

## Policy Brief: Making assessment of special needs more inclusive across European Schools

### Introduction

Striving to become more inclusive, school (administrative) systems and policy makers across Europe need to consider their assessment procedures and labelling practices. As long as identification procedures of disability and special needs remain manifest solely in psychological and medical traditions, scopes of implementation of inclusive processes will remain limited. The additional reference to environmental impacts and its effects on active engagement and participation need to be considered further.

The three-year Erasmus+ project (funding period: 2021/01/15 to 2024/01/14) aimed to promote school teachers and educators in their role as key actors in realizing inclusive education as an international obligation following the Salamanca Declaration from 1994, the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability from the early 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 from 2016. Therefore, an innovative assessment tool called ‘Inclusive Assessment Map – I AM’ was co-designed, piloted and evaluated together with key actors following the requirements of participatory action research to sustain policymaking for inclusion. The ‘[I AM tool](#)’ is an open access web application, currently available in three different languages (English, German, and Portuguese).

### Policy Outcomes and Implications

The innovate ‘[I AM tool](#)’ supports transnational policy reform to implement social inclusion in the field of school education. Although national school systems and legislations are not necessarily organized in coherence with the international claim of inclusion, the ‘[I AM tool](#)’ makes a valuable contribution to promote inclusion at the local level against the backdrop of the European vision to promote inclusive education for all students. The potential of the ‘[I AM tool](#)’ lies in

- identifying environmental factors that support or hinder participation at school in order to reduce barriers and enable participation;
- providing international good practice examples to facilitate participation in the school system for all students;
- overcoming an exclusively individual-centred and deficit-oriented perspective by applying a group- and participation-orientated assessment;
- supporting the design of educational plans by identifying environmental support measures to meet the needs and goals of all students;
- promoting collaborative work through a common language and shared understanding of educational situations using the ICF-CY framework.

## Actionable Recommendations

The legislative anchoring of the ICF-CY needs to be obligated at the national level like in the participating country Portugal, or other European countries like Switzerland, as well as parts of Italy. Hereby, the comprehensive implementation and use of the '[I AM tool](#)' helps to sustain inclusive education and spread the ICF-CY.

**Recommendation 1 for politics:** Legislative adaptations towards an inclusion-orientated index-based assessment system using the ICF-CY as a common and transnational language for education like the '[I AM tool](#)'.

**Recommendation 2 for politics and organization:** Reorganisation of resourcing and thus financing inclusive education under the involvement of relevant stakeholders, disability organisations, researchers etc to meet the goals of the '[I AM tool](#)' to assess groups and adapt the learning environment.

**Recommendation 3 for administration:** Reduction of bureaucratically and administrative workload by implementing the '[I AM tool](#)' on the ground, which strengthens and simplifies the complex task of collaboration between the involved actors.

**Recommendation 4 for teacher training:** Obligatory introduction of the '[I AM tool](#)' in teacher trainings for both pre- and in-service teachers.

**Recommendation 5 for school lessons:** Designing inclusion-orientated school lessons for optimal support and development. Developing support plans that will not only be related to the individual, but will also consider the environment as a whole, especially the social environment.

**Recommendation 6 for research:** Provision of funding for further research-based development of the '[I AM tool](#)' as well as fundamental research on inclusion-orientated assessment from a cross-country perspective to strengthen the European vision of inclusive education.

## References

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