



Doc. 16184
03 June 2025

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

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 2278 (2024)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully examined Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2278 \(2024\)](#) “Quality education for children with special education needs: challenges of the pandemic, war and digitalisation” and has forwarded it to the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU), to the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) and to the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) for information and possible comments.

2. The Committee of Ministers shares the importance of a human rights-based approach to the education of children with special educational needs to make education accessible, adaptable and acceptable to these children. It also supports a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to addressing their needs in the face of challenges such as the pandemic, war and digitalisation and to address these challenges in order to ensure equitable and inclusive education for all.

3. The Committee of Ministers recalls that the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, at its 26th Session (28-29 September 2023), took decisive action adopting a series of measures which are currently implemented. First, it adopted the Resolution on “Education in Times of Crisis and Emergencies”, which provides for the development of education resilience principles in times of emergencies and crisis, and the creation of the Council of Europe’s Toolkit for education in times of emergencies and crisis. The Toolkit has been piloted and expected to be adopted by the CDEDU Plenary session in March 2025.²

4. The Ministers also adopted the 2030 Council of Europe Education Strategy, mentioned in the Parliamentary Assembly’s recommendation, which emphasises the importance of inclusive education and the well-being of all learners, including children with special education needs. The Education Strategy underscores the need to ensure that all children, regardless of their abilities and background, have access to quality education and promotes a holistic approach to education. This includes adapting educational environments and curricula to meet the diverse needs of learners and creating a safe and supportive school environment where all learners can thrive. Emphasis is placed on the importance of mental health and psychological and pedagogical support services within schools, which is crucial for children with special educational needs. The Education Strategy also highlights the need for ongoing professional development for educators to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to support children with special educational needs. This covers training in inclusive teaching practices and understanding diverse learning needs.

5. As part of the action foreseen under Pillar 1 of the Education Strategy “Renewing the democratic and civic mission of education”, a Toolbox on the right to inclusive quality education for all learners, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable, is being developed and will be finalised in 2025. It will consist of decontextualised materials on democratic school culture, developed by the Council of Europe within the framework of various capacity-building projects in member States. The aim is to make these resources available for wider use to ensure inclusive school culture and appropriate individual support at school and

1. Adopted at the 1529th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (28 May 2025).
2. The Toolkit has been approved by the CDEDU Plenary session in March 2025.



classroom levels, with the learner at the centre. The Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) also provides for a set of material promoting education system that ensures equity and inclusion for all learners, including those with special education needs. Destined to be used by education policy makers and education practitioners, the framework advocates for the adaptation of teaching methods and materials to meet the diverse needs of all students.

6. As regard digitalisation of education, the Committee of Ministers acknowledges that digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), are increasingly permeating educational settings, offering unprecedented opportunities to learn and actively participate in society to all children, but also raise new challenges to human rights, inclusion, privacy and security, democratic participation and well-being. In this regard, the Ministers adopted a resolution on the establishment of a European Year of Digital Citizenship Education in 2025. Digital citizenship education is fundamental to empower citizens and equip them with the competences needed to harness the benefits of digital technologies and become aware of their impact, and to learn to navigate responsibly, safely and ethically in digital environments. The European Year 2025 will provide a strategic platform for key education stakeholders from the public, private and civil sectors to collaborate and share practices and pedagogical resources including for children with special needs.

7. AI has also significant potential to transform the education of children with diverse special education needs by offering personalised learning, assistive technologies and enhanced accessibility. With this in mind, the Ministers adopted a resolution concerning the development of a comprehensive and nuanced regulatory framework that specifically addresses the use of AI systems in education in order to ensure that AI systems enhance learning without causing harm, protect the rights and interests of learners and educators, and promote equitable access to educational opportunities.

8. The Committee of Ministers also recalls that several of the objectives of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) contribute to promoting equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children in education (Objective 2), fighting digital exclusion and ensuring an equal access to the digital environment, including for children with disabilities (Objective 3), as well as ensuring that participatory processes include children in vulnerable situations (Objective 5). Under its Strategic Objective 6 “Children’s rights in crisis and emergency situations”, the Strategy calls for “providing guidance to protect children in a public health crisis, including by supporting children’s resilience, ensuring that the right to education and to participation are not overlooked, and by promoting digital citizenship for children to strengthen their ability to respond to crisis.” The Council of Europe will also continue to promote the implementation of Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2018\)7](#) on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment, and recalls its §12 calling States to ensure access to the digital environment in educational and other care settings for children in vulnerable situations.

9. More specifically, the issue of access to education in times of war has been addressed by the Council of Europe Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU) with respect to children of Ukraine in the member States. The CGU, a multilateral operational co-operation platform between Council of Europe member States, the EU, and relevant international organisations and civil society organisations, has been set up with the support of the CDENF as a follow-up to the “[Reykjavík Declaration – United around our values](#)”. During an exchange of views organised at its March 2024 plenary meeting on this issue, participants highlighted the diversity of approaches taken by member States and agreed on the need to understand the different approaches across States, including innovative practices and ways in which national education systems provide psychological support to the children of Ukraine. A [Mapping Study](#) on children of Ukraine’s access to education in Council of Europe member States, which has been prepared by the CGU in close co-ordination with the Education Department, to understand gaps and promising practices so as to determine how to further support member States, was published on 21 November 2024.

10. In 2024, the Council of Europe complemented the Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026³ with a comprehensive response package to help addressing the mid- and long-term social, health and housing challenges of the refugee influx in Armenia, caused by displacement, including children needing support for their education rights.

11. The Committee of Ministers would also underline the European Committee of Social Rights’ (ECSR) extensive findings based on Articles 15 and 17 of the European Social Charter concerning a human rights-based approach to education of children with special education needs. It specifically addressed the challenges of remote learning and, in this context, emphasised that remote learning exacerbates the problem of digital exclusion and, in many instances, a move away from face-to-face teaching severely impacts the

3. Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026, document [CM\(2022\)121-final](#).

access to and the quality of education of children with disabilities and special education needs. The ECSR has consistently held that in order to secure the independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community of persons with disabilities through their education, public authorities must take account of the type of disability concerned, how serious it is and a variety of individual circumstances to be examined on a case-by-case basis. Inclusive education implies the provision and support and reasonable accommodations which persons with disabilities are entitled to expect in order to access schools effectively. Such reasonable accommodations may also include innovative learning environments, and digitalisation of education to ensure that children with special education needs are provided with special equipment corresponding to those needs. Teaching and learning strategies should also be tailored to the specific needs of individuals and groups on the basis of flexible curriculum designs, and digital media used to promote adaptive teaching.