \(2024\)](#).



- 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 educational 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 educational 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, in order to help their children continue learning at home;
 - 6.4. implement the World Health Organization's 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 the capacity of schools to reach out to all children, whether physically present or not; build bridges between different learning spaces such as regular schools, specialised 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;
 - 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 or 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 educational 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 displaced in Ukraine and in host countries;
 - 7.4. ensure the education of displaced children with disabilities or learning difficulties who temporarily fled with their families from Ukraine, addressing their specific educational needs and possibilities to help them 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 the 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, strengthen institutional capacity and support the education of children with special educational needs.