

InclEduw 4AllNeeds

Training Seminar Lisbon
29-30 October 2025

REPORT

EFEE





“European Sectoral Social Partners in Education promoting inclusion of persons with special needs in education”

(Project *InclEdu4AllNeeds*, number 101145637)



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Introduction

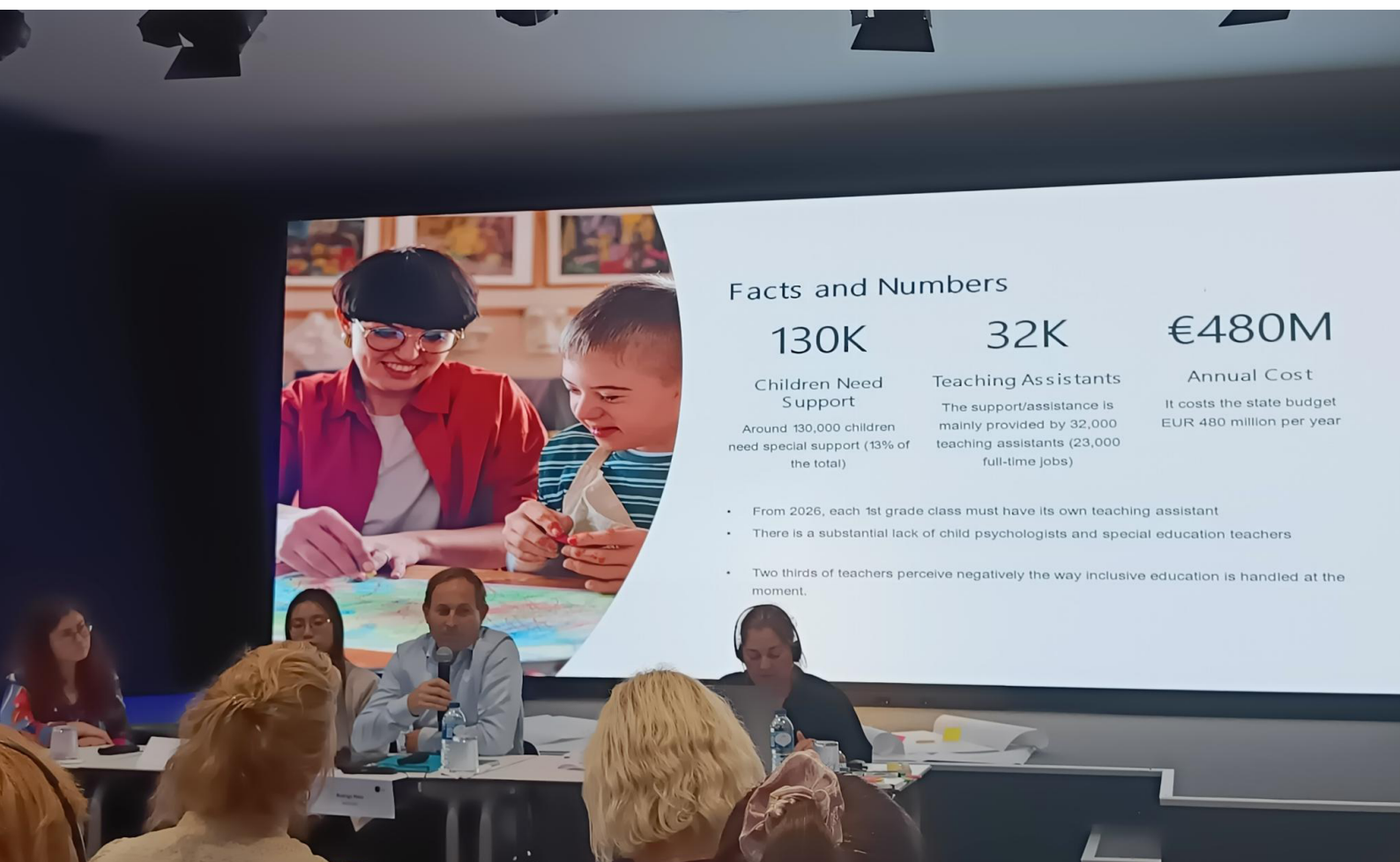
The second training session took place in Lisbon, Portugal, on the 29-20 May 2025, as part of the social dialogue project [InclEdu4AllNeeds](#) - "European Sectoral Social Partners in Education promoting inclusion of persons with special needs in education" (2024 - 2026). Led by ETUCE and EFEE with European Commission co-funding, this project supports the 2024-2026 of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Education (ESSDE) Work Programme. Contemporary global issues, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools and the ongoing war in Ukraine, have had significant consequences, particularly for students who were already disadvantaged. Committed to inclusive, high-quality education, the project promotes effective social partner collaboration to integrate persons with special needs. It assesses policies and practices, providing recommendations for all stakeholders involved in special needs education.

Project objectives:

- To evaluate the existing legislation, special programmes and measures undertaken at national, regional, local or institutional level as regards to the inclusion of persons with special needs in the education system and education policies, as well as assess the impact of the EU policies on inclusion on the national educational and employment policies, identifying challenges (e.g. special needs teachers' shortage) and potential solutions;
- To identify and promote the joint approaches, practices and strategies of social partners in education to ensure the full inclusion of persons with special needs in the education system and education and employment policies,
- To address the relevant professional needs of school leaders, teachers and other education personnel, challenges linked to working and learning conditions (including digital and sustainable education), initial and continuous professional development, recruitment and retention, and other areas;
- To support education trade unions and education employer organisations across Europe to become more pro-active in addressing the issue of the inclusion of persons with special needs in education systems with an intersectional approach and against the backdrop of the consequences of COVID-19, in their national social dialogue structures and within the European Semester consultation practices at national level;
- To update knowledge and peer learning on this topic in the ESSDE Committee;
- To draft concrete guidelines on how to promote effective inclusion of persons with special needs in the education system and education policies through joint social partner initiatives at national, regional and local level.

Project activities:

- An **online survey** among ETUCE and EFEE national member organisations;
- **Focus groups and school visits** organised in Solingen (Germany) and Bucharest (Romania) with the participation of local social partners in education. The visits consist of school visits, interview and filming in order to look at best joint practices of social partners in the inclusion of persons with special needs in education, which are currently being implemented;
- **Two training seminars:** in Paris (France) and Lisbon (Portugal) with participants from other ETUCE and EFEE member organisations. The sessions will be used to present and discuss the research and country visits outcomes, build the knowledge and capacity of social partners on the topic, exchange good practices, and discuss the draft guidelines on how to promote effective inclusion of persons with special needs in the education system and education policies through joint social partner initiatives at national, regional and local level.
- **Final conference** in Chisinau, Moldova, where practical guidelines on how to promote effective inclusion of persons with special needs in the education system and education policies through joint social partner initiatives at national, regional and local level, will be drafted;
- **Filming a series of short videos** on the current situation persons with special needs in education systems in several European countries, as well as on the role of education social partners in addressing the issue.



Facts and Numbers

130K

Children Need Support

Around 130,000 children need special support (13% of the total)

32K

Teaching Assistants

The support/assistance is mainly provided by 32,000 teaching assistants (23,000 full-time jobs)

€480M

Annual Cost

It costs the state budget EUR 480 million per year

- From 2026, each 1st grade class must have its own teaching assistant
- There is a substantial lack of child psychologists and special education teachers
- Two thirds of teachers perceive negatively the way inclusive education is handled at the moment.

Joint Training Seminar

The event built on the outcomes of the training seminar held in Paris (France) in May 2025 and brought together more than 60 stakeholders in the education sector to address the challenges and opportunities of effective inclusions of persons with special needs in education.

The seminar began with welcoming address by local hosts and introduction to the project by coordinators. Participants then explored how social dialogue can contribute to disability inclusion in education, beginning with a presentation done by researchers, Alison Milner and Emily Winchip, on how disability itself is understood. They noted that many education systems still implicitly rely on outdated ideas rooted in the charity and medical models. These frameworks view disability as an individual problem, a condition to be treated or compensated for, often justifying segregation and reinforcing paternalistic attitudes. In contrast, the social model—which gained influence through disability rights movements of the 1970s—argues that exclusion results not from impairment but from societal barriers such as inaccessible services, stigma and prejudice. Building on this, the human rights model places responsibility on society and institutions to guarantee equality and participation. Participants agreed that both the social and human rights models together offer strong foundations for self-assessment, accountability and solidarity within education systems.

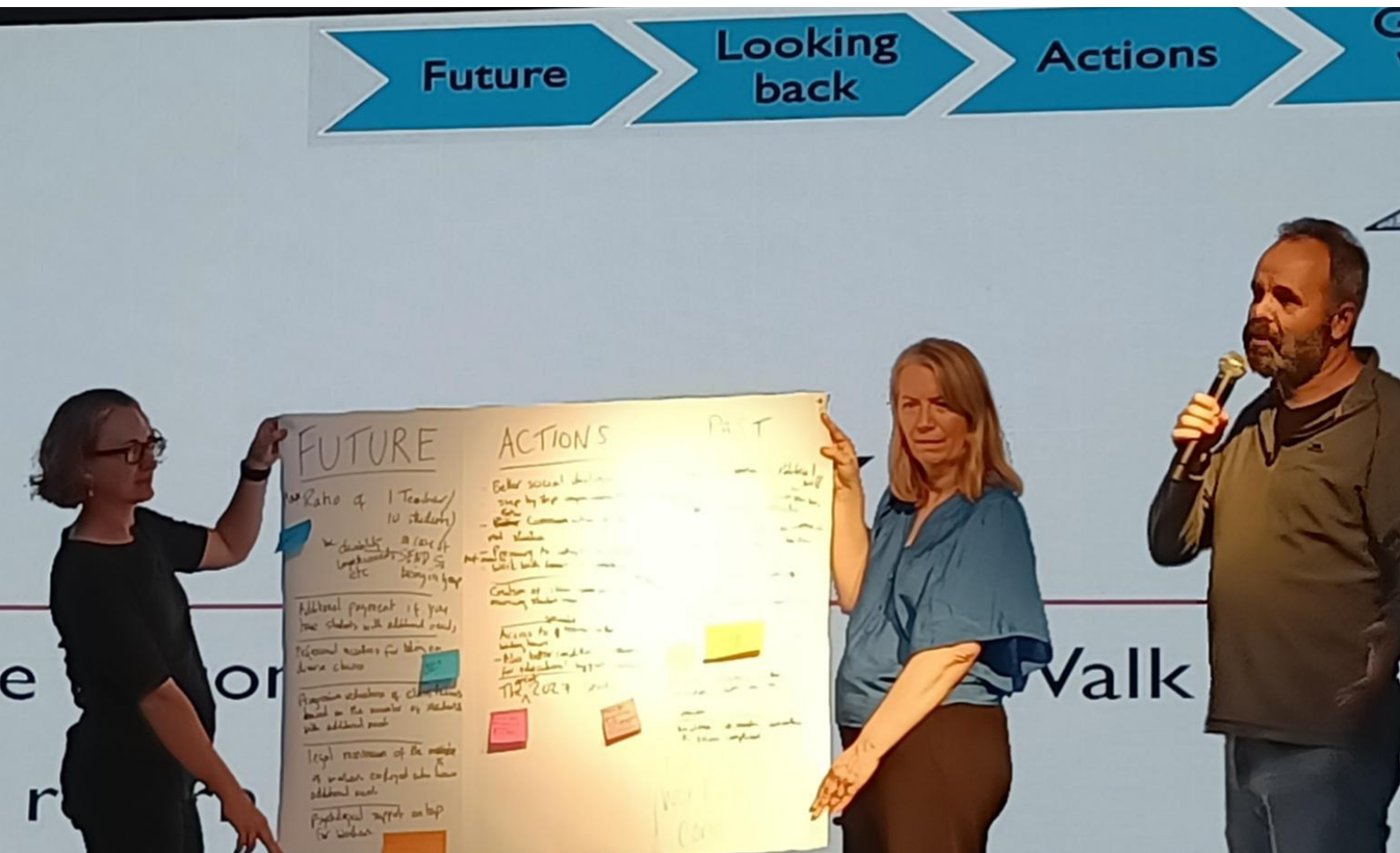
Alison and Emily presented survey results on how education social partners currently engage with disability inclusion. Out of 77 responses, 51 came from the education sector. The survey found that many organisations provide training on inclusion, hire staff with disabilities, and offer opportunities for networking among employees who have disclosed disabilities. However, inclusive language in training and communication is often not matched by concrete policies or access to support. The areas requiring biggest improvements were disability equality and anti-discrimination actions, which were reported as rarely available. Participants observed that social partners appear to prioritise what is easiest to address—such as funding transparency, general pay or staff retention—while avoiding politically sensitive actions such as disability representation, leadership or systemic anti-discrimination measures. This gap suggests that, although commitment is frequently stated, inclusion remains limited in practice.

The discussions drew attention to the idea that inclusion is not an end point but a continuing process of development. This mirrors frameworks such as the Index for Inclusion, which encourages schools and education authorities to rethink cultures, practices and policies while holding themselves accountable. Speakers noted that social dialogue could support this process if it addressed seven key areas: representation, engagement, awareness, leadership, advocacy, communication and training, combined with system-level development. Together, these areas reflect a broader vision: inclusion is most effective when it is collaborative, transparent, participatory and sustained over time.

Despite strong values expressed by many social partners and other stakeholders, the event highlighted several obstacles preventing effective social dialogue on disability. Limited resources and funding often clash with ambitious policies. Structures for collaboration exist but could be better coordinated between ministries and institutions. Education systems need a clearer shared definition or vision of disability, and the topic is rarely treated as a political priority. In many contexts, resistance to diversity, equity and inclusion persists, as disability is still perceived as an issue that individual schools must resolve in silos. Levels of trust between different stakeholders are strong, but working together on disability inclusion remains at times challenging.

Participants discussed ways forward, emphasising capacity building, research, and awareness-raising as necessary conditions for progress. They also urged stakeholders to strengthen alliances, develop a common language around inclusion and rely more consistently on the social and human rights models. These steps would allow social partners not only to respond to existing problems but to anticipate barriers and reshape systems.

The panel discussion on inclusion of persons with special needs in Portugal featured former ministry of education, education employers and trade union representatives. Experiences shared illustrated how inclusion requires both policy commitment and realistic implementation. Portugal, for instance, has worked since 2008 to transform special schools into resource centres to support mainstream schooling. As a result, by 2016, about 98% of students with special needs were in mainstream environments. However, the transition revealed ongoing challenges such as insufficient specialised staff, overcrowded classes and the need for intersectoral cooperation. Panellists stressed that even strong legislation cannot succeed without adequate funding, cultural change and shared responsibility.



Workshop on developing joint guidelines for disability inclusion in education allowed participants to exchange views on different perspectives, such as leadership, teacher supply or pay and working conditions. The outcomes will feed directly into the guidelines, meant to be published at the Final Conference in January 2026. The day concluded with a session on good practices of the joint social partners' initiatives, where attention was drawn to Germany, France and Czechia. A German case put emphasis on relevant legal framework which exist in various regions. At the same time, France highlighted the consequences of ambitious policies that are not supported by the necessary resources, leaving many students without the support promised to them. Czech perspective stressed the importance of looking for a balanced approach in the education system. Experiences from higher education also showed that increasing numbers of students with disabilities require more robust and structured collaboration between stakeholders. Across contexts, speakers insisted that inclusion cannot rely solely on laws or specialised programmes as it must engage school leaders, teachers, families, communities and students themselves.

Overall, the event concluded that disability inclusion in education depends on social dialogue that is not merely symbolic but backed by enforced agreements, common goals and sufficient resources. When social partners share a vision, work collectively and embrace disability as a matter of human rights rather than individual deficit, education systems move closer to ensuring that every learner belongs, participates and thrives. The project will conclude with the Final Conference on 28-29 January 2026 in Chisinau (Moldova).



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