

Digital Readiness

of Vocational Educational

Institutions

in an Inclusive Environment

PR2: Handbook

Chapter

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**Abbreviations**

* AT: Assistive Technology
* CV: Curriculum Vitae
* ETCF: ENTELIS+ Trainers Competence Framework
* EU: European Union
* ICT: Information and Communication Technology
* NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
* VET: Vocational Education and Training

# Recommendations for a systematic change

## Introduction

Emergencies often push for change to happen. It is important to recognize the steps taken by organisations and people during these emergencies to keep normal life going. It is equally important to capture the lessons learned during challenging situations and to consolidate results. The COVID-19 pandemic was one such emergency where the forced closure of schools affected the lives of students, particularly students with disabilities. Adapting courses and classes for learners with disabilities in the VET sector was a particularly difficult task. Building on the lessons learned during the pandemic and the consolidated outcomes of the DIG-i-READY project as laid down in previous chapters of this DIG-i-READY Handbook, this chapter provides recommendations for decision makers at the local, regional, national and international level. These recommendations will help them to support and facilitate the process towards a “new and inclusive normal” for VET centres and schools in Europe and beyond, based on digital preparedness. More specific guidelines and recommendations for school management and staff are addressed in Chapter 3 of this Handbook.

## An ideal scenario

Formulating recommendations presume the existence of a vision of an ideal situation or ideal scenario in which all the recommendations have been implemented. For the DIG-i-READY project consortium the ideal situation can be summarised as such:

1. School policies are in place that aim at the full participation of all learners in the activities. Practices are stooled on these policies. Barriers to the full inclusion and participation of learners in different conditions are systematically identified and addressed. Monitoring mechanisms are in place.
2. Digital technologies are regularly embedded in the ordinary and extraordinary activities of the educational institution. Educators and learners have personal and personalised equipment that helps them to teach, learn and develop skills and competences and are trained to use the technology based tools effectively. The use of technology is functional, effective and efficient and not an aim in itself.
3. The learning environment is accessible to all, versatile and communication is multimodal. Alternative communication channels and modalities exist and are tested.
4. “Online” and “in presence” activities are integrated and the transition between different learning modalities is smooth.
5. The educational institution is resilient in case of medium- and long-term emergencies and all stakeholders are informed about procedures in case of forced interruptions of the planned.

In the depicted ideal scenario “inclusion” is considered a fundamental aspect of “resilience”. A system that discriminates in challenging situations is not resilient. When educational systems are cohesive, flexible, able to cope with diversity leaving no one behind, they will be less fragile and more resilient in case of challenges.

Many features of the ideal scenario are rooted in policy frameworks at international and national level, the most important ones being:

* UNCRPD: The Convention does not claim special rights for a specific group of citizens but claims that all persons with disabilities can enjoy the same opportunities as anyone else.
* Inclusive education: The first principle of the European Pillar of social rights underlines that: “Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully, transitions in the labour market.” Inclusive education thus has to be understood as barrier free education that provides equal opportunities and universally designed learning curricula and activities.
* Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027: The renewed European Union (EU) policy initiative that sets out a common vision of high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe, and aims to support the adaptation of the education and training systems of Member States to the digital age. Chapter 2 and 3 of this Handbook contribute to the two key prioritised by the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-27: Fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem and enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation (e.g. DIG-i-READY Digital Competence Framework).

## 5.3 Recommendations

Educational systems tend to be complex and structured. As a consequence, adopting innovations or bringing about change requires investments in time, creativity, management skills and resources.

The stakeholders involved are many, among which ministries, regional or local educational authorities, school directors and management, educators, students, families. Each of them has a role with responsibilities, resources and expectations. Like in nature, the well-functioning of the educational ecosystem depends on the participation and collaboration of all stakeholders. However, policy makers at European level and national, regional and local educational authorities, each within their respective roles and functions, have a specific responsibility in guiding and facilitating the transition towards more resilient and inclusive educational systems. For that reason, the following recommendations specifically target them.

### 5.3.1 For policy makers at European level

* When it comes to the implementation of the core objectives of the UNCRPD a major alignment is needed between the different strategies at European level in the areas of education, employment, accessibility, access to digital AT. Further gaps in EU policies in this domain have to be identified, such as access to AT for those for which accessible mainstream does not solve all challenges, frameworks for facilitating the transition between school and employment for learners with disabilities.
* The cooperation between member states willing to ensure high standards of inclusion in education needs to be enhanced. Programmes such as ERASMUS+ need to be further strengthened and appropriate funding should be available for priorities targeting vulnerable groups.
* Access for all to digital education should be a high priority for policy making in Europe. Knowledge about accessibility legislation and requirements should be further promoted.

### 5.3.2For educational authorities at national level

* It is important that national educational systems in Europe are further aligned with each other, also in the case of VET and professional education.
* Making the education system more inclusive should be a key priority. All learners should have equal opportunities to develop their interests, talents and personality and to acquire the skills needed to work in a professional field close to their ambition.
* Thanks to its diversity in approaches and long-standing pedagogical tradition Europe is a fertile common ground for the exchange of good practice and reciprocal learning. National governments should incentivise collaboration among educational authorities and schools in different countries and make resources available for study and exchange visits.
* The adoption of appropriate digital technologies in schools should be promoted, as well as the use of assistive technology by learners with disabilities. Technologies that are purchased with public money should respond to high accessibility standards.
* National programmes for the training of educators and other staff in professional training and education in using digital technologies in their professional activities should be developed and enhanced. These programmes should be based on inclusive models. The use of existing competency frameworks for building capacity should be enhanced.
* Resources should be made available for investments in technology in education and for schools that experiment new forms of teaching and learning.

### 5.3.3 For educational authorities at regional or local level

* At the local level it is important that an ongoing dialogue is established between schools, educational authorities and organisations of parents and persons with disabilities. The dialogue should focus on the barriers that specific groups of learners meet in accessing the educational opportunities available to all.
* At regional and local level policies and plans should be developed that support educational institutions in making the transition towards more inclusive and resilient student-centered organisational models. Action plans for emergency situations should be drafted at school level.
* For more centralised systems local authorities should be involved in the central processes of policy and decision making as well as the allocation of funds and budgets, in order to empower local authorities not only to support learners and education staff, but also to facilitate transition between education levels and transition to independent living.
* Free educators training programmes in the use of digital tools in education should be included in obligatory in-service training. The outcomes and impact of those programmes should be monitored.
* Internet access for all educators and learners need to be assured. Funds should be made available to schools to connect learners that for valid reasons have no access to the Internet on a continuous basis.
* At local level establishment of local or regional resource centers of support teams should be included in action plans and budget. A community/local based resource center can provide support to schools as well as links to the local community for facilitating transition between education, social life and employment.
* Locally/regionally develop accessibility and inclusion awareness programmes and activities that break stereotypes and charity perspectives, while developing a culture of common responsibility and inclusiveness.

## 5.4 Conclusions

To make systemic change happen it is important to have the correct policies in place. Keeping an ideal scenario in mind, this chapter on recommendations for systemic change to achieve inclusive digital education, identifies gaps between existing policies and an ideal scenario. Just setting policies in place is not enough, monitoring the implementation is equally important. Providing support to decision makers at the local, regional, national and international level who are responsible for facilitating change in educational systems to make them inclusive. Through these recommendations long-term solutions and preparedness can be achieved in case of a complete online shift to digital education in times of crisis.

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