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Access to school and education for all children

Report[1]
Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media
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Summary

Access to quality education is an issue of social justice and of equal opportunities. It is also in the interest of our societies to make the best possible use of each person's talents, and to avoid social costs linked to unemployment and dependency, which may be much higher than investment in education. However, in Europe, access to school is not always effectively guaranteed to all children by law and in practice: children driven out of their countries by military conflicts, street children, and those suffering from exclusion due to their social origin, ethnicity, disability or other factors, need immediate attention.

In this respect, parliaments have a key role to play. Firstly, they should ensure that national legislation guarantees access to quality education for all. Secondly, they should ensure that legislation is duly implemented and that appropriate measures of redress are in place to meet the specific needs of children from vulnerable groups. Thirdly, they should rethink and reform education systems to prevent school dropout and ensure that no child is left behind. As far as necessary, positive measures should be applied, such as stimulation of greater parental involvement in early childhood literacy activities as regards children from migrant communities and targeted measures focusing in particular on girls and young women.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 13533, Reference 4053 of 27 June 2014

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. Europe has seen significant progress in the last two decades as regards access to school and education. Such progress, however, is of varying degrees according to the different European regions and groups of population concerned. Barriers to access to school still exist in the Council of Europe member States and they deprive children of the concrete opportunity to take their place in society.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly calls for these barriers to be lifted. It also underscores that the goal is not only to have all children attend school, but to ensure they can access quality education that will guarantee the development of their personal capacities and help them reach their full potential.

3. Moreover, access to school and quality education is not only an issue of individual justice and of equal opportunities, it is also in the interest of our societies to make the best use each person's talents and to avoid social costs linked to unemployment and dependency, which may be much higher than investment in education.

4. The Assembly therefore calls on member States to enhance their education systems in order to ensure access to quality education for all and regular class attendance until the end of the study programme. Member States should, in particular:

4.1. identify priority education zones, and design action for urban and rural environments;

4.2. identify groups at risk of exclusion and develop action plans for vulnerable groups, including measures to support education of children who are at risk of dropping out of school, and bring back to school those children who left it before having finished the school programme;

4.3. promote networking, exchanges and mutual learning on inclusive education between schools, and the development of relations between schools and the wider community;

4.4. strengthen co-operation between public authorities and families and put in place measures to protect children and ensure their access to school and regular class attendance, if families fail to do so;

4.5. improve access to pre-primary education for all children, with a special focus on children from disadvantaged families, children of migrants and those attending schools in rural areas;

4.6. support programmes that help children from minority and migrant communities to acquire adequate knowledge of the language of schooling;

4.7. invest in programmes that support parental engagement in early literacy activities with the potential to promote literacy in the early primary grades; these programmes should be tailored to the cultural, ethnic and socio-economic contexts;

4.8. encourage parental involvement in school activities, particularly in schools with a higher proportion of students whose parents have low levels of education or a low level of proficiency in the language of their children's schooling (for example migrant families);

4.9. promote academic resilience and academic success (including success "against all odds" for children from disadvantaged families), for instance by developing programmes fostering a positive school climate and motivation towards learning for socially disadvantaged students;

4.10. promote the inclusion in high-profile schools of students from disadvantaged families and migrant backgrounds in order to provide an equal opportunity to achieve;

4.11. enhance, through targeted training the ability of school managers to implement a policy of inclusiveness, to stimulate a democratic atmosphere in school and to further develop co-decision procedures on school matters;

4.12. enhance, through targeted training, of school managers and teachers, the prevention of violence among pupils, in school and outside of it, offline and online, in order to minimise possible conflicts among and with new students;

4.13. include in curricula more teaching on human rights, democracy, social justice, multicultural society, tolerance, peaceful conflict resolution and mutual respect in order to advance, in the most efficient and smoothest manner and the inclusion and socialisation of new students;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 3 December 2015

4.14. enhance teachers' professional education and in-service-training to enable them to implement the above-mentioned values and to foster a co-operative atmosphere in the classroom, by acting as role models;

4.15. support teachers' continuing professional development and, in particular, implement teacher education programmes to raise teachers' awareness of the role played by language in children's cognitive and social development and teachers' ability to manage linguistically diverse classrooms;

4.16. foster access to pedagogical professions for students from minority and migrant families;

4.17. ensure gender equality at all levels of the education system, with a special focus on disadvantaged women and girls, such as the Roma, migrants and refugees and women and girls with disabilities;

4.18. provide adequate financial support for programmes promoting social inclusion and access to education for all, bearing in mind not only the cost of investing in education, but also the risk of not doing so.

5. The Assembly calls on member States to support actions at world level to promote access to school and education for all and, in particular, to implement the Incheon Declaration on "Education 2030: towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all", adopted at the World Education Forum held from 19 to 22 May 2015 in Incheon (Republic of Korea), and its Framework for Action adopted at the UNESCO High-level meeting on 4 November 2015. Concerted efforts with UNESCO, UNICEF and the European Commission should assist governments and national parliaments to fulfil their duty to offer every child an appropriate education, prepare children for future challenges and give them the chance to live in dignity.

6. Finally, the Assembly notes that education expenses are an investment for a better future for individuals, their surroundings and humanity worldwide. It therefore calls on governments of member States to consider adhering to the international benchmarks of 4% to 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) and/or 15% to 20% of total public expenditure for domestic investment in education. Furthermore, Europe should also reiterate its commitment to the international target of providing 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) as official development assistance (ODA) at United Nations-level.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Flego, rapporteur

1. Aim and scope of the report

1. Over the last twenty years, access to school and education had shown significant progress in Europe and beyond. Such progress, however, is of varying degrees when it comes to different groups of the population.

2. In several European States, there are children who do not attend class: reasons may vary from lack of schools in the areas in which they live, to poor socio-economic conditions (for example parents who need their children's free labour on their land and in their business) or cultural obstacles (for example traditions which oppose the education of girls). Some of the most disadvantaged children, for example undocumented children (often children who have been abandoned by their families and are living in the street, but also Roma children and refugee children), are *de facto* denied the right to education. This robs them of any opportunity to take their place in society in their home countries or abroad, depriving them of their chance to live their lives in dignity. There are also children who receive inappropriate education or an education of poor quality or inadequate for their specific needs, such as children with disabilities, but also children of exceptional ability.

3. The variation in levels of educational attainment is considered to be one of the great social divides in modern societies. It is therefore important not only to look at what prevents access to education, but also at what prevents its completion. The dropout rate is considered to be very high in some parts of Europe. Education systems should not only cover an access policy but also an exit policy: students need to complete their education successfully. High rates of access with high rates of dropout simply delay the problems.

4. Article 2 of the Protocol to European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 9) provides that "[n]o person shall be denied the right to education". In addition, under Article 17.1.*a* of the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163), the States Parties must "ensure that children and young persons … have … the education and the training they need" to ensure the effective exercise of their right to grow up in an environment which encourages the full development of their personality and of their physical and mental capacities.

5. The Parliamentary Assembly, in its Resolution 2013 (2014) on good governance and enhanced quality in education stressed the importance of ensuring access to quality education for all. Member States were called upon to "ensure non-discrimination in access to education and take positive steps to counter educational inequalities" (paragraph 5.4). Bearing that in mind, on 27 June 2014, the Assembly referred to our committee for report the motion for a resolution on "Access to school and education for all children" which I had tabled with 23 other colleagues (Doc. 13533, Reference 4053). I was appointed rapporteur on 2 October 2014.

6. In this report, I have focused on access to "quality education", and not just any kind of educational provision, considering what Council of Europe member States could do to remove obstacles to access to education and to ensure that State schools cater for all children. In other words, our goal is to not only have all children attend a school but to ensure they can access an education that will guarantee the development of their personal capacities and help them reach their full potential. Our committee explored this concept in depth in the report by our colleague, Mr Paolo Corsini, on "Good governance and enhanced quality in education".[3]

7. With this in mind, the report looks at the situation of some specific groups which may be at risk of discrimination or exclusion with regard to an effective implementation of their right to education (Chapter 2). I then analyse the barriers that prevent access to education (Chapter 3) and conclude by proposing a series of actions at local, national, European and world levels to ensure access to quality education for all (Chapter 4). I am grateful to the experts that participated in the committee's work for their valuable contributions.[4]

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3. Doc. 13585.

4. On 29 January and 24 June 2015 in Strasbourg, the committee held an exchange of views with Mr Sjur Bergan, Head of the Education Department, Council of Europe, who informed the committee about the latest developments with regard to access to education and school for all children in the Council of Europe member States. On 11 and 12 March 2015 in The Hague, the committee considered a memorandum and held an exchange of views with Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe; Ms Margarete Sachs-Israel, Programme Specialist, Education for All Global Partnerships Team, UNESCO; and Ms Gabriela Noveanu, Senior Research Analyst, International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

2. Children at risk of discrimination or exclusion

8. High variation in education levels leads to a greater degree of inequality among people and a denial of the principle of equal chances and of societal inclusion. Many people are aware that lack of education brings exclusion and discrimination, poverty, expulsions and potential for revolt. It is evident that without schooling, one is hardly prepared for social relations, for peaceful and co-operative coexistence or for skilled work. Brutally speaking, nowadays, without general education and vocational training, one is nobody and nothing. This is the reason why access to school and education for all is crucial.

9. The Council of Europe has identified measures to foster access to education for children who are at risk of discrimination or exclusion.[5] To take stock of member States actions, a questionnaire was sent to public authorities in the field of education via the Council of Europe Steering Committee on Education Policies and Practice (CDPPE) on 31 March 2015.[6] In this chapter, I will analyse the situation of some specific groups of children with regard to an effective implementation of their right to education.

2.1. Children of migrants and asylum seekers

10. In 2013, an estimated 7 million children were refugees and between 11.2 and 13.7 million children were displaced within their own country due to conflict, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Today, the situation is even more dramatic, following the events in Syria and Ukraine in the last two years. While children benefit from most of the humanitarian assistance offered, sectors specifically targeting children, such as child protection and education, are strongly underfunded at global level. Over the last decade, education was the least funded humanitarian sector, with almost two thirds of needs unfunded and an allocation of only 3% of overall humanitarian assistance. This is largely due to life-saving emergency relief often taking priority over education and other needs during a crisis.[7]

11. Refugee and asylum-seeker children have experienced the tragedy of war in their home countries, surviving atrocities. These children, who come from different cultures and customs, need to be re-socialised. The new home country's duty is to treat them as new citizens and to create conditions for their societal integration, offering them the possibility to learn the language of their new living environment and to enter, as soon as possible, into regular schooling activities.

12. Professor David Little mentioned the Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní), a school in Blanchardstown, Dublin (Ireland), which has about 320 pupils, 80% of which come from non-English/Irish speaking homes. There are 51 home languages (including English and Irish) spoken in that school. The school is successful in ensuring access to education for all the children enrolled. This example is enlightening. First, this school has two overarching educational goals: to ensure that pupils from immigrant homes gain full access to education and to exploit linguistic diversity to the benefit of all pupils. The policy and education practice in the school are determined accordingly. Second, home languages are treated as a resource for all learners, and pupils from immigrant families are encouraged to use them as they wish, inside and outside the classroom. There is strong emphasis on literacy development in language of schooling, curriculum languages (Irish, French), and home languages (role of parents). As a result, the school performs above the national average in standardised tests of English and mathematics (designed for native speakers). Immigrant pupils develop high levels of age-appropriate literacy in their home languages. Since their home languages are continuously in focus, the pupils feel valued, their motivation to learn is very high and they develop high levels of language awareness and of age-appropriate literacy in English, Irish and French.

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5. Parliamentary Assembly key texts include: Resolution 1930 (2013) and Recommendation 2014 (2013) on "*Young Europeans: An Urgent Educational Challenge"*, Resolution 2013 (2014) and Recommendation 2054 (2014) on "Good governance and enhanced quality in education"; and, as regards specific groups at risk of discrimination and exclusion: Recommendation 1652 (2004) on "Education of Refugees and Displaced Persons", Resolution 1761 (2010) and Recommendation 1938 (2010) on "Guaranteeing the right to education for children with illnesses or disabilities", Resolution 1927 (2013) on "Ending discrimination against Roma children", Resolution 2039 (2015) and Recommendation 2064 (2015) on "Equality and inclusion for people with disabilities". A non-exhaustive list of key reference texts appears in the Appendix to document AS/Cult (2015) 39.

6. The questions I asked were the following: How do national authorities identify children who do not attend school? What did they do in the last five years to improve the situation? and What do they plan to do in the near future? The results were presented to the committee at its meeting during the June 2015 part-session. A brief overview of replies – in the original language – to the last two questions, mentioning actions that may require political support by the Assembly members, appears in document AS/Cult/Inf (2015) 04.

7. http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/children_conflict_en.pdf.

13. As regards children of migrants and asylum seekers, statistics show that reading in the language of schooling is crucial to success in school, and students need good reading comprehension to understand and learn the material being covered in all classes.[8] Reading makes students more knowledgeable, not just about school subjects but also about many topics relevant to everyday life and society more generally. In families, where parents do not speak the language of schooling, children have lower levels of proficiency in reading. This is important, since failing to learn to read fluently with good comprehension before the third or fourth year of schooling may result in life-long problems in learning new skills, as demonstrated by the IEA's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).[9] Pre-school education could help children from migrant and asylum-seeker families improve their overall reading literacy.[10]

14. Indeed, proficiency in a language other than their mother tongue can make it easier for these pupils to follow courses and thus stimulate their development. That said, having access to education in their native/home language[11] acts as an additional stimulus, which helps secure the self-esteem of immigrant children and of their families and respect for their identity. This can lead to benefits in several areas: parents who participate in their children's potential success in school and well-being get socially integrated faster and in a better way; and, in turn, the community appreciates the quicker integration of parents.

15. Education provision for newly arrived migrant children seeks to ensure that pupils entering mainstream education are not beginners in the language of schooling. This may be necessary as a reception measure when dealing with large numbers of new pupils from migrant families. Special language lessons could also be offered to facilitate participation in mainstream lessons, which requires efficient co-ordination between language teachers and class/subject teachers. Some countries (including Belgium, France and Ireland) have developed pedagogical approaches that encourage migrant pupils to use their home languages even though the teacher is not proficient in those languages.[12] Teachers, as individuals, and schools, as institutions, together with local communities and national authorities need to be well prepared and willing to co-operate in this endeavour.

16. When discussing language proficiency, parents' level of language competences needs to be taken into consideration. In the European Union, around two thirds of the countries have written information on the school system, published for immigrant families. However, these publications are generally published in a limited range of languages. Access to interpretation services is a statutory right in three Nordic countries (Norway, Finland and Sweden), two Baltic States (Estonia and Lithuania) and Hungary. Even in those six countries, the legal entitlement applies to a specific category of immigrant families (refugees) or in very specific situations requiring contact between immigrant families and schools.[13]

2.2. Children from the Roma population

17. Roma children are far less likely to attend pre-school education, with coverage for Roma children aged 3 to 6 ranging from a low of 0.2% in Kosovo to a high of 17% in Romania.[14] Educational achievement among Roma is lower compared with their peers. For example, a Hungarian survey found that the average grades of Roma pupils were lower than that of the majority of their peers, with half failing in the Hungarian language and mathematics. It also takes longer for Roma children to finish their schooling. In the Slovak Republic, Roma children are 18 times more likely than non-Roma to not finish eighth grade in eight years, and in Hungary, 80% take longer than eight years to complete primary education. Of those with less than eighth grade level,

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8. The Council of Europe set up a project on the language of schooling following the adoption in 2014 of Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)5 on the importance of competences in the language(s) of schooling for equity and quality in education and for educational success. A pan-European conference on this issue took place on 14 and 15 October 2015 in Strasbourg. It addressed the issue of dropout causes assessed by this project (i.e. difficult socio-economic background, lack of books at home): www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Conference_EN.asp.
9. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) provides international benchmarks that assist in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of education systems worldwide. The IEA conducts regular cyclic studies of learning in basic school subjects (mathematics, science and reading) as well as studies on a range of other topics (such as computer and information literacy, civic and citizenship education, early childhood education and teacher education) (www.iea.nl).
10. Source: IEA
11. Each person's home language is the basis of his/her primary socialisation, cognitive development, cultural inheritance and identity; his/her default medium of communication and discursive thinking and plays an essential role in his/her sense of well-being and security.
12. Concept paper "The linguistic and educational integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds", Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2010.
13. Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe, Eurydice, April 2009.
14. www.romachildren.com/?page_id=665.

there is still some level of illiteracy.[15] Even more vulnerable are the Roma women.[16] In south-east Europe, illiteracy levels reach 32% for Roma women and 22% for Roma men, compared to 5% and 2% respectively among women and men in the majority community.

18. Some Roma children are enrolled in special schools although they don't have any problems with their mental or physical health. This is often the result of discrimination and refusal to accept these children in the normal schools. This practice is threatening the whole future of Roma children. Once in a special school, students do not receive an education of a standard equivalent to regular schools.[17] Furthermore, once in a special school, the chances of a transfer to the mainstream are virtually non-existent.

19. The European Court of Human Rights, in a case against the Czech Republic in relation to the education of Gypsy/Roma children, stated an important principle: it is not enough to guarantee access *per se,* the State should guarantee that children should have quality education (and not be segregated into schools where the teaching is designed for mentally disabled children).[18] We should insist on the principle of not only "access to rights" – in this case the right to education – but "equal and full enjoyment of these rights".

20. Access to pre-school education as from three years of age could be beneficial for future access to school and socialisation of Roma children. Of course, public authorities cannot achieve proper results without the co-operation of Roma families, and this means that getting them involved is crucial.

2.3. Children from lower income families, particularly in rural areas

21. Levels of income and the geographical area in which families live are also amongst factors which have an impact on access to education. Parents from lower income families are often not able to provide all that is required for their children to attend school. For example, in the United Kingdom, social class remains the strongest predictor of educational achievement and the social class gap in terms of educational achievements is one of the most significant in the developed world.[19]

22. The geographical area in which children live also creates inequalities The recent economic crisis has forced public authorities in a number of member States to close rural schools, following a strategy of grouping schools. Primary and secondary schools in rural areas are now less accessible in terms of the distance which pupils have to cover, commuting every day. This also increases the costs for the parents.

23. The differences between rural and urban areas are beginning to emerge already with respect to pre-school education. Even in the Nordic countries, well known for an efficient and extensive network of pre-education services, there is a clear pattern along the rural-urban axis, with a considerably higher proportion of kindergartens in urban areas.

24. The most successful schools are often in cities; they tend to have students that are relatively economically affluent, speak the language of instruction, and begin school with early literacy skills. Successful schools also have better working conditions and facilities as well as more instructional materials, such as

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15. www.unicef.org/ceecis/UNICEF_ROE_Roma_Position_Paper_Web.pdf.
16. Roma survey – Data in focus, Education: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014: http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014_roma-survey_education_tk0113748enc.pdf.
17. For example, while regular school students in the Czech Republic learn reading comprehension, the entire Czech alphabet and counting to 20 in the first grade, special school students are not expected to acquire this knowledge until the third and fourth grade.
18. *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*, judgment of 13 November 2007 (Grand Chamber): This case concerned 18 Roma children, all Czech nationals, who were placed in schools for children with special needs, including those with a mental or social handicap, from 1996 to 1999. The applicants claimed that a two-tier educational system was in place in which the segregation of Roma children into such schools – which followed a simplified curriculum – was quasi-automatic.

The Court noted that, at the relevant time, the majority of children in special schools in the Czech Republic were of Roma origin. Roma children of average/above average intellect were often placed in those schools on the basis of psychological tests which were not adapted to people of their ethnic origin. The Court concluded that the law at that time had a disproportionately prejudicial effect on Roma children, in violation of Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) taken in conjunction with Article 2 (right to education) of the Protocol to the Convention.

See also: *Sampanis and Others v. Greece*, judgment of 5 June 2008; *Oršuš and Others v. Croatia*, judgment of 16 March 2010 (Grand Chamber); *Horvàth and Vadàzi v. Hungary*, decision on the admissibility of 9 November 2010; *Sampani and Others v. Greece*, judgment of 11 December 2012; *Horváth et Kiss v. Hungary*, judgment of 29 January 2013; *Lavida and Others v. Greece*, judgment of 28 May 2013; and the factsheet on "Roma and Travellers".
19. www.thersa.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/367003/RSA-Social-Justice-paper.pdf.

books, computers, technological support and all kinds of supplies. Depending on the country, the location of the school can provide access to important additional resources (for example libraries, media centres or museums).

25. At European level, on average, the students attending schools in cities or towns with more than 15 000 inhabitants have higher reading scores than those attending schools in smaller towns or rural areas of less than15 000 inhabitants. As regards children from lower income families, particularly in rural areas, there are several issues that need to be given due consideration: availability of resources for education at home, parental education, equitable access and gender parity and the difference in access to and completion of education between rural and urban environments. Research consistently shows a strong positive relationship between achievement and socio-economic status, or indicators of socio-economic status such as parents' or caregivers' level of education or occupation.[20] Home factors are likely to exert much of their influence before the start of formal schooling. Availability of reading material in the home is likewise strongly related to achievement not only in reading, but also in mathematics and science.

26. Family income has been shown to have a powerful influence on students' achievement in reading and mathematics.[21] At European level, differences in average achievement between students with considerable home resources for learning and those with few resources varied from 40 points (Portugal) to 130 points (Malta). In Sweden, Germany and Italy, the lower the parents' educational level and occupational class, the lower the students' reading performances appear to be. Sweden appears to have higher performance disparities between students from different social origins, followed by Germany and Italy. This analysis provides support to the hypothesis that school attendance is more important for less advantaged students. The decline in reading literacy achievement in the Netherlands in the past decade is related to student socio-economic status (i.e. poverty) and to educational factors such as lack of early literacy activities in the home or of early literacy abilities established in school.

2.4. Children with disabilities

27. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24) prohibits discrimination and promotes equal opportunities in education at all levels.[22] A total of 151 countries have ratified the Convention, including most of the Council of Europe member States.[23] I should also recall the adoption by the Committee of Ministers in 2006 of Recommendation Rec(2006)5 on the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015. The European Union became party to the United Nations Convention in December 2010.

28. Despite high-level political commitments, however, children with disabilities are still faced with serious barriers in access to education in a number of Council of Europe member States. According to a report released by OSIAF Armenia, 70% of children with disabilities living in orphanages no longer go to school at all.[24] Furthermore, in cases where they have access to some kind of education, very often it is not adequate and does not contribute to fulfilling their potential. In Armenia, 19% of parents of children with special education needs reported insufficient conditions and the low quality of education as the main reasons why their children are excluded from mainstream schools.

29. Experience and data suggest that those who are enrolled in mainstream education have better academic results than those schooled in special classes or in special schools and, therefore, may have better chances in accessing subsequent employment. This is exemplified in systems where special schooling limits the possibility of equal qualifications. For example, the German country report indicates that, in 2006, more than 77% of all special school leavers did not have a school leaving qualification on accomplishing their school education, whereas only 7.9% of those enrolled in regular schools were in such a situation. Also, reports from Poland show that, in 2008, more than 95% of mainstream secondary school graduates who sat matriculation exams passed the exams, whereas in special secondary schools only 67.4% did so.[25]

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20. Source: IEA
21. In IEA PIRLS 2011, students were scored according to the availability of the five home supports for learning (parents' education; parents' occupation; number of children's books in the home; number of books in the home; and availability of two study supports – an Internet connection and their own room), and allocated to three distinct categories.
22. www.un.org/disabilities/
23. www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf.
and www.un.org/disabilities/documents/maps/enablemap.jpg.
24. http://chalkboard.tol.org/news/armenian-ngo-receives-unesco-prize-for-inclusive-education-work.
25. www.disability-europe.net/content/aned/media/ANED%202010%20Task%205%20Education%20final%20report%20-%20FINAL%20(2)_0.pdf.

2.5. Children with high abilities

30. As regards children with high abilities, the IEA conducted a large-scale assessment of high achievers in education.[26] The IEA studied the percentage of students reaching High International Benchmarks across the achievement spectrum in three subjects (mathematics, science and reading). The percentage of high achievers – that is students able to read complex materials with in-depth understanding, solve a variety of problems in mathematics, and show familiarity with a range of scientific information – was used as an indicator of gifted children's educational achievement compared to the rest of school pupils of the same age. At European level, the average difference in reading achievement scores between the upper 10th percentile and lower 10th percentile of students across countries was 182 points. This difference varied from 139 points in the Netherlands to 253 points in Malta. This shows that gifted children, in order for them to progress, might require programmes which are different from the programmes designed for their peers. Education programmes should be tailored to their learning pace to stimulate progress in learning.

31. Unfortunately, however, gifted children do not have access to an educational provision which is adequate for their abilities. Very often, these children have to follow the "normal" programme which should enable the majority of pupils to advance. This, however, creates a situation in which gifted children become disillusioned and simply bored in the classroom. It leads to loss in motivation and, in extreme cases, pupils dropping out of school.

32. Moreover, teachers frequently focus less attention on the more capable students. Perceived as being academically successful, these children often do not appear to require much teacher assistance. However, these students do have needs, including the need to confront their competences with those of students who may be of a different age, but who have a similar level of knowledge. For instance, students of different ages but with a particular ability in design and technology may benefit from having some lessons together once a week led by a specialist teacher in that subject.

2.6. Gender-related discrimination

33. Gender is another characteristic which tends to be related to differences in academic achievement. However, considerable variation can be observed across learning domains, student age, and countries, and the nature and reasons for this variation are not well understood. Studies show that male and female infants do not differ in the cognitive abilities that form the foundations of mathematical and scientific thinking, and that male and female children master the concepts and operations of elementary mathematics in the same way at the same time. Among the participants in IEA studies,[27] there was no significant average effect of gender on achievement in mathematics or science, while there was a consistent difference in favour of girls in reading literacy.

34. We should also bear in mind the risk of double discrimination that combines factors such as gender and ethnicity. For example, the illiteracy rate in the SEE (Southeast Europe) region is 32% for Roma women, compared with 22% for Roma men, and 5% and 2% respectively among women and men in the majority community. In Albania, one quarter of Roma women are illiterate – more than twice the rate for men. Roma women in Albania have spent an average of 5.5 years in school, as compared with 8 years for men, and almost one third of primary-school-age girls from those communities do not take part in education, as against 19% of boys[28].

3. Specific barriers to access to quality education and school for all

3.1. Barriers identified by an inclusive education programme of the Council of Europe

35. To build inclusive societies, establishing systems which offer equal opportunities for everybody, we must pay special attention to inclusive education. The Council of Europe and the European Union set up a Joint Programme on inclusive education in South East Europe to address the challenges in access to education. As was often stressed by participants in this programme, an inclusive school is a school where "every child is welcome; every parent is involved; every teacher is valued". The project promotes the concept of inclusive education as a reform principle that respects and caters for diversity among all learners, with a

26. IEA TIMSS and PIRLS 2011 reported on mathematics, science and reading achievement at four points along the scale as international benchmarks: Advanced International Benchmark (625), High International Benchmark (550), Intermediate International Benchmark (475), and Low International Benchmark (400).
27. TIMSS and PIRLS 2011.
28. www.unicef.org/ceecis/UNICEF_ROE_Roma_Position_Paper_Web.pdf.

specific focus on those who are at a higher risk of marginalisation and exclusion.[29] Networking between pilot schools is an important element of this project[30] as it helps exchange good practices and fosters mutual learning on inclusive education. The importance of networking between schools was also mentioned by Estonia in its reply to the questionnaire on access to school (see item 4.1 below).

36. Achieving inclusiveness is not simple. Various obstacles have to be overcome. The Joint Programme identified specific barriers, including the following:

– social and financial obstacles – student support and support for disadvantaged families vary widely throughout Europe; the social environment might be insufficiently supportive; social origin and conditions can generate lack of hope and perspectives;

– cultural obstacles – challenge of growing up in an environment that does not value education;

– language proficiency – those with insufficient command of the language(s) of instruction but also those with insufficient command of their native language find it difficult to access an education programme;

– administrative obstacles, such as lack of documents (irregular migrants, whether refugees or not; street children).

37. I should like to stress that education is decisive for the future lives of children. It is not possible to establish individually tailored training. One should try, however, to establish an education system which would intensively stimulate children and help them develop their capacities from a very early age.

38. Another barrier which prevents access to school and high educational achievement is the lack of involvement of parents in their children's education. International studies underscore the fundamental importance of a supportive home environment in shaping children's reading literacy. Parents or other caregivers can directly support reading development by expressing positive opinions about reading and literacy. The time devoted to literacy-related activities remains essential to the acquisition of reading literacy skills and the effects can be long-lasting. A large study in England recently found that seven home activities – being read to, going to the library, playing with numbers, painting and drawing, being taught letters, being taught numbers, and singing or reciting songs/poems/rhymes – had greater predictive power for literacy and numeracy achievement than any other variables studied, including socio-economic status, parents' education, and household income.

39. Parental involvement in school activities is positively associated with children's reading achievements. This association holds even after taking into account differences in parental education. Parents with lower levels of education tend to get less involved in school activities. Students whose parents take an active role in their children's school activities are more likely to attend school regularly, achieve higher grades and test scores, and continue their education beyond high school.

3.2. Access to education jeopardised at world level

40. As regards access to education at world level, one could ask why European citizens should feel concerned. To answer that question I could say there is no other way. Council of Europe member States should not only look at the cost of action, but also at the price to be paid for inaction. This is the reason why I would like to stress that Europe must play a more important role in ensuring access to education worldwide.

41. In 1990, at the World Conference held in Jomtien (Thailand), UNESCO, in co-operation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF and the World Bank, launched the Education for All Movement to ensure a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, young people and adults.

42. Concerted efforts with UNESCO, UNICEF and European Commission should help us persuade governments and national parliaments that there was a duty to offer every child an appropriate education, to prepare children for future challenges, to give them the chance to live in dignity, and that the education

29. To increase the understanding of the benefits of inclusive education, the main activities focus on 49 pilot schools (seven per beneficiary: three primary, two general secondary and two vocational secondary). The experiences gained from these pilot schools provide policy makers with firm suggestions on how to scale up identified effective practices. This will enable them to cater for increased social diversity and more inclusive societies. The project was designed based on a "bottom-up" approach that will help policy makers move from experience in the field to mainstream education reforms.

30. Joint European Union–Council of Europe Project "Regional Support for Inclusive Education in South East Europe": http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/inclusive-education.

expenses were not just a budgetary expenditure, but investment for a better future. This being said, I should like, however, to draw the Assembly members' attention to the worrying developments threatening access to education at world level.

43. The United Nations estimated that, in 2013, 28,5 million children were not attending primary school in conflict-affected countries. As a result, only 79% of children in conflict-affected poor countries are literate, compared to 93% in other poor countries. Over 1 billion children, including 300 million under five years old, live in the countries affected by conflict.[31]

44. The world has witnessed a series of attacks on schools in the last few years and the number of such attacks is growing. We all remember the courageous act of Malala Yousafzai, who was only 11 years old when her anonymous diary captivated audiences.[32] Taliban militants destroyed dozens of girls schools at the time when the Taliban wielded power over the region she lived in. Malala Yousafzai first came to public attention through her diary, published on BBC Urdu, which chronicled her desire to remain in education and for girls to have the chance to be educated. When she was shot in the head in October 2012 by a Taliban gunman, she was already well known in Pakistan, but that one shocking act made her famous internationally[33].

45. Pakistan was again stricken by terror on 16 December 2014. Pakistani Taliban militants attacked an army-run school in Peshawar, leaving at least 135 people dead, most of them children.[34] This attack caused unprecedented shock in Pakistan and it also showed how far the Talibans can go in instilling a feeling of terror. Apparently, they intended to kill as many students as possible – rather than take hostages, as initially thought. The Taliban militants presented this attack as a retaliation measure in a revenge for Malala Yousafzai being awarded the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize.

46. On 14 April 2014, 276 schoolgirls were abducted by Boko Haram – a Sunni jihadist movement waging a five-year insurgency to establish an Islamist State in north-east Nigeria – from the government girls secondary school in Chibok, 53 of which were able to escape and return home.[35] Boko Haram used the kidnapping as a means of intimidating the civilian population into non-resistance.

47. A United Nations human rights official, Mr Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said that nowhere in the world should it be an act of bravery for a child to attend school. Yet, in parts of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria simply showing up at school takes tremendous courage and determination. He stressed that United Nations received frequent reports in these three countries of schools being destroyed or closed because of militants' threats, and of schoolchildren – especially girls – being kidnapped, shot, attacked with acid or poisoned by groups whose ideology bears no resemblance to any religion or any cultural norm.[36] These attacks have targeted schools, which is an environment where children should feel safe. No access to education is possible where parents live in fear and where children refrain from going to school.

48. The arms race has led to a dramatic increase in affordable munitions in the hands of terrorist groups. This can no longer be tolerated. Countries should take urgent actions to stop the proliferation of arms and their use against the civilian population. Council of Europe member States can no longer afford to let the arms trade get out of control.

49. As it was stressed by our colleague, Mr Michael Connarty at our meeting in The Hague, the situation of children in areas of conflict is critical. The figures given to a United Kingdom parliament commission were about 15 million children who were at that moment in areas of serious conflict (either in conflict areas or displaced). This issue was also raised by Ms Gülsün Bilgehan, who noted that there were 2 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, and amongst them thousands of children. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like "War child" or even UNICEF complained that the disruption of education begins when the funds run out. The funds move on to another area of crisis. When education provision is disrupted, children find themselves

31. http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/children_conflict_en.pdf.
32. She wrote under a pseudonym – Gul Makai, the name of a heroine from a Pashtun folk tale. She survived the dramatic assault, in which a militant boarded her school bus in Pakistan's north-western Swat valley and opened fire, wounding two of her school friends as well. The Taliban said that they targeted her for "promoting secular education" and threatened to attack her again. Malala Yousafzai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December 2014.
33. www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23241937.
34. www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30491435.
35. http://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-how-many-schoolgirls-did-boko-haram-abduct-and-how-many-are-still-missing/#sthash.QXs6QmqV.dpuf.
36. www.ibtimes.co.uk/peshawar-school-attack-live-126-dead-massacre-military-school-by-taliban-terrorists-disguised-1479741.

without any alternative. Second, the effect of early learning is dissipated very quickly if you are living in an environment of poverty. If you do not have the resources, by primary 3 or primary 4, children are back to the factor of "born to fail".

50. In 2014, a global consultation was initiated to take stock of the results of the Education for All Movement and to fix new goals for the post-2015 Education Programme. The results of the consultations on the future education agenda were presented in the World Education Forum (WEF) 2015 (Incheon, Republic of Korea, 19-22 May 2015). The Forum adopted an agreed position on education post-2015 presented in the Incheon Declaration on "Education 2030: towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all".[37] The Incheon Declaration is now accompanied by the Framework for Action adopted at the UNESCO[38] High-level meeting on 4 November 2015, during its 38th General Conference.[39] The Framework for action specifies concrete targets and indicators for each goal and identifies implementation strategies and support actions. The UNESCO member States are called upon, in particular, to:

– "ensure access to and completion of quality education for all children and youth to at least 12 years of free, publicly funded, inclusive and equitable primary and secondary education, of which at least nine years are compulsory";

– "ensure equity and inclusion in and through education and address all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, disparity, vulnerability and inequality in education access, participation, retention and completion and in learning outcomes";

– bear in mind that "an integral part of the right to education is ensuring that education is of sufficient quality to lead to relevant, equitable and effective learning outcomes at all levels and in all settings."

51. Council of Europe member States should support the implementation of the Incheon Declaration and its Framework for Action, and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), created by the United Nations to accelerate progress toward the Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 (achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women).

52. As regards governance, co-ordination and financing for education, Ms Sachs-Israel, who represented UNESCO at our committee meeting in The Hague, drew the committee's attention to the specific targets mentioned in the UNESCO Paris Statement on post-2015 Education Goals. It is recommended that governments consider adherence to the international benchmarks of 4% to 6% of GDP and/or 15% to 20% of total public expenditure for education. At the same time, as Europe remains a major donor region, UNESCO reiterates the commitment to the international target of providing 0,7% of gross national income (GNI) as official development assistance (ODA).

4. Actions to ensure access to quality education for all

4.1. Member States' responses to the questionnaire on access to school

53. Only 15 delegations out of 50 replied to the questionnaire addressed to the CDPPE, but many replies received were of high quality. Main issues raised were the legal provision for access to education for all, the role of public authorities, the public policies in place, the practice of dealing with access as part of prevention of school dropout. Some replies concerned the most disadvantaged groups in terms of access to schooling

54. As regards legal provisions, delegations' replies noted that education was viewed as both a right and an obligation. For example, there were compulsory procedures in place for registering school-age children; there were both coercion/sanctions and encouragement/incentives. Some replies noted a lack of legal definition of vulnerable groups; others mentioned that data protection provisions created obstacles to targeted measures.

55. Public authorities were responsible for ensuring access to schooling, albeit at different degrees, when it comes to central vs. regional and local authorities. I appreciate the fact that some member States take new initiatives in this direction. The question of matching responsibilities of local authorities with the means at their disposal was raised. Sometimes, the replies noted that responsibilities concerning some groups of children (i.e. children with disabilities) were shifted from education authorities to other public authorities.

37. www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/FinalVersion-IncheonDeclaration.pdf.
38. www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/education-2030/.
39. www.unesco.org/new/en/general-conference/.

56. There was a need for a systemic approach to ensuring access to school and education. Public policies should specify the priority education zones with specific actions to be designed for urban and rural environments. Cooperation between public authorities and families should be strengthened. Measures should be in place to protect children and ensure their access to school, if families failed to do so.

57. Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 on ensuring quality education stresses that a high quality education system is socially inclusive. Public authorities should take measures to identify groups at risk and develop action plans for vulnerable groups. In addition, lifelong learning strategies should be developed, in particular for families whose children are at risk of exclusion or dropping out of school. Specific teacher education programmes and strategies should be prepared and there should be adequate language provision for children from minority or migrant families. Public authorities should recognise that the home languages of children from minority and migrant communities are central to their cognitive and social development. This fact should be acknowledged in the way in which those children are taught, even in contexts where instruction in the language of the home is not possible. They should also recognise that in order to access education, children from minority and migrant communities must reach adequate levels of proficiency in the language of schooling, which may not be the language they speak at home.

58. There were also some specific comments from member States as regards access and dropout. For instance, as regards compulsory schooling, the diversity of age ranges for schooling might cause dropout in some cases. There is a need to take different sets of measures at primary school, at lower secondary school, and at higher levels for those who are at risk of leaving without completing the course or programme. The weakest groups require special attention. The term “dropout” implies the child or young person had at some point been in an education programme. This being said, some children may never accede to education at all, in spite of education being compulsory (e.g. refugees, irregular migrants, severely disabled children and street children). There is a need, therefore, to consider what makes education essential: first, what place is given in our societies to those with few or no qualifications; second, the risks related to the individual and societal costs of marginalisation; third, what is the significance and the impact of illiteracy in modern, complex societies.

4.2. Systemic change needed to ensure access to quality education for all

59. Providing appropriate access to education and seeing social inclusion as an integral part of the notion of educational quality is of course not just an issue for individual schools or universities or for the education system. It really is an issue for the whole of society.

60. The issue can be addressed from two angles, and these are complementary rather than contradictory. From the perspective of individuals, this is an issue of individual justice, of equal opportunities. From the perspective of our societies, it is also an issue of making the best use of our collective talents. No society can afford not to make the best possible use of the talents if all its members, least of all in times of economic crisis. Both these concerns come together in our understanding of ourselves and the kind of societies we want to be.

61. Several studies point to the need for systemic change to ensure access to quality education for all.[40] Such systemic changes require adequate planning and long-term commitment for the measures to be put in place. Generally speaking, one should focus on the following three elements: first: the right to learn as a matter of principle to be accepted by everyone (parents, teachers, school principals, etc.); second: the affordability of the measures put in place; and, finally, the practicality of the proposed measures, such as the availability of teachers capable of working in such a multicultural environment. Measures such as those below should contribute to enhancing access to quality education for all children:

62. Improving access to pre-primary education for all children, with a special focus on children from disadvantaged families, children of migrants and those attending schools in rural areas, seems to be a desirable education policy goal, which may support higher achievement. Policies targeted at improving early childhood education (ECE) attendance appear to be especially important in education systems where there is a large achievement gap in primary school favouring children who attended ECE. An earlier starting age had a positive impact on the overall access and completion of secondary schooling. The equivalent of the French “école maternelle” provided good results in a number of countries. It was also observed that children who did not go through “école maternelle” started with a considerable disadvantage.

40. IEA’s Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

63. Policymakers might consider investing in programmes that support parental engagement in early literacy activities with the potential to promote literacy in the early primary grades. Strategies to promote parental involvement, if they are to be successful, are likely to require a nuanced approach reflecting the unique cultural, ethnic and socio-economic contexts. This is necessary, in particular, as regards a migrant community, which, without adequate support, might not be in a position to help their children with their homework, thus increasing the risk of school dropout at a later stage.

64. Policymakers could explore interventions aimed at increasing levels of parental involvement in school activities, particularly in schools with a higher proportion of students whose parents have low levels of education.

65. Findings suggest that academic resilience and academic success (including success “against all odds” for children from disadvantaged families) should be promoted through public policy, for instance by developing programmes fostering a positive school climate, high academic expectations and motivation towards learning for socially disadvantaged students.

66. Findings also suggest that students from disadvantaged backgrounds typically have higher achievements if they attend schools where the majority of students are from advantaged backgrounds. Policies targeted to a better inclusion of students from disadvantaged families and migrant backgrounds appear to have a role in levelling differences in achievement.

67. Initiatives to support gender equality and parity should be ensured at all levels of education systems, with a special focus on disadvantaged women and girls, such as Roma, migrants and refugees, and women and girls with disabilities.

68. It is clear that education represents a significant part of the public budget. However, one should bear in mind not only the cost of investing in education, but also the risk of not doing so, including social costs linked to unemployment and dependency, which may be much higher that the initial investment in education. There is also the cost of lost opportunity. What would have been the contribution of these young women and men had they had access to quality education?

69. To conclude, we should not forget that access to education is a precondition for effective social inclusion and access to employment; therefore this goal deserves strong political support and political will. The Parliamentary Assembly can and should trigger such political support.