

Global Inclusive Schools' Forum

From practitioners to policymakers

14-15 March 2024

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris



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Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its focus on leaving no one behind, provides a unique opportunity to build more inclusive, just and fair societies. We know that inclusion is the key to building peace, bridging divides and empowering all citizens to contribute meaningfully to society.

The [Salamanca Statement](#) adopted and widely endorsed at the international conference organized by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education and Science of Spain in Salamanca, Spain in 1994 laid down the fundamental principle of inclusion at school: “All children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students”.¹ Since then, the concept of inclusion has broadened, emphasising the need to reach all learners,

¹ UNESCO and Spanish Ministry of Education and Science (1994), [The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education](#). Paris, UNESCO, p. 11.

under the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive relevant, equitable and effective educational opportunities.

The [UNESCO International Forum on inclusion and equity in education](#) held in Cali, Colombia in September 2019 urged policymakers and practitioners to ensure that all people have access to lifelong learning opportunities irrespective of sex, age, race or ethnicity, ability, indigeneity, migrant status or other characteristic. As stated in the [Cali Commitment](#), inclusion “represents a commitment to making preschools, schools, and other education settings, places in which everyone is valued and belongs, and diversity is seen as enriching”.²

Nevertheless, education systems continue to face huge challenges in ensuring all learners have fair and equal access to educational opportunities, and since the COVID-19 pandemic, new layers of education inequalities, marginalization and exclusion around the world have been added.

Making education inclusive is key to ensuring that no one is left behind. It is important to see individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for democratizing and enriching learning. Differences can act as catalyst for innovation that can benefit all learners, whatever their personal characteristics or home circumstances.³ Factors such as globalisation, poverty, migration, conflicts, wars, or climate change can present additional challenges to schools and the school system.

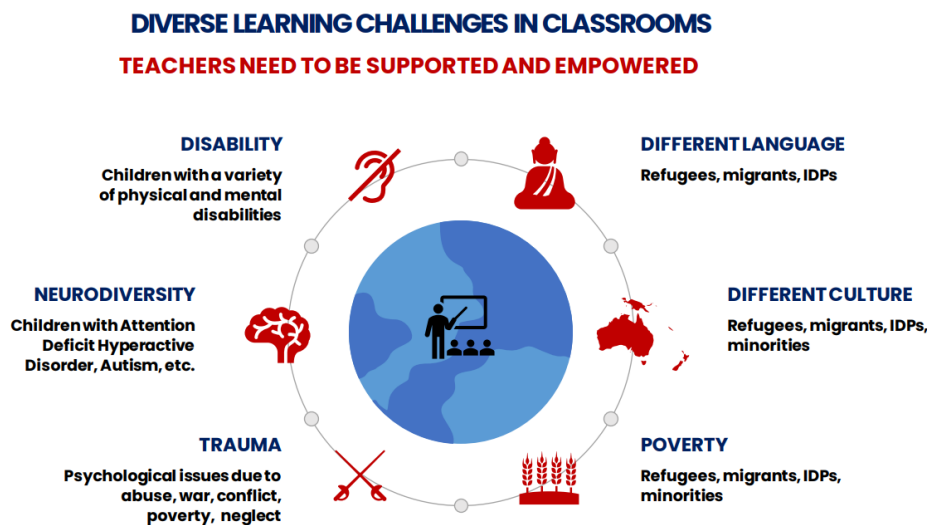


Figure 1, source: International Forums of Inclusion Practitioners (IFIP)

In this context, teachers are at the front line in the quest for inclusion, but they are not always well-prepared to teach and create welcoming learning environments for a diverse student population. They are exposed to higher levels of stress due to increasingly complex learning needs in regular classrooms,⁴ and inadequate pre- and in-service programmes cause low levels

² UNESCO (2019), [Cali commitment to equity and inclusion in education](#). Paris, UNESCO, p. 1.

³ UNESCO (2017), [A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education](#). Paris, UNESCO.

⁴ World Bank (2021), [Pandemic Threatens to Drive Unprecedented Number of Children into Learning Poverty](#), Press release on 21 October 2021. Washington D.C., World Bank.

of self-efficacy in understanding and managing student behaviours, providing daily support in the classroom, and meeting the expectations of others, such as parents.⁵ They must be supported and empowered to address diverse learning challenges in classrooms (see **Figure 1**).

Achieving inclusion in education requires inclusive schools

In an inclusive and equitable education system, all teachers need to approach learners' diversity with a positive attitude and an understanding of inclusive practices.⁶

As UNESCO's 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report on Inclusion and Education states, "teachers need to be prepared to teach students with varied backgrounds and abilities". Globally, "teachers tend to have positive attitudes towards inclusion but also doubts about its feasibility".⁷

*"If teachers understand what inclusion means (...), they can be agents of change."
Maria Teresa Moreno Zavaleta, teacher, Peru⁸*

To face this issue, schools need to be reformed and practices need to be improved in ways that will make teachers to feel supported in responding positively to diversity and in promoting gender equality.

Collaboration between schools is also very important as it can help reduce the polarisation of schools, to the particular benefit of those students who are marginalised at the edges of the system. School-to-school collaboration can also strengthen the capacity of individual organizations to respond to learner diversity.

School principals are key in widening the understanding of inclusive education to include all learners, regardless of identity, background or ability, by guiding inclusive pedagogy and planning professional development activities.

A key entry point for strengthening the capacity of schools is with the sharing of ideas, knowledge and practices through collaboration amongst members of staff. This can also encourage new thinking and experimentation with alternative ways of working. Research shows that this can be stimulated through an engagement with the insights of students and families, and knowledge from academic research, in ways that challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, not least in respect of the presence, participation and achievement of vulnerable groups of learners.⁹

Inclusive schools to build inclusive societies

Despite the multi-billion-dollar effort to promote inclusion in schools, a significant percentage of children do not graduate into further education or work. Traditionally, school and workplace inclusion efforts are made in silos. This Forum recognizes the value in promoting teacher skills

⁵ Brackenreed, D. (2008) "[Inclusive Education: Identifying Teachers' Perceived Stressors in Inclusive Classrooms](#)", in *Exceptionality Education Canada*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 131-147.

⁶ UNESCO (2017), [A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education](#). Paris, UNESCO.

⁷ UNESCO (2020), [Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all](#). Paris, UNESCO, pp. 136

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁹ UNESCO International Bureau of Education (UNESCO-IBE, 2021), [Reaching out to all learners: a resource pack for supporting inclusion and equity in education](#). Geneva, UNESCO-IBE.

and school leadership in meeting the needs of learners in classrooms as well as their graduation into work or higher education.

A follow-up Forum to Cali Declaration and Transforming Education Summit

The Forum contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all and to the follow-up to the UN 2022 Transforming Education Summit. 87% of the [National Commitments to Transform Education](#) delivered during the 2022 United Nations Transforming Education Summit recognized the importance of ensuring more inclusive education systems to cater for the needs of the most vulnerable learners and communities.

The Forum also contributes to the Cali Commitment follow-up that calls to support teachers, head teachers and other educational staff to give them “the necessary values and attitudes, as well as a solid understanding of the principles and practices of inclusion and their application, as an anti-discriminatory response to evolving awareness of intersecting diversities in society, including disability; migrant and refugee status; violence and displacement; ethnicity; gender and sexuality; and health status”¹⁰.

Purpose of the Forum

The purpose of the Forum is to convene practitioners from different regions around the world and provide them with a space to share experiences and highlight promising and innovative practices that will be channeled to policymakers and key stakeholders. It is hoped that the Forum will further encourage synergies between practitioners, schools and communities at local, regional and global levels for more impact.

The following key questions will be discussed:

- What are the roles of teachers in inclusive classrooms and schools? How can we develop teacher pedagogy and teacher training (pre- and in- service) to make it more inclusive and support teachers?
- How can we make safe and welcoming schools for all learners, and support the psychosocial well-being of students, teachers and school staff?
- What roles do parents and communities have in supporting inclusive education? What can we do to further involve them in the learning process?
- How can we prepare children to a post-school world, and in transitioning from school to the labour market?
- How can practitioners and schools use assistive technology to support inclusive education?

Objectives

The objectives of the Forum are to:

- Recognize and pay tribute to practitioners’ work to include all learners in quality and inclusive learning.

¹⁰ UNESCO (2019), [Cali commitment to equity and inclusion in education](#). Paris, UNESCO, p. 2.

- Promote and share innovative inclusive educational practices that foster inclusion in education.
- Identify key recommendations and messages to inform policy makers and practitioners.

Expected outcomes

- Strengthened platform for dialogue and cooperation on inclusion in education.
- Enhanced awareness of practices (from early childhood to higher education) that are effective in promoting inclusion in education.
- Key recommendations messages developed and shared.

Format

The Forum will provide a platform for in-person debate and exchanges and a place to share innovation on inclusive practices. It will consist of plenary sessions and interactive, hands-on learning and knowledge-sharing sessions. Plenary sessions will be webcast.

Participants

The Forum will bring together a range of around 200 education and inclusion practitioners and other stakeholders who are drivers of change towards fostering inclusive learning and schools. These include teachers, school leaders, experts from ministries of education supporting inclusive education, as well as representatives of youth organizations and communities, civil society organizations, inclusion researchers and experts, EdTech companies, donor agencies and other interested parties.

Interpretation

Interpretation for the plenary sessions will be in English, French, Spanish. Closed captions will be provided for the plenary sessions.

Date and venue

UNESCO HQ, 125 avenue de Suffren, 75007 Paris, France

14 March 2024, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and from 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

15 March 2024, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:40 p.m.

The Forum will be preceded by an event on Wednesday 13 March 2024 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Salamanca Statement.

Contacts

UNESCO

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Draft Agenda

Thursday 14th March 2024

Morning session

9:30 – 10:00	Registration & Welcome coffee
10:00 – 10:30	Opening Session
10:30 – 11:00	Setting the scene
11:00 – 12:55	<p>Panel discussion I: Supporting teachers and school personnel for inclusive teaching and learning practices</p> <p><i>Panelists will share expertise, experiences, and innovative approaches to empower educators in fostering inclusive environments</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Topic 1: What works (or does not) in classrooms and schools to build inclusive teaching and learning practices? <p><i>The panel will explore the regional and cultural factors influencing the upskilling of staff and shifting attitudes and perceptions.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Topic 2: What is effective in teacher training? <p><i>The panel will ask what are the minimum requirements for teachers to be effective inclusive practitioners? What are the key points? What works?</i></p>
12:55– 13:00	<p>Inclusion Village presentation</p> <p><i>At the heart of the Global Inclusive School's Forum, a special exhibition called the 'Global Inclusive Village' will welcome a selection of attending schools and institutions from around the globe to present their examples of innovative inclusive practices.</i></p>
13:00 – 14:30	Networking lunch and visit of the Village

Thursday 14th March 2024

Afternoon session

14:30 – 17:30

Panel discussion II: Building safe, welcoming and inclusive learning environments

This panel discussion will explore the multifaceted concept of building safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environments. The focus of this session is to dissect the conditions necessary for education to thrive for all learners, taking into consideration sensory, physical, and psycho-social phenomena that impact the learning experience. This includes examining factors such as accessibility, accommodation, emotional support, and fostering a sense of belonging among diverse student populations.

- **Topic 1: What are the principles in building safe, welcoming and inclusive learning environment and what is effective in building learners' psychosocial competencies?**

This session will explore the essential principles and basic conditions that are integral for creating inclusive classrooms where all children can thrive. The aim is to establish a solid understanding of the fundamental elements that contribute to the success of inclusive education.

- **Topic 2: Scalable initiatives involving parents and the community**

In this session, the focus will be on exploring scalable initiatives that actively involve and engage parents and the community in the inclusive education process to equip educators, administrators, and stakeholders with practical strategies. Participants will leave with actionable insights to foster meaningful partnerships between schools and families, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience for every learner.

17:30

Networking

Friday 15th March 2024

Morning session

9:30 – 10:00

Coffee

10:00 – 10:10

Recap of Thursday's sessions

10:10 – 11:30

Panel discussion III: Ensuring access to assistive technologies and inclusive ICTs

The critical topic of ensuring access to assistive technologies and inclusive Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to all will be discussed. The focus is on exploring the benefits and limitations of inclusive technology in including all learners, with a particular emphasis on the issue of equitable access across different countries.

In this session, success stories and case studies from around the world where inclusive technology has made a significant impact will be showcased. Innovative approaches, collaborative initiatives, and the transformative power of technology in diverse educational settings will be highlighted.

11:30 – 12:30

Panel discussion IV: The transition from school to labor market

This panel will explore the pivotal topic of transitioning from school to the labor market. The focus is on understanding how schools and workplaces can coordinate efforts to enhance employability and facilitate smoother transitions for learners entering the workforce. The session will delve into key barriers that schools and employers need to be aware of and overcome and share promising practices and success stories from collaborations between schools and employers that have successfully facilitated smooth transitions.

12:30 – 12:45	<u>Key recommendations</u>
12:45 – 13:00	Key takeaways and closing remarks
13:00	Networking lunch