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# *Inclusive education in Poland*



*Project Erasmus+ Get in shape for Europe-  
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# Education in Poland

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland stipulates that education is compulsory until the age of 18 and sets out a number of fundamental rights and freedoms relating to education:

- Every individual has the right to education.
- Education in public schools and higher education institutions is free.
- Public authorities ensure universal and equal access to education; to this end, they provide financial and organisational support to learners.
- Learners with disabilities and those with behavioural problems have the right to learn at all types of schools.
- Learners have the right to adjustment of the contents, methods and organisation of education to their own abilities, and the possibility to avail of psychological and pedagogical support and special forms of didactic work as needed.



# INCLUSION

- The idea of inclusion deriving from the notion of uniting people of different needs was started in the US in the early 19th century.
- In Europe it was widely propagated starting with the 1950s and 1960s in the context of migration problems Its aim is to create an environment that is most favorable to the development of all people regardless of their health, age, race, religion, origin, etc
- In Poland the idea of inclusion raises a lot of controversy and its development can be described as slow.
- In 1991 the first act on education system in post-communist democratic Poland was established Legal framework brought about real changes in the mid 1990s. Thanks to that, for around 20 years now, people with developmental problems have been able to obtain mandatory education in any given school whose obligation it is to ensure appropriate conditions, adapt the education program, methods and didactic tools to suit the child. In the 1990s integration classes were formed in order to facilitate the realization of compulsory education by children with and without disabilities. Currently there are more and more schools which create environment ready for a natural role in the education of children with different needs.



# Inclusive Education – Key Points

- The process of inclusion meets the diverse needs of all students by extending the possibility of their participation in social life, reducing their isolation and exclusion;
- The process of inclusion requires changes and modifications to the content of training programs;
- This process requires changes in the approach of teachers and educational strategies, based on the belief in the necessity of general education for all children in a regular school, appropriate for the age of the child (UNESCO Declaration);
- Inclusive education requires a step away from the medical model of disability, assuming the perception of disability as a problem;
- Inclusive education is an idea of acceptance of people with disability in the social life from the perspective of the theory of full normalization;
- Inclusive school identifies barriers to full participation in the educational process for students with special needs;
- Furthermore, actions are taken to abolish these barriers;
- Inclusive education is a leading form of education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, assuming that the school system is adapted to the individual pace of each child with regards to learning, abilities and capabilities.



# Students with special educational needs in the Polish educational system

There are some categories of disabilities that exist in the Polish educational system:

- Visually impaired
- Hearing-impaired
- Developmentally disabled
- Autism
- Long term illnesses
- Motor Disabilities
- Multiple Disabilities
- Socially Disadvantaged
- Behavioural Disorders
- Threatened with Addiction

**In Poland students with special educational needs (SEN) can attend:**

- General schools
- Integration schools or classes
- Special schools or classes
- Individual teaching





It has been a great effort of our Ministry of Education to implement integration schools and classes which offer students with special educational needs equal opportunities to obtain education and development in various spheres. Inclusive education is a chance to reduce isolation and overcome social barriers. There are about **3-5** disabled children and other **15** students in the classroom. Apart from a regular teacher, there is always a supporting specialist who takes care of the children with SEN.



There are a lot of non-profit organisations which offer support to parents and teachers of children with SEN. Our membership in the European Union brought many positive changes in the education system in Poland. Students with SEN can benefit from the financial support from the EU, various foundations and participate in the European Union projects.



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## Education in such classes requires a few changes and adjustments in the functioning of the school:

- introducing teaching programmes, methods and techniques appropriate for all children in the group
- ensuring appropriate learning conditions for disabled students (facilities and teaching aids)
- employing specialists and training teachers
- organising psychological help and rehabilitation activities
- organising integration activities for the whole groups
- strengthening the school's cooperation with the local community and institutions
- increasing public awareness and maintaining regular contact with parents
- limiting the number of students attending the integration classes
- ensuring equal treatment of all children





## Positive aspects of inclusion observed by Polish teachers:



- ✓ improving communication and social skills
- ✓ increasing positive peer relations
- ✓ innovative teaching methods
- ✓ positive effects on children without disabilities - development of positive attitudes and perception of disabled people
- ✓ conditions conducive to students' personal development and growth of self-esteem
- ✓ development of the sense of responsibility, tolerance and empathy
- ✓ enhancing cooperation and multiple approaches to teaching and learning
- ✓ pleasant atmosphere of mutual understanding
- ✓ good promotion of the school (increase of the school's prestige)







## National minorities in Polish schools

The largest national minorities in Poland are **Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian** and **Roma** people. Their children have to attend school until the age of 18. Educational institutions have to guarantee access to their national language, culture and history. The schools cooperate with the institutions from their countries and minority associations. Schools support the children financially and involve them in international educational programmes of student exchange.

**The most common problems connected with their inclusion are:**

- late enrolment at school
- backlog in learning
- problems with language and communication
- insufficient cooperation with parents
- prejudices in the local community



## Problems encountered by Polish educational institutions:



- ❖ small amount of specialists in a given field
- ❖ not enough trainings for teachers
- ❖ lack of funds to cover expenses connected with necessary rehabilitation equipment and other facilities
- ❖ lack of special course books for children with visual or hearing impairments
- ❖ insufficient cooperation between the school and parents of disabled children
- ❖ rivalry among children and sense of injustice
- ❖ social prejudices – lack of understanding and fear of integration
- ❖ insufficient support from the municipality and Education Department
- ❖ lack of collaboration between schools and local institutions supporting disabled people





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# Teachers' role in inclusive education

Undoubtedly one of the most important elements of an inclusive system are the teachers. Development and success of inclusion depends on their work and attitude towards the idea itself. Through their attitude they shape the future generation's open attitude which accepts that every person is different, yet equally valuable, and the diversification of needs is a motor for the development of the world.



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# Teachers' role in inclusive education

- ❑ Creating the best possible environment specific for each student's capabilities and their potential;
- ❑ Developing the strengths of the child;
- ❑ Motivating each child to participate in school activities, considering the nature of their disability and associated restrictions;
- ❑ Preparing individual educational and therapeutic programs specific to the individual needs of each child;



## *Inclusion at our school*

In our school we have a few students with special educational needs .We make efforts to integrate these pupils with other students by:

- informing teachers, students and parents about various diseases and organising first-aid trainings
  - offering them psychological support
- adjusting learning conditions, teaching programmes and methods to their needs
  - organising integration activities in groups
- involving them in the school life, after-school activities and clubs
  - strengthening cooperation teachers-parents

Students with SEN can always count on our help and they are integrated with the school community as soon as possible .All pupils can thus learn to function successfully in a community and benefit from diverse teaching methods.



# Tolerance

## *How to make our students tolerant?*

- ✓ organise workshops and contests devoted to the topic of diversity and tolerance
- ✓ treat equally all students within the class
- ✓ enhance the attitude of openness towards other people
- ✓ punish the acts of discrimination towards other nations, subcultures, religions
- ✓ emphasize similarities among people
- ✓ encourage children to share their interests, backgrounds, family traditions
- ✓ discuss the topic of stereotypes and prejudices



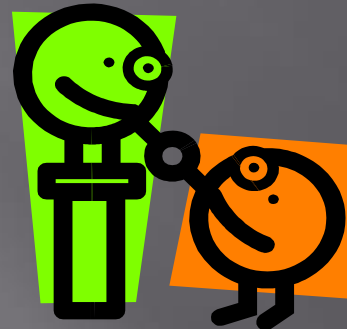
dare to be different

- ✓ encourage students to get involved in charity and volunteer work
- ✓ discuss the examples of tolerance in art and literature and set positive patterns of behaviour



*“The highest result of education is tolerance.”*

*Helen Adams Keller*





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## Summary

- In Poland, inclusive education is seen as contingent, that is, students with disabilities are educated in mainstream schools if certain conditions are met.
- Special Education serves as an auxiliary and is applicable in those situations in which persons with disabilities cannot attend public schools.
- Special educators refer to types and degrees of disability, as well as other variables to determine the functioning of the student.
- Special education is designed for pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities and those with profound and multiple disabilities – also those with mental illness and with aggressive behavior.
- Most educators share the opinion, that the possibility of integration is also determined by other personal factors such as (level of physical, emotional development, level of psychological resilience, cognitive abilities, motivation.