

Executive summary

Introduction

Governments and education policy makers are increasingly concerned with equity and inclusion in education due to several major global developments such as demographic shifts, migration and refugee crises, rising inequalities, and climate change. These developments have contributed to increasing diversity and warrant an examination of its impact on equity and inclusion in education.

The report synthesises the main findings of the OECD Strength through Diversity Project (Phase II, 2019-2022). It presents a holistic framework for studying diversity, equity and inclusion in education, structures the analysis in five key policy areas (i.e., governance; resourcing; capacity building; school-level interventions, and monitoring and evaluation), provides examples of good policies and practices, and offers policy advice on promoting more equitable and inclusive education systems.

Key findings

Education systems vary in terms of defining and conceptualising diversity, equity and inclusion in education. They have developed their own definitions, which reflect their history, priorities and educational goals. This creates considerable challenges for comparative analysis. This report supports the view that equity and inclusion in education systems are approached holistically, building on their interdependencies to generate complementarities and prevent inconsistent objectives.

Governing and designing education systems to promote equity and inclusion

Developing an equitable and inclusive education system requires a holistic approach. This implies the need for education systems to look beyond policy silos and connect them through a policy framework that links key areas for equity and inclusion, from the design of curricula, the conception of teaching practices, the capacity building of teaching staff, to the design of data collections and monitoring of student outcomes. A policy framework can also highlight the importance of fostering student well-being together with their achievement, and emphasise the role of schools in the development of inclusive environments.

It is also important that all relevant stakeholders for equitable and inclusive education are engaged meaningfully throughout the policy cycle. This entails involving them in the development of the policy framework to ensure a shared understanding of the goals, means and concepts adopted by the education system. It then translates into building partnerships to ensure the implementation of the framework across different government levels and to secure the collaboration with other government areas (e.g., health and social services), and non-state institutions (e.g., teacher unions and employers).

Resourcing education systems to foster equity and inclusion

The way funding is allocated to schools and students that are most in need of additional resources has fundamental implications for the equity and inclusion of an education system. To this end, education systems should leverage both main allocation mechanisms and targeted distributions of resources to appropriately support all students. These two funding mechanisms can serve these objectives through different means, and while they both have several strengths, they also entail some risks, such as overlap between programmes and excessive bureaucracy. It is thus important to ensure that both main allocations and targeted funds are designed with the explicit goals of fostering equity and inclusion in education, and that their respective challenges are taken into account and balanced. Moreover, when designing targeted funds for diversity, equity and inclusion, countries should take advantage of the wide range of funds that is available to them: from the provision of financial resources and in-kind benefits to the allocation of physical and human resources, education systems have access to numerous ways of supporting disadvantaged students in education.

Building capacity to foster equity and inclusion

Supporting the learning and well-being of all students requires teachers to have strong theoretical knowledge of differentiated instruction and the skills to put this into practice. Without adequate learning opportunities throughout the teaching life-course, teachers often feel unprepared to address the diverse needs of students. That is why it is important to incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion within initial teacher education and continuous professional learning. Such training is also necessary for school leaders who can drive the effective implementation of practices for equity and inclusion and thereby influence student learning outcomes.

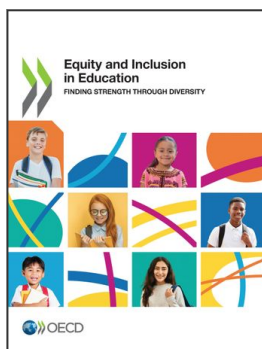
Furthermore, ensuring the diversity of school staff has increasingly been considered an important policy lever in advancing equity and inclusion in a context of increasing student diversity. This requires a holistic approach encompassing both strategies to attract diverse candidates into initial teacher education and initiatives to support and retain diverse teachers.

Promoting equity and inclusion through school-level interventions

Education systems' policies can create an equitable and inclusive framework for education settings, but their implementation at the school level is what determines students' daily experiences in classrooms. It is in schools that policies take the form of specific resources, teaching practices and instructional and non-instructional support mechanisms. Numerous interventions at the school level (including matching resources within schools to individual student learning needs; providing learning strategies to address diversity; offering non-instructional support and services; and engaging with parents and communities) are needed to promote equity among and the inclusion of all students.

Monitoring and evaluating equity and inclusion in education

Monitoring and evaluation can play a fundamental role in ensuring that an education system is not only introducing policies to improve equity and inclusion but also implementing them and achieving its objectives. As such, it is important that education systems monitor progress in improving equity and inclusion in education, and evaluate policies, programmes and processes to promote equity and inclusion in education. Evaluation processes can also support individual schools in improving equity and inclusion practices. Education systems thus need to design monitoring systems that assess progress towards equity and inclusion. Instruments that are used to measure progress towards equity and inclusion can be embedded in a comprehensive strategy. Evaluations to identify policies, programmes and processes that best address the needs of students should be leveraged at the central, local and school levels.



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