Supporting inclusive education through cross-curricular programmes: lessons learned and way forward

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Outline

In increasingly diverse classrooms across Europe, with students from all socioeconomic, language and cultural backgrounds, an effective access to quality inclusive education is crucial. Inclusion in the classrooms is a vital first step for learners and educators to acquire the mindset and competences they will need to be active citizens and build fairer and more resilient societies. Supporting inclusive education has been the goal of the Erasmus+ initiative called "Supporting Inclusion and Diversity in Teaching" (SIDiT), focussing on the development of transversal competences among teachers and students, and equipping teachers with relevant resources, skills and training opportunities. After three years of piloting in two schools in Belgium, the outcomes and impact of the project are shared in this publication, alongside recommendations and a call for action to enhance the access to inclusive education in Europe.

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Section 1: An initiative to support inclusive teaching

"Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists, it is making a new space, a better space for everyone."

George Dei, Canadian Educator

Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners (UNESCO, 2017).

Diversity is the people's differences which may relate to their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status (UNESCO, 2017).

It is in this context that the Erasmus+ project "Supporting Inclusion and Diversity in Teaching" (SIDiT) has been created, to provide resources and training opportunities to teachers, so that they engage in more inclusive teaching. The aim of the project is to support teachers to develop transversal competences and to ensure the inclusion of all students – including migrant children, regardless of cultural, socio-economic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds or their abilities– in classroom activities. The SIDiT project gathers partners from Greece, Belgium, Italy, Ireland and Croatia, a dynamic and ambitious consortium paving the way towards more inclusive classrooms. In addition to equipping teachers with competences and resources, the project partners have developed lesson plans, which have been the corner stone of the piloting in schools.

The aim of this publication is to give an overview of the existing policies for inclusive education (with a focus on cultural diversity) at the European level, to highlight the project's achievements in this field, as well as to reflect on the lessons learned throughout the three years of piloting. The aim is also to look at the future, with the European Inclusive Competences Framework, and presenting policy recommendations with a call for action – bringing together the experience gained through the implementation of the project which provided solid grounds for the future, to support systemic changes in the field of inclusive education.



Section 2: About the method

The methodology used to extract the main findings of the project, as well as draft the policy recommendations presented in this publication derive from qualitative and quantitative methods.

- 1. The **yearly evaluations** in the schools, conducted by the University of Athens and supported by the Goethe Institute and Bantani Education, constitute an important dataset, with research questions answered by both teachers and students to assess the extent to which SIDiT reached its objectives as well as to measure its success. Respondents have shared their views on the methodology, the content of the lessons, the competences developed, and inclusion in the classrooms.
- 2. In addition to yearly evaluations, **semi-structured interviews** have been conducted with a sample of students and teachers, to gather testimonials, quotes and qualitative data regarding the implementation of the SIDiT methodology and lessons.
- 3. In order to reinforce the evidence-based policy recommendations a **survey** has been shared with all teachers and headmasters, for them to share anonymously their feedback on the impact, positive and negative, and on the challenges they have faced during the implementation of the project.

Section 3: European policies and initiatives for inclusive education

International and European institutions have launched several initiatives to support inclusive education in the past years, outlines in this section. The SIDiT project's outputs, including the Inclusive Competences Framework presented in <u>Annex 1</u>, are aligned with the European Union and the Council of Europe priorities in the fields of education and training by supporting the development of competences to foster inclusivity in schools.

- At an international level, UNESCO is actively advocating for inclusive education, and has published a *Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education* (2017)¹. This guide is intended to support countries in embedding inclusion and equity in educational policy.
- At European level, the *European Pillar of Social Rights*² sets out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets. Pillar 1 "Education, training and life-long learning, Pillar 3 "Equal opportunities" and Pillar 17 "People

² Available online via: <u>https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1568&langId=en</u>



¹ Available online via: <u>https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254</u>

with disabilities" directly target inclusivity, diversity and the challenges regarding equal access to education. Following on these policy initiatives, the European Education Area³ was endorsed in 2017 to foster collaboration among European Union Member States to build more resilient and inclusive national education and training systems.

• The Council Recommendation of the 22th of May 2018⁴ (2018/C 195/01) on "promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching" emphasises the importance of funding instruments of the European Union, such as Erasmus+, to ensuring effective equal access to quality inclusive education for all learners, as well as the essential role of Member States to contribute to the provision of inclusive education. The Council of Europe Youth Policy⁵ is also a driving force behind youth policy development, with youth programmes that create conditions for learning, opportunity and experience, to enable young people to integrate and play an active role in society.

Section 4: Achievements of the project

Piloting in schools

During the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, more than 600 students participated in the SIDiT lessons. The majority of them (73% in 2020-2021 and 86% in 2021-2022) belong to a category of SIDiT's interest e.g., migrant, refugee, different language/ cultural/ socioeconomic/ religious/ ethnic backgrounds, special educational needs. A third implementing year is taking place in 2022-2023.

The SIDiT lessons tackle issues of identity, culture, religion, anti-racism, and social justice, prompting students to work – among others – on topics of family, community, respect, rights, beliefs, fairness, discrimination, bullying, peer-pressure, diversity, tolerance, values, individual actions, responsibility for self and others. Students explore critically the topics through student-centred and collaborative project work that develops their transversal and entrepreneurial competences, such as personal responsibility, social responsibility, communication, creative and critical thinking, active learning, problem solving, decision-making. The use of digital tools in the classroom, such as tablets, constitutes a core element of the lessons, intending that students foster primarily their digital and media competences.

The lessons were delivered by teachers in the Unescoschool and Toverfluit elementary schools in Brussels, Belgium and were developed by lecturers from the Marino Institute of

⁵ Available online via : <u>https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/about-youth-policy</u>



³ Available online via: <u>https://education.ec.europa.eu/</u>

⁴ Available online via : <u>https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-</u>

content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018H0607%2801%29

Education in Dublin, Ireland. To support teachers and schools in this piloting phase, two important deliverables were published:

- 1. A Teacher Training Course that improves teachers' capacity to practice effective, innovative inclusive teaching in their classrooms. It is an interactive online self-paced course that enables primary school teachers to acquire educational skills that value the individual strengths and contributions of the students and makes the learning experience richer and more diverse for everyone.
- 2. A Methodology inviting schools to engage in student-led project work that addresses the curriculum and offers teachers an opportunity to reflect on inclusive practices, including practice examples from the partner countries of the project. It is provided in the practical form of a toolkit⁶; a handbook with sample lesson scenarios which promotes learning and inclusion and is easily accessible for educators to use in their classrooms.

Teacher training

In addition to the piloting phase, the teachers implementing SIDiT lessons have participated in a training in Matera, Italy. During the teacher training week held in Italy in September 2022, participants from different European countries, together with Matera-based teachers, explored the SIDiT teaching methodology based on principles of inclusive and intercultural education. Teachers, educators and school professionals worked together in a multicultural context in order to acquire new skills and integrate the different lesson scenarios offered by the project. During the week participants were inspired by the fruitful exchanges, the in-practice training and by best practices shared. For instance, creating a nature mandala was one of the lessons proposed to enhance the value of the surrounding nature and to stimulate the importance of expressing oneself and one's values.

> "The search for something in nature that represented us in one collective act such as creating the nature mandala together, was for me a way to bring us back to an essential original unity." - *Stefania, teacher and training participant*

⁶ Handbook for teachers available online via <u>https://www.siditproject.eu/_files/ugd/74f199_92c23e59e08d47d788edf2c2851be7fe.pdf</u>



The overall purpose of the training was:

- To implement lessons from the SIDIT methodology with different groups of participants.
- To finalise the training course based on the feedback of the participants.
- To train the participants in order to implement the methodology within their institutions to strengthen children's transversal competences (digital literacy, media literacy and entrepreneurial competences) based on the European key competences frameworks EntreComp⁷ and DigComp⁸
- To extend the opportunities for teachers and educators, allowing them to use innovative tools and methodologies, such as design-based learning, the inclusion of Content and Language Integrated Learning ⁹(CLIL) and the principles of Universal Design for Learning¹⁰ (UDL).

Section 5: The impact and the challenges of more inclusive classrooms

During the project's implementation, yearly evaluations were conducted with pre and post methodology implementation surveys and interviews, led by the University of Athens. The main results of the quantitative and qualitative evaluations are highlighted in this chapter. The project evaluation allowed project partners to have a clear picture of the impact the new teaching methodology had on both students and teachers.

The SIDiT methodology has proven to have had a significant impact on both students and teachers, and in 2021, **80% of the teachers and 79% of students would like to implement the SIDiT project next year**. The evaluation demonstrated that students increased their ability to interact and communicate with each other while developing their skills and enhancing their self-confidence. Teachers witnessed students opening up and feeling comfortable to take part in discussions on sensitive topics, which have been enabled by SIDiT lessons. Both teachers and students had the opportunity to go into depth on certain subjects, taking the time to foster discussion, cooperation and allow time for the children to express

 ⁸ Vuorikari, R., Kluzer, S. and Punie, Y., DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens -With new examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes, EUR 31006 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, ISBN 978-92-76-48883-5, doi:10.2760/490274, JRC128415.
 ⁹ Available online via: <u>https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-</u>

development/teachers/educational-policies-practices/articles/content-and-language ¹⁰ Available online via: <u>https://udlguidelines.cast.org/</u>



⁷ Bacigalupo M, Kampylis P, Punie Y and Van Den Brande L. EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework. EUR 27939 EN. Luxembourg (Luxembourg): Publications Office of the European Union; 2016. JRC101581

themselves. By using digital tools to deliver the SIDiT lessons, the students improved their digital literacy by 26%¹¹.

It has been a successful learning journey, as teachers also **strengthened their profiles** by applying an innovative methodology in their teaching, which allows them to produce inclusive activities for students of different backgrounds and increased their confidence in using digital means to deliver lessons. In the post-methodology implementation survey, teachers shared that they were **more willing to adopt innovative practices** in their teaching **(92% against 81% in the pre methodology implementation survey**).

"I enjoyed getting to know the different cultures and languages in the classroom better and seeing that not everyone is the same but still equal" - *Student about*

SIDiT

The SIDiT methodology has proven to have an impact in the schools where the piloting took place. Indeed, it stimulated inclusion in classrooms while enhancing the digital skills of students and teachers, and has provided facts, testimonials and the opportunity to reflect on the current state of inclusive education in classrooms.

The findings of the consortium are relevant regarding the needs of educational systems in order to not only facilitate the implementation of innovative projects such as SIDiT but to foster lasting change in making classrooms more inclusive. While there are opportunities for schools and institutions to apply for support and/or subsidy to address issues such as bullying in schools, there is a need to support reforms, including increasing government funding in the area of inclusive education. The schools have highlighted the lack of a good structure around policies of inclusive education, which resulted in this case in a challenging adaptation of the content of the SIDiT methodology into the curriculum and targets set by national governments.

Regarding the challenges in the implementation of the methodology, teachers have raised some concerns regarding the ability of teachers to guide discussions and debates on sensitive topics, as they need to be prepared to handle difficult questions and emotional reactions from their students and peers. Implementing new methods, fostering discussions and group work in a classroom where the whole school year is planned out can also bring challenges. This was amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, the lack of time

¹¹ Comparison of students' digital literacy skills before the implementation of SIDiT (60%) and after (86%) in the 2021 evaluation.



regarding the preparation of the lessons was often mentioned, a lack of time to deliver them, as well as to report on the outcomes of the sessions. Some lessons were shortened or divided in two to accommodate a tight schedule. Students also sensed the lack of time in the lessons and have shared it during the evaluation process.

> "Sometimes there was not enough time, I would have liked to talk some more about the subjects I found interesting" - *Student about SIDiT*

Section 6: The way forward

The SIDiT project has created and implemented an innovative teaching methodology, learning materials and a European common Inclusive Competences Framework that are adaptable to the curricula of different national contexts and transferable across different school subjects The materials have the potential to be adapted to the needs of teachers and students in different educational levels, such as secondary education, VET and higher education. They could be used also by teachers and other professionals who are working in inclusive education outside the domains of formal education, in non-formal education and youth work. It is essential for schools to work with cross-curricular programmes implemented across different subjects, using new technologies, to support the development of inclusive education and digital literacy. SIDiT can serve as an example for schools to implement similar cross-curricular programmes that can be used by all teachers or educators who want to focus on the development of the transversal competences of their students, to facilitate their inclusion into society.

In order to support teachers and students in developing inclusive competences, the SIDiT project has developed an Inclusive Competences Framework, which can serve as a general reference model to design learning opportunities and self-assessment tools. The Framework is based on thorough desktop research, analysing existing policies, European Competences Frameworks and supporting official documents on social inclusion and inclusive education from the partner countries. The aim was to produce a practical, adaptable and concrete competence framework to support education and training programmes. A total of nine competences have been identified and will serve as a basis to design learning opportunities that aim at developing inclusive competences among teachers and student teachers. The framework is available in <u>Annex 1</u> of the present publication.



Call to Action

Drawing from the evaluation undertaken during the piloting years in the schools, as well as from the research conducted by the consortium, the following points constitute the call to action for practitioners, institutions, and policy makers.

- Development of policies and frameworks for inclusive education at national and European levels, to provide better structure for schools to implement innovative methodologies, using European Competences Frameworks to develop digital, entrepreneurial, and transversal competences among students and teachers in the long term.
- **Provide in service training on diversity and inclusion** such as internship and training periods for teachers and trainee teachers, focusing on topics relevant to inclusive education (e.g. religion, cultures, identity) in order to provide them with the skills, knowledge and understanding to create safe spaces for their students.
- Active dissemination of projects supporting inclusive education through crosscurricular programmes, at national and European levels, as well as online channels such as the newly launched European School Education Platform, to facilitate the use of project results and exchange of inspiring practices.
- Support teachers to effectively embed the use of digital technologies in their learning and teaching practice. Enhance the use of digital tools in schools by increasing government-funded campaigns to equip schools with devices and hardware. Provide targeted trainings for teachers to apply effective strategies in the classroom for digital literacy and develop students' skills in using digital technologies.



Annex 1: Inclusive Competences Framework

Introduction

An Inclusive Competences Framework responds to the growing need to improve educational systems and orient them towards the integration of all children with different socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, religious and language backgrounds. Inclusion is a vital first step for learners and educators to acquire the mindset and competences they will need to successfully achieve integration in increasingly broad social groups, while valuing the unique contributions of people of all backgrounds and allowing diverse groups to grow side by side, to the benefit of all.

Under these circumstances, inclusive education provides the opportunity for all students to develop the abilities, values, and competences needed to live and work alongside others in a diverse society. By growing up and learning together, students with varied abilities, interests, and backgrounds experience diversity as a community norm. At the same time, inclusive competences are an indispensable tool for every educator working in an environment enriched by diversity. They can foster an inclusive mindset by helping educators develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to think, embrace and act with empathy, responsibility, and care for people with different backgrounds. Furthermore, these competences promote the creation of a common ground between teachers and learners for inclusion and for a safe environment for every child, to succeed in personal growth and development, but also in the integration and contribution of each one in the society without facing any difficulties or discrimination.

The Inclusive Competences Framework is an integral part of the project's policy recommendations addressed primarily to policy makers (regional governments and local education authorities). The Framework also targets stakeholders interested in the project's implementation and in inclusive education, to research and identify gaps in European and national frameworks regarding inclusive education.

The development process

The development process consisted of researching, analysing and mapping the various national norms, guidelines and official documents involving all project partners, who were asked to identify lacunae and specific competences useful to the SIDiT methodology and its vision of school inclusion. In many countries, teacher competency frameworks address specific competences dedicated to "migrant inclusion skills" focusing mostly on language teaching, bullying and discrimination. In general, the approach is more sector-based and not holistic.

The innovation of the SIDiT methodology leads to a systemic view of *inclusion*, embracing inclusion not only in content, but also in teaching methods. Building on the mapping

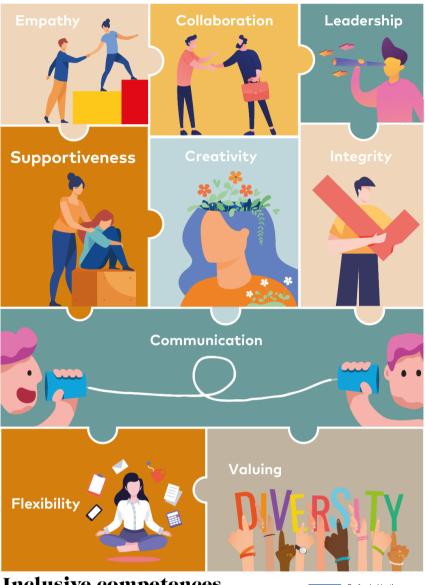


already carried out by Eurydice "Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures" ¹²(EACEA, 2019), the partnership sought to identify an inclusive competences framework modelled after other European Competences Frameworks such as EntreComp, DigComp, LifeComp and GreenComp, which would reflect this innovative and holistic approach and vision.

This common Inclusive Competences Framework is therefore designed to support education and training programmes for lifelong learning and serve a wide range of purposes, including the design of teacher education programmes, (self-) assessment/reflection, policy development, assessment, monitoring and evaluation. It constitutes the result of a robust research of the policies in the partner countries in the fields of social inclusion in education. The framework provides a general reference model that everyone can use to design learning opportunities aimed at developing inclusive competences and to assess progress in supporting education and training for diversity and inclusion in education. Built on the existing norms of Belgium, Greece, Italy, Croatia and Ireland, the framework consists of nine inclusive competences as mentioned and briefly explained below.

¹² European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Integrating students from migrant backgrounds into schools in Europe : national policies and measures, Publications Office, 2019, <u>https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/819077</u>





Inclusive competences framework



The competences:

Empathy

Empathy is being aware of the emotional state of another person, engaging with and sharing those emotions. It is crucial for implementing inclusive education that actively involves students with special educational needs, and is important for the prevention of particularly serious social phenomena such as bullying, cyberbullying, and youth distress.

Collaboration

Collaboration refers to the ability to cooperate together to achieve a common goal or objective. It is connected with empathy and is essential in educational settings to teach reciprocity and solidarity.

Leadership

Leadership as a competence is the ability to take initiatives, inspire and empower others by acting as a role model of positivity, confidence and recognition. Leadership has a lot to do with integrity and empathy. A leader is one who can understand and value everyone and their diverse background by making them flourish in a community of well-being, belonging and engagement of all.

Supportiveness

Supportiveness as a competence is the ability to help, support and encourage those around us, especially in times of need. Everyone needs to be encouraged and valued in order to gain confidence in themselves and others. In inclusive contexts where diversity appears to be a barrier, support and encouragement become essential in order to build self-confidence in ourselves and the world around us.



Creativity

Creativity is the ability to create innovations, new worlds and imaginaries, and possible alternatives outside conventional patterns.

Creativity is indispensable in the inclusive process since it feeds on diversity itself. Indeed, diversity itself is a source of inspiration and innovation for students and teachers.

Integrity

Integrity is the quality of having strong moral and ethical values and uncompromisingly adhering to them. It constitutes the practice of always doing what is morally right, based on the principles of being truthful and honest. It is connected with justice and fairness and it is fundamental in an educational context, as it helps to build trust between people.

Communication

Communication as a competence refers to the ability to interact effectively through multiple languages and adapt to a variety of contexts. Verbal or nonverbal communication is essential to create a common language and scenario to understand each other, to be part of a group without ever feeling excluded.

Flexibility

Flexibility is the ability and attitude to respond to the different needs that different pupils manifest and presupposes open-mindedness without prejudice. Flexibility is educational personalization in response to the different educational needs of individual pupils (personal, social, cultural and professional identities) and their different personal characteristics. A "different" flexibility for each pupil, a "flexible" flexibility that continually adapts to the developments in the learning and educational processes of individual pupils.



Valuing diversity

Valuing diversity is the ability to embrace people by respecting and appreciating what makes them different. It means fostering creativity, innovation and critical thinking, envisioning differences as opportunities and resources. Valuing diversity ensures a sense of belonging and connectedness, contributing to the preparation of students to thrive as citizens in a diverse world. Educating students "in and for diversity" is a means to learn to live together in pluralistic, democratic and anti-racist societies and develop values and relationships that promote cooperation, understanding, solidarity and justice.



Annex 2: Desktop research

Count	- National policy and directives
Country	National policy and directives Pafarantiakadar yoor and armiiskuualitait (2016). Vlaamaa Ovarhaid
Belgium	Referentiekader voor onderwijskwaliteit (2016), Vlaamse Overheid, http://mijnschoolisok.be/wp-content/uploads/referentiekader.pdf
	GOK-wijs: kwaliteitsverwachtingen en kwaliteitsbeelden (versie 8/6/21), GO! (2021) https://g-o.be/pers/go-lanceert-kwaliteitstool-voor-gelijke-onderwijskansen/
Greece	Institute of Educational Policy, New Curricula, Basic Principles of the New Curricula, in all subjects and classes (2022). <u>http://iep.edu.gr/el/nea-programmata-spoudon-arxiki-selida</u> & <u>http://iep.edu.gr/el/nea-ps-provoli</u>
	Institute of Educational Policy, Skills workshops, (new subject in all classes of primary school and gymnasium (2021). <u>http://iep.edu.gr/el/psifiako-apothetirio/skill-labs</u>
	Greek Ministry of Education, Refugee and Education (actions for the inclusion of refugee children in the Greek education system). https://www.minedu.gov.gr/tothema-prosfigiko-m
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	Law 4547/2018 for the reorganization of the support structures of primary and secondary education - Article 2 (2018)
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	Greek Ministry of Education and Institute of Educational Policy, Participation in Project for Inclusive Schools, Policy Report on Inclusive School Education (2021). <u>https://inclusiveschools.net/gr/wp-</u> <u>content/uploads/sites/3/2021/01/Policy-Paper-GR.pdf</u>
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	C.M. n. 24 del (2006), Linee guida per líaccoglienza e líintegrazione degli alunni stranieri
	https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2006/cm24_06.shtml
	C.M. n. 2 dell'8 gennaio (2010), Indicazioni e raccomandazioni per l'integrazione di alunni con cittadinanza non italiana
	http://www.integrazionescolastica.it/article/916#:~:text=2%20del%2008%2F01%2F20 10,alunni%20con%20cittadinanza%20non%20italiana
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Croatia	Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi (2008), Republic of Croatia <u>https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2008_07_87_2789.html</u>
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	Smjernice, upute, preporuke i prijedlozi aktivnosti učiteljima, nastavnicima i stručnim suradnicima u osnovnim i srednjim školama za inkluziju ranjive skupine učenika izbjeglica (2022), Ministry of Science and Education with the Education and Teacher Training Agency
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Ireland	Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (2016) https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/publications/fitness-to-teach/code-of-professional- conduct-for-teachers1.pdf
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