

## INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT UNIVERSITY: A MOBILITY PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

Impact analysis

*INnetCAMPUS PROJECT*





EDITORS: Fundación ONCE

COORDINATORS: Isabel Martínez Lozano y Maria Laura Serra

COLLABORATORS: Marta Medina García, Esperanza Alcaín  
Martínez, Rute Saraiva, Els Pazmany y Beno Schraepen.

DESIGN: Alejandra Roda

ISBN: 978-84-88934-48-2



*“Achieving the right to education is the foundation for building a truly inclusive society, where all people learn together and participate equally. Yet today, over 77 million children are not enrolled in school and more than 781 million adults are deprived of literacy. Such exclusion is particularly acute among persons with disabilities. About 97% of adults with disabilities do not have basic literacy skills. Estimates of the number of disabled children attending school in developing countries range from less than 1% to 5%. Disabled children count for over one-third of all out-of-school children. It is clear that we cannot achieve the Education for All Goals or the Millennium Development Goals without taking into account the special needs of the estimated 650 million persons — 10% of the world’s population — with disabilities.”*

Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, May 2007.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> General Presentation at the 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) organised by the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in Geneva, November 2008. “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future”, ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/4.



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## 1 | INTRODUCTION: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Education as a human right is recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other International Treaties on Human Rights, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereafter, CRPD), where Article 24 reflects the social model of disabilities (Oliver, 1996; 2009; 2013) and the human rights model of disabilities (Degener, 2017), so that persons with disabilities are seen as human rights subjects not simply social beneficiaries.

According to UNESCO's *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*, inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all people; it can therefore be understood as key strategy for achieving *Education for All* (EFA). As a general principle, it should guide all educational policies and practices, starting from the premise that education is a basic human right and the foundation of a more just and equal society. The main impetus towards inclusive education came from the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, held in Salamanca (Spain) in June 1994. More than 300 participants, representing 92 governments and 25 international organisations, considered "the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, namely enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs" (UNESCO, 2009).

This vision was reaffirmed in Dakar in April 2000 at the meeting of the World Education Forum to review progress since 1990. The Forum declared that EFA had to pay attention to the needs of "the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health; and those with special learning needs". It also highlighted the need to pay special attention to girls and women (UNESCO, 2009).

Following on from this, the document ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/4, from the 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) organised

by the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in Geneva in November 2008 centred on “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future”, reviewed the most up-to-date international legal frameworks with respect to inclusive education with the aim of drawing attention to the fact that: “even if this concept might give the impression of being of recent date or even new, it has now been several decades since the international community provided itself with significant legal instruments which, by stressing the right of ALL children to benefit from an education without discrimination, express—implicitly or explicitly—the concept of ‘inclusive education’”. It mentions:

- 1948: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ensures the right to free elementary education for all children (Article 26);
- 1960: the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education;
- 1989: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, furthermore, ensures the right of all children not to be discriminated against when receiving education;
- 1990: the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien) strengthened the idea of basic education for all, satisfying essential learning needs;
- 1993: the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities not only affirms the equal rights of all children, youth and adults with disabilities to education but also states that education should be provided in “integrated school settings” and in “general school settings.”
- 1994: the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education stipulates that (para. 3) “schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups”;



- 2000: the World Education Forum’s Framework for Action, Dakar, and the Millennium Development Goals ensure that all children have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education by 2015; the focus is placed on marginalised groups and girls;
- 2001: UNESCO launched its EFA Flagship Programme on the right to education for persons with disabilities: towards inclusion;
- 2006 : On 13 December the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities, of which Article 24 is specifically devoted to education (absence of discrimination; equality of opportunity; inclusion in education at all levels, particularly primary education; educational opportunities throughout life aimed at facilitating the full development of their human potential, sense of dignity and self-worth; strengthening respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity; the development by persons with disabilities of their personality; their effective participation in a free society with a view to their full integration, etc.).<sup>2</sup>

In order to make this right effective, the CRPD, through Article 4 (general obligations), commits the States parties to undertake to ensure and promote the full realization of the rights, that “Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability.... Reasonable accommodation of the individual’s requirements is provided; [and] Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education; [and that] Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion”.

The right to a good quality inclusive education refers to the “right that [all persons] without distinction have to be educated, in equality of conditions with the rest of the student body in the general education system, guaranteeing that the educational system is adapted to the various educational needs so that each person can develop their own personality, aptitudes, and capabilities

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2 International Bureau of Education, UNESCO (2008). ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/4.

to the maximum they are able and to be trained with the greatest respect for the intrinsic dignity of every human being” (Campoy, 2017).

In summary, the right to education includes the right to an inclusive education and is based on the values that uphold human rights such as freedom, equality, dignity, and solidarity. In this context, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2013) recognised inclusive education as the most suitable approach for States to guarantee universality and non-discrimination in the right to education. As a result of this premise, the CRPD indicates that, in order to be able to exercise this right, there have to be inclusive education systems, so that the right to education becomes the right to inclusive education. In the same context, Muñoz Villalobos (2007), Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, stated that the existing legal and programmatic human rights frameworks clearly recognise that inclusive education constitutes an essential element of the right to education for persons with disabilities.

One of the principal deficiencies found in the implementation of inclusive education is in the lack of norms for carrying out the transition between stages of education, particularly the transition to higher education. The barriers to access at the different educational stages, especially once education is no longer compulsory, mean that the guarantee to the right to education diminishes (Medina García, 2017).

In this context, the Committee of the United Nations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereafter, the CRPD Committee)—a body created through the human rights treaties with the mandate of supervising the application of the CRPD—states that: “Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without [...] structural changes to, for example, organisation, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion.





Furthermore, [it states that] integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion” (CRPD Committee, 2016a).

The Europe 2020 Strategy, a plan for growth and employment in the EU, stipulates efforts to reduce the proportion of persons between 18 and 24 who leave education and who leave with no more than a lower secondary level of education to less than 10% by 2020 (Eurostat, 2018). This objective requires an extraordinary effort for persons with disabilities who have a far higher level of early school leaving.

Despite this strategic plan, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in its Concluding Observations on the European Union’s initial report, registered concern about the situation in Europe with respect to mainstream, inclusive, quality education. In this respect, the CRPD Committee highlighted that “in different European Union member States, many boys and girls, and adults with disabilities cannot access inclusive, quality education in line with the Convention” (CRPD Committee, 2015).

The data shows that the proportion of persons with disabilities who reach higher education in the European Union (EU-28) is lower than that of persons without disabilities (15.5% in comparison to 25%). The proportion of persons attaining “upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education” levels in the European Union “remained fairly similar among disabled and non-disabled persons (between 45 % and 47 % [...]). However, there was a wider gap between the groups in the share of persons attaining on one hand at most a lower secondary education and on the other hand a tertiary education level. Among persons having a basic activity difficulty, a difference of 23 percentage points was observed between the lowest (38.9%) and the highest (15.5%) educational attainment levels” (Eurostat, 2018).

Nonetheless, the European Union considers that education has a central role in promoting both social and economic progress throughout the EU. This shows that education is crucial for the transition from basic education to the labour market and for the successful integration of young people into society. With



respect to the EU's road map, therefore, the Europe 2020 Strategy establishes a goal of no more than 10% of those between 18 and 24 leaving school early.

In fact, according to the European Commission's Statistical Office (Eurostat), the EU's current level of early school leaving is 14.4%, but 31.2% in Spain. For persons with disabilities, early school leaving is even higher, at 53.8% in Spain. The Europe 2020 Strategy also sets as a goal that at least 40% of people between ages 30 and 34 should have completed tertiary education. In Spain, the general proportion here is good, at 39.4%, but falls drastically for persons with disabilities between ages 30 and 34, to 19.3%. In Flanders, the proportion of people between 30 and 34 who have completed tertiary education is higher than the European average, at 42.7%, but stands at only 3% for those with disabilities in this age range (Eurostat, 2017). At the same time, the university enrolment of persons with disabilities for all modules on all courses, show that students with disabilities remain a minority in Flanders, at less than 1% (Glorieux, Laurijssen & Sobczyk, 2014). Out of all the students who completed special education, 38% are unemployed a year later (Tegenbos, 2015).

Diagnosing the educational situation for persons with disabilities in the European Union therefore shows us that there is plenty that needs improvement for persons with disabilities to be able to complete a higher education in line with the eight priority action areas in the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020. One of these was "Education and Training", where the objective was to promote inclusive education and lifelong learning for university and school students with disabilities, and to increase the number of students with disabilities entering and successfully completing higher education. In the current context, therefore, it is a European Union priority for persons with disabilities, especially young persons, to receive an inclusive and quality education that will contribute to improving their chances to gain stable and well-paid employment. An adequate education undoubtedly contributes to professional development for persons with disabilities and to achieving a more autonomous and independent adult life.

On the other hand, the CRPD Committee in its Concluding Observations on the initial report presented to the European Unions does not refer to the

area of post-compulsory education, although it does state its concern that in many member States of the European Union many adults with disabilities do not have access to an inclusive, quality education in line with the Convention (CRPD Committee, 2015). In its own report, “General Observation no. 4 of the CRPD Committee on Article 24”, there are only a few specific references to the university sector. It does propose that inclusive education can set up “partnerships between neighbouring educational institutions, including universities,” as well as partnerships with civil society, in order to develop a system of support and resources for teachers at all educational levels.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that, despite the CRPD Committee’s lack of specificity with respect to the areas of post-compulsory and university education, it enjoins the States parties “to implement or introduce legislation, based on the human rights model of disability that fully complies with article 24” (CRPD Committee, 2016a).

With respect to international cooperation, and in harmony with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, all bilateral and multilateral cooperation must have the aim of ensuring an inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, including support for capacity building, the exchange of information and best practices, research, technical and economic assistance, and access to accessibility and support technologies. All the data gathered and all the international assistance directed towards education must be broken down by the type of impairment. Establishing an international coordination mechanism on inclusive education to implement Sustainable Development Goal 4 and to bring together trials will contribute to improving the dialogue on policies and help lead to progress.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Committee of the RPD 2016a, Para. 72.

4 Committee of the RPD 2016a, Para. 43.



## **2 | THE INnetCAMPUS PROJECT**

With the legal framework and the European context for inclusive quality education in mind, the ONCE Foundation has developed a Strategy on University and Disabilities to promote actions that encourage the participation of persons with disabilities at university.<sup>5</sup> The ONCE Foundation was born in Spain in 1988 with the goal of social inclusion for persons with disabilities through training, employment, and promoting accessibility. The ONCE Foundation is the main social organisation in Spain working in the field of inclusion for persons with disability and its board includes representatives from all the Spanish organisations for disability at national level.

The ONCE Foundation's Commission for University, Youth and Special Plans is the arm responsible for moving forward with the ONCE Foundation's Strategy on University and Disabilities, with the aim of furthering inclusive education and the inclusion of young people with disabilities in the university sector. This comes in a context where more than half of young persons with disabilities in Spain finish study at secondary level and do not reach higher education. In the knowledge society, it is seen as necessary, however, to increase training and entry to higher education for persons with disabilities, as an essential strategy to guarantee their access to technical and skilled employment. The aim of the ONCE Foundation's Commission for University, Youth and Special Plans is therefore to develop the personality, talents, and creativity of persons with disabilities to the maximum, and to make their full potential socially visible and apparent. To do this, programmes and actions have been developed in three directions: to facilitate entry to higher education; to promote young people's academic development; and to increase their employability and their skills, to enable them to enter professional careers in skilled employment and with social leadership.

In this area, the ONCE Foundation also periodically organises studies and reports on the situation of persons with disabilities in education and the higher education sector. In 2014, a report on the participation of university students

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5 Source: <https://www.fundaciononce.es/es/pagina/universidad-y-discapacidad>

with disabilities in mobility programmes was published, with the aim of looking at the existing mobility programmes in Europe and the level of inclusion of students with disabilities in these programmes. It also aimed to look at the needs of students with disabilities and lay the foundations for promoting greater participation by students with disabilities in European mobility programmes and to put forward a series of proposals to achieve this goal.

Among the main conclusions of the study, chief was the low level of participation of university students in these programmes. In the case of Spain, only 0.12% of the students enrolled in the academic years 2010–2012 (i.e., 13 Spanish students) took part. According to the study, the main difficulties that they faced in the course of their stay abroad included: lack of accessibility, lack of resources and adaptations, and the search for accessible accommodation. Even so, all who had participated highlighted the personal growth that they had been able to achieve in the academic period away from their home institutions, as well as the importance of the friends they had made and having felt part of a group. It was an unforgettable experience of academic and personal growth for all of them.

Bearing in mind that students' participation in mobility programmes improves their linguistic abilities, their training, and their personal skills, the ONCE Foundation, in collaboration with Spanish Universities and the Ministry of Education, proposed a series of measures to encourage students with disabilities to take part in mobility programmes and thereby to ensure equality of opportunity from persons with disabilities in the university sector and in the possibility of mobility within the European Higher Education Area.

As part of this strategy, in 2015 the ONCE Foundation's Commission for Universities, Youth and Special Plans set up the project titled *INnetCAMPUS, The network of inclusive European universities: Towards inclusion and transnational mobility for young people with disabilities* (hereafter, INnetCAMPUS Project), aimed at promoting access to university for young students with disabilities, involving universities in this objective, and advancing mobility in Europe for young people with disabilities. The INnetCAMPUS Project—which is part Europe 2020 strategy, within the Education and Training 2020 strategy and the



Rethinking Education strategy—has received subvention from the *Erasmus + Programme, within the action Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices*, as a form of activity of the *Strategic Partnerships in Higher Education*.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Erasmus + criteria, priorities that Strategic Partnerships projects must address, include:

- Reducing learning inequalities that affect students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with limited opportunities, including students with disabilities.
- Strengthening transnational cooperation between educational institutions and youth organisations (including voluntary ones), as well as mobility.
- Preventing early school leaving.
- Developing activities aimed at giving support to students with disabilities, to finish educational and training courses and facilitate their transition to the labour market.

The INnetCAMPUS Project thus fully meets the Programme’s objectives and focuses its efforts on the students with disabilities who are still studying at the educational stages prior to university. Thus, in accordance with the objectives, it combats early school leaving and enhances higher education prospects for persons with disabilities, as well as promoting international mobility for young people with disabilities, through their participation in the Erasmus + Programme.

More specifically, the INnetCAMPUS Project is aimed at students with disabilities in the European Union, offering them the opportunity to experience a taste of university by means of a week’s academic visit and stay on a university campus. The students participating undertake activities to learn about the academic programmes available at the various universities, to see the accessibility or otherwise of their campuses, and the services available to students with

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<sup>6</sup> Grant agreement no. 2015-1-ES01-KA203-016095.

disabilities. The Project also includes activities designed to identify the participants' talents and their potential future professional skills, as well as improving their linguistic abilities. The universities taking part in the programme were the University of Granada (Spain), the Faculty of Law at the University of Lisbon (Portugal), and Artesis Plantijn University in Antwerp (Belgium), and the ONCE Foundation acted as the sponsoring body and coordinator of the project. The Project lasted 36 months, with the goals of facilitating the exchange and dissemination of good practices on the part of the universities involved to promote inclusion in the higher education sector, with a view to reducing the high level of early school leaving, and also to promote transnational mobility for young people with disabilities in Europe. As secondary objectives, it sought to foster a raising of awareness at the universities and for them to identify opportunities to improve their campuses. More generally, the Project set out to improve and promote inclusion of persons with disabilities in the European university community.

The project also set out with the ambitious aim of paving the way in creating a future network of inclusive university campuses in Europe, with the goal of helping to give access to higher education to young students with disabilities. The students with disabilities at all levels of secondary education were worked with and encouraged to put aside any fears and to continue their education towards university. At the same time, the project secured the commitment and active participation of the universities involved in achieving this goal, giving them the opportunity to review their level of inclusion after the experience, to review the accessibility of their installations, and, in some cases, the dearth of specific actions favouring the inclusion of students needing educational support.

In short, the INnetCAMPUS Project set out to attain the following principal goals:

1. To promote transnational mobility of young persons with disabilities.
2. To motivate university entry by students with disabilities and reduce early school leaving in this group.

3. To give universities the opportunity to perform a self-diagnosis of their level of inclusion and accessibility.
4. To improve and promote the inclusion of persons with disability in the university community.
5. To share and learn from the experiences of other European countries with respect to different educational models for inclusion and the support offered to persons with disability.
6. To spread good practices among the European actors.
7. To improve the linguistic skills of students with disabilities, particularly their level of English.

The Project was organised within the time frame of several academic years to allow the programme's impact to be designed and modified, incorporating improvements, and to create reports and workshops in parallel in order to publicise the work and to increase the project's impact, to enhance the debate and the proposals for greater inclusion at university. So each year, the participating universities organised an Inclusive Campus with a mix of students from the three countries. At each Campus, the young people with disabilities and a group of volunteers enjoyed a seven-day stay on a university campus, experiencing some of the day-to-day life of university students on site, and taking part in academic, cultural, and leisure activities. At each inclusive campus, 5 young students with disabilities from the organising university took part, 10 young people with disabilities from abroad, and 10 volunteers both with and without disabilities. This meant that the maximum number of participants envisaged for the whole Project was 150 (90 students and 60 volunteers). The participants on each inclusive campus lived together at a residence and took advantage of the university's resources, according to their specific needs. They also took part in a variety of activities with the aim of exploring their natural talents and future professional skills, as well as improving their language and social skills. The university personnel and people accompanying provided personal support. The Campuses also had the services of a mother-tongue



sign-language interpreter. In 2016 the so-called “Pilot Campuses” were put into action and, in 2017, the “Consolidation Campuses”. Each year, each university had to select 25 participants, including 5 pre-university students with disabilities to take part in their own Inclusive Campus, and 10 pre-university students with disabilities to go to the Inclusive Campuses organised by the other participating universities, and 10 university students with or without disabilities to take part as volunteers at the home Inclusive Campus.

The first Pilot experience was a learning process for the organizing universities and the Consolidation Campus made significant progress on all the objectives set out in the programme, building on the experiences of the first Campuses.

In the different years and locations of the Inclusive Campuses, therefore, almost a hundred pre-university students with disabilities took part:

At the Inclusive Campus of the University of Granada in 2017, there were 17 students in total: 5 students from the University of Granada, 5 from the University of Lisbon, and 7 from Artesis Plantijn University, Antwerp.

At the Pilot Inclusive Campus of the University of Granada in 2016, there were 14 students in total: 5 students from the University of Granada, 5 from the University of Lisbon, and 4 from Artesis Plantijn University, Antwerp.

At the Inclusive Campus of the University of Lisbon in 2017, there were 22 students in total: 8 students from the University of Granada, 5 from the University of Lisbon, and 9 from Artesis Plantijn University, Antwerp.

At the Pilot Inclusive Campus of the University of Lisbon in 2016, there were 8 students in total: 5 students from the University of Granada, 2 from the University of Lisbon, and 1 from Artesis Plantijn University, Antwerp.

At the Inclusive Campus of Artesis Plantijn University, Antwerp, in 2017, there were 15 students in total: 5 students from the University of Granada, 5 from the University of Lisbon, and 5 from Artesis Plantijn University, Antwerp.

At the Pilot Inclusive Campus of Artesis Plantijn University, Antwerp, in 2016, there were 12 students in total: 5 students from the University of Granada, 5 from the University of Lisbon, and 2 from Artesis Plantijn University, Antwerp.

The participating students were involved in a variety of activities:

- a. Academic extension activities: they were able to learn about the training opportunities on offer at the universities and the services available for students with disabilities, as well as the way these are structured.
- a. Vocational orientation activities: they explored a range of activities that enabled them to identify their talents and strengths, as well as future professional skills.
- a. Cultural and leisure activities: they enjoyed accessible and inclusive cultural and leisure activities, making use of the available resources and the local community neighbourhood.

After finishing the Campus, the students were able to evaluate their experience through a questionnaire. The following conclusions were drawn from it:

In terms of evaluating their prior expectations about participation in the Inclusive Campus, the results showed that it exceeded their expectations either positively or very positively.

In their general assessment of the INnetCAMPUS Project, all the students and persons involved evaluated it very positively and 100% would recommend the experience of attending one of the Inclusive Campuses to other students.

In their evaluation of the experience of the Inclusive Campus as a form of bridge to university, 62% considered that the experience was positively or very positively rewarding and thought that the Project had given them a more positive attitude towards continuing university studies, and even that their experience on the Project had motivated them to carry on to do university studies. While the remaining 38% did not view the experience as having a major influence, since they had already taken the decision to continue their

education at university when they attended the Campus, their participation at the Campus had opened up possibilities with respect to studying at a university abroad. Indeed, at the time of the end of the Project (August 2018), 56% of the participants were already at university, while the remaining 44% indicated that they were still following their secondary education studies and that, on finishing, they intended to move on to studying a university course. Their views and expectations after this experience made them plan for studies at other European universities outside their home country, demonstrating the importance of taking part in such enriching experiences to help them lose their fear of the unknown and of the possible barriers they might come up against.

At the same time, two international conferences were held within the framework of the INnetCAMPUS Project (Madrid 2017 and Granada 2018), titled “Building a European Network for Inclusive Higher Education: International Conferences for International Mobility and Inclusion”, attended by 135 participants. The bodies involved were able to exchange experiences, and experts in inclusive education were invited to share their ideas and knowledge to help improve the development of the Campuses. The two conferences brought together interested people from the academic world, researchers, teachers, and organisations from the world of disability associations.

The first day, titled “Publicising the INnetCAMPUS Programme”, involved a programme of debate about international mobility for students with disabilities, with a presentation of the results and impact of the first experiences of the Inclusive Campuses at the universities in Granada, Lisbon, and Antwerp, and discussion of good practices for the transition to higher education. Participants included representatives from the Conference of Spanish University Rectors (CRUE in Spanish), the Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education (SEPIE), and experts from other universities, such as the Autonomous University of Madrid.

The second conference was held at the University of Granada under the title “A Mobility Programme for All. Creating a Network of Inclusive European Universities”. This event also drew a large number of participants and an open debate, involving experts from some of Europe’s networks for inclusive

education, including Ann Heelan of the European Association for International Education. Members from other Spanish and European universities also took part, including the University of Montpellier in France, the Complutense University of Madrid, the University of Murcia, the University of Jaén, the University of Las Palmas, etc. It was a productive discussion and, after sharing information about the experience of the INnetCAMPUS Project, ideas were put forward to advance strategies for making European universities more inclusive spaces. Experiences from other projects in the Erasmus + programme were also presented and there was great interest in continuing to take advantage of the opportunities of the Erasmus + programme to make it more inclusive.

As a coda to the project, an International Conference was organised in Antwerp, to discuss the programme's impact and other matters associated with the future of inclusion in the European area. The conference was a success in terms of participation and involved a large number of the institutions, universities, bodies, and organisations working in this field in Europe, enabling synergies for continued progress. The conference was held under the title "Strategies for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in European Universities: Experiences of a Mobility Programme". As well as the country's main educationalists, the debate included those in charge of European Disability Forum (EDF) and experts who put forward interesting proposals for moving the Erasmus + programme forward, examining the different educational models in Europe and their influence on the inclusion of persons with disabilities at universities.

During the roll out of the INnetCAMPUS Project, the institutions taking part noted an absence of guidelines and procedures to establish a protocol for action that would ensure the participation of students with disabilities in the processes involved in transitioning between different stages of education. This means that students with disabilities experience the stage of transition to university as one of instability, which can lead to reasons for leaving education or making decisions that are against their real wishes and professional or vocational intentions.

At the same time, following the implementation of the INnetCAMPUS Project we can confirm that there is another goal and function to the programme that

had not been foreseen: the INnetCAMPUS Project serves as a tool for analysing and evaluating the educational reality in Europe and the influence this has on access to higher education for persons with disabilities.

As part of the INnetCAMPUS Project—with the main aim of changing the situation of segregation and/or exclusion faced by students with disabilities in university education and of facilitating the educational transition between stages, to guarantee the right to an inclusive education in Europe—we created the “Methodological Guide for the Educational Transition to University of Students with Disabilities”. This methodological guide includes the following primary and secondary objectives:

## **2.1 | Primary Objectives**

1. To promote the effective implementation of an inclusive model of education that guarantees the presence, participation, and progress of students with disabilities.
2. To facilitate an effective transition for students with disabilities from the compulsory stages of education to higher education.
3. To promote the presence of students with disabilities who gain access to and successfully take part in university education.
4. To contribute to encouraging the development of inclusive educational environments at all stages of education.
5. To promote the implementation of training actions and guidance of teaching and research faculty in the university context, to assist in the creation of a truly inclusive educational community.
6. To guide in activities regarding tutoring and developing personal abilities that enable the empowerment of students with disabilities.
7. To promote improvements and innovation in teaching, as well as avenues of research in this area.



## **2.2 | Secondary Objectives**

1. To contribute to developing the social model of disability as well as the human rights model of disability.
2. To foster a general social environment that guarantees accessibility and universal design for all persons.
3. To demonstrate clearly that inclusive education offers the best academic, personal, social, and economic results.
4. To improve the professional possibilities and future employability of persons with disabilities, by having access to more and better professional qualifications.

The guide has been distributed throughout the Spanish and European university system, in Spanish and English language versions. It has been published on the internet and the aim is for it to become an important tool for strengthening the strategies and programmes for the educational transition to higher education.



## **3 | NATIONAL CONTEXTS AND EXPERIENCES AT THE THREE INCLUSIVE CAMPUSES SET UP THROUGH THE INnetCAMPUS PROJECT**

### **3.1 | Inclusive Education in Spain**

In Spain, the right to an inclusive education for persons with disabilities at all educational levels, including university, is recognised by law (Alcaín Martínez & Medina García, 2017).

This legislation has undergone progressive enhancement since it was put on the statute books in 1985 in the Royal Decree on the Organisation of Special Education, setting in motion the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream centres. Following on from this regulation, important milestones have been achieved, including the schooling of all persons within a single system, the increase in psycho-pedagogical teams, and the enlargement of centres and resources to give appropriate attention to students with special educational needs (SEN) (International University of Valencia, 2014).

Later on, the Organic Law 1/1990 on the General Organisation of the Educational System (LOGSE) clearly backs the principles of normalisation and integration, introducing for the first time the concept of SEN to refer to the pupils who, in the course of their studies in mainstream classrooms, need special support and even some form of adaptation of the curriculum to overcome impairments, developmental or learning problems (International University of Valencia, 2014).

In April 1995 the Royal Decree 696/1995, of 28 April, on the Organisation of Education for Students with Special Educational Needs was passed, with all the stipulations related to the attention to students from a diversity perspective. It is not only students who show disabilities who have special educational needs (García Rubio, 2017).

In May 2006 the Organic Law on Education (LOE) came into force, introducing new categorisations for students defined as having special needs for educational

support and clearly backing the inclusion of all students regardless of their personal or social conditions. It does not address just disabilities but also students who come late into schooling, show specific educational difficulties, show high ability, or need support because of social circumstances. Article 74.1, referring to the schooling of students, definitively backs the necessity of inclusion (García Rubio, 2017).

Law 26/2011 of 1 August, the regulatory adoption of the CRPD, set out to adapt Spanish legislation to what was set out in the CRPD. This law, despite including some changes referring to other aspects of social actuality, made no reference to education. Finally, the most recent Law on Education for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE) of 2013 was passed, introducing few new elements of any significance in the general move towards inclusion. Although this law implies a substantial change to the educational direction taken by the Organic Law on Education, it is not formally a new text, since it is based on the previous law and introduces modifications. This follows the recommendations of the OECD, since—as is signalled in the text of the law itself—the countries whose educational systems produce the best results are those that make constant reforms to a stable framework in response to the detection of shortcomings (García Rubio, 2017).

In 2013 the Consolidated Text of the General Law of the rights of persons with disabilities and their social inclusion (Official State Gazette [BOE], 2013) was also passed. Article 16 explicitly incorporates inclusive education as part of integrated care, understood as: "... the processes or any other means of intervention directed such that persons with disabilities may acquire the highest possible level of development and personal autonomy, and may achieve and maintain the greatest possible independence, physical, mental, and social ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life, which includes securing appropriate employment" (Article 13) (Alcaín Martínez & Medina García, 2017).

Inclusive education will be imparted by means of the support and accommodations recognised in Chapter IV of the Consolidated Text and in the Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education (BOE, 2006). Chapter IV (Articles 18 to 21) is important because, in it, the Spanish legal system expressly recognises the right



to inclusive education: “1. Persons with disability have the right to an inclusive education, of quality and free of charge, on equal terms with others. 2. It is the responsibility of educational authorities to ensure an inclusive educational system at all educational levels, as well as in lifelong learning [...] paying attention to the diversity of the educational needs of students with disabilities, by means of controlling support and reasonable accommodations to care for those who need special attention for learning or for inclusion...” (BOE, 3 December 2013, Article 18) (Alcaín Martínez & Medina García, 2017).

“In order to guarantee the right to an inclusive education for persons with disabilities and notwithstanding the measures laid out in the regulations on education, further additional guarantees are established, such that: persons following university courses, whose disability seriously impedes their adaptation to the established general entrance system, will be able to request, and the universities will be obliged to grant, in accord with what is laid down in their corresponding permanent regulations, that in all cases they must take into account the situation of persons with disabilities pursuing studies at the university, increasing the number of persons with disabilities, and appropriately compensate for the difficulty, without compromising the required level. The tests will be adapted, in their case, to the characteristics of the disability of the particular candidate.” (BOE, 3 December 2013, Article 20, c) (Alcaín Martínez & Medina García, 2017).

Despite all this, in Spain persons with disabilities face high levels of early school drop out (more than half finish their studies during secondary level). The Spanish National Institute for Statistics (INE) in the section of its statistical information on Health contains the following results from its most recent survey on “Disabilities, Personal Autonomy, and Situations of Dependency” (INE, 2008). This popular census revealed that, in 2007, the population with disability in Spain came to 8.5% of the total (3.84 million people), with 58% over the age of 65. With respect to education, the 2007 survey gives the level of studies completed broken down by age and sex: 10.7% of the population with disabilities cannot read or write (73% women); almost 34% had not finished primary education (64.8% women); 29% had finished primary education or equivalent (58.4% women); 9.4% had lower secondary level education (54.4% women); 5.7% had higher secondary

level (47.3% women); 2.9% had professional or vocational training at mid-level or equivalent (50.1% women); 1.9% had professional or vocational training at a higher level (43.5% women); and 5.2% had a university degree or equivalent (51.2% women).

With respect to the population of those with disabilities between ages 25 and 64, only 8.65% had achieved a university degree or equivalent, in comparison with 29% of the general population between 25 and 64, in the year 2007.

These percentages also contrast with the indicator relating to the type of disability involving “basic learning (reading, writing, arithmetic)” in the 2007 survey, where only 1.5% of the population with disability between ages 6 and 24, and 3.2% of those between 25 and 64, presented this “type” of disability.

Alcaín Martínez and Medina García—basing themselves on the Third Study called, “University and Disability”. A study on the degree of inclusion in the Spanish university system and the reality of disabilities, carried out in 2016 by the Universia Foundation and the Spanish Committee of Representatives of Persons with Disabilities (CERMI)—indicate that all students with disabilities make up just 1.7% of the total of university students and that the percentage of undergraduates with disabilities who proceed to a Master’s or other postgraduate programme is 1.2%, with 0.9% choosing to undertake doctoral studies. This follows the pattern by which, the higher the level of study, the fewer persons with disabilities are involved (Alcaín Martínez & Medina García, 2017).

From the data above, it is evident that in Spain the educational level of persons with disabilities continues to be lower in comparison with those without disabilities. Today in Spain, only between 5 and 6% of persons with disability have university studies, despite talk of a horizon of 40% in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The data show that, in spite of Spanish universities’ efforts in recent years to promote diversity and improve entry and retention of all persons with special needs at university, it is still necessary to adopt positive action measures to reduce early school leaving, to encourage entry, and guarantee higher education adapted to the needs of the future.<sup>7</sup>

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Source: <https://www.fundaciononce.es/es/pagina/universidad-y-discapacidad>

### **3.1.1 | The Inclusive Campus at the University of Granada, Spain**

The University of Granada became involved with the INnetCAMPUS Project in order to increase the presence of students with disabilities in its degree programmes, both in the university stages and, in the academic mobility programmes. Previously, during the academic year 2014/2015, there were 494 students with disabilities at the University of Granada. After the initial implementation of the project in the year 2015/2016, the figure rose to 517 students, reaching 526 students in the year 2016/2017, coinciding with the Project's Consolidation phase in its second year.

The implementation of the INnetCAMPUS Project during the two academic years led to significant improvements in terms of inclusion:

- Increase in the number of students with disabilities enrolled at the University of Granada, in line with one of the Project's objectives.
- Increase in the involvement of students with disabilities in the European mobility programmes. As with the previous indicator, this addresses one of the Project's objectives. At least three volunteers with disabilities on the INnetCAMPUS Project 2016, after taking part in the Project, receiving information about assistance, and getting to know persons with disabilities and educational systems abroad, applied to the Erasmus + programme and are currently experiencing that mobility.
- Including evaluation of the INnetCAMPUS Project in the study plan of the module "Evaluation of Public Policies" in the Degree in Political Science and Administration at the University of Granada.
- Carrying out events and conferences with outreach to raise awareness and public education within the university community, which had a positive impact. During the course of Project, various events and conferences have been held to publicise it and to inform and encourage students with disabilities to take part in the mobility programmes. In collaboration with the Erasmus Student Network Granada (ESN Granada) and the ONCE Foundation, several conferences have been organised to inform about assistance and support for mobility for university students with disabilities.

Similarly, the ESN Granada in collaboration with the Secretariat for Inclusion and Diversity, the Association of University Students with Special Needs (AUNE), and various public organisations in the city (the City Council and the Regional Council of Granada) have undertaken a variety of events with the same aims, moving a step forwards with the approach and attitude of the city's representative bodies, for which the mobility programmes have important element in terms of economic implications.

- Teaching innovation and quality. Greater involvement in the university professors' participation in terms of innovation and teaching quality has resulted from taking up the methodological adaptations for students with disabilities as part of teaching practice. It also means a suitable transfer of learning, i.e., university teachers have been able to communicate their experience and projects to the students with disabilities and those in the secondary school levels of the Project.
- Improvement in accessibility and inclusion in the university community. In the wake of the Project, a series of overall improvements has been made with respect to accessibility and inclusion at the level of services and management, as well as of faculty and student body, at the University of Granada.

### **3.2 | Inclusive Education in Portugal**

In Portugal, the legal framework for the rights of persons with disabilities in terms of inclusive education has made significant progress in recent years, although the progress has centred on the compulsory stages of primary and secondary education. First, Decree-Law 319 of 1991, later replaced by Decree-Law 3 of 2008, and also by Joint Order 453 of 2004 and the Normative Orders 1 of 2006, 50 of 2005, and 7-B of 2015, among others.

A consequence of Decree-Law 3 of 2008 was that, in 2015, 98% of students with disability in Portugal were enrolled in mainstream schools (CRPD Committee, 2016b). In this way, the fight against early school leaving during inclusive compulsory education was able to have a positive impact on entry to higher

education for persons with disabilities (and is highlighted as a positive aspect by the CRPD Committee in its Concluding Observations on the initial report on Portugal).

Recently, in July 2018, Decree-Law 54 of 2018 was passed,<sup>8</sup> establishing a new legal regime for inclusive education at the level of compulsory education. The Decree establishes an integrated and continuous approach to each student's school career, guaranteeing an education of quality throughout compulsory schooling. It also introduces changes to the way of organising schools, the support structures to identify the measures to support learning, and inclusion throughout compulsory schooling; furthermore, it enhances the role of the family and/or those responsible for education, conferring a set of rights and duties on them to promote participation in the whole educational process. This Decree-Law establishes the principles and regulations that guarantee inclusion as a process that responds to the diversity of needs and potentials of each and every student by increasing participation in the learning processes and the life of the educational community. In addition, it identifies measures to support learning and inclusion, specific areas of the curriculum, as well as specific resources that must be mobilised to respond to the education needs of each and every student, throughout their career in different forms of education and training.

This Decree-Law 54 of 2018 also indicates commitment to an inclusive education, according to the UNESCO definition (2009), as a process that aims to respond to the diversity of needs of all students through increasing participation in learning and the life of the school community, which was confirmed by Portugal with the ratification of the CRPD and its Optional Protocol and reaffirmed in the "Lisbon Declaration on Educational Equity" in July 2015. This commitment aims to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda.

Setting out to monitor compliance with the applicable regulation and to learn the real situation of persons with disabilities in Portugal, the CRPD Committee published its Concluding Observations on Portugal's initial report on the implementation of the CRPD's provisions. The report was presented by Ana María Antunes, Portuguese Secretary of State for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. During the session,<sup>9</sup> in the context of education, the members of the

8 Source: <https://dre.pt/web/guest/pesquisa/-/search/115652961/details/maximized>

9 Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/newsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=18543&LangID=E>



Committee asked for current data on the funds assigned to guarantee access to mainstream schools. One member of the Committee asked if Portugal had specific rules and legislation on the status of non-national persons, in particular refugees and migrants with disabilities, with respect to access to education. In response, the Secretary of State indicated that:

Refugees and migrants enjoyed a set of legal rights on an equal footing with other citizens. There was no distinction drawn between refugees with and without disability, and their children could access the same education.

The latest data showed that the number of persons with disabilities enrolled in mainstream education was even higher than 98.5%. Seven percent of the education budget was allocated to institutionalisation measures. Organisations of persons with disabilities were the first to create schools for children with special education needs. Those organizations had cooperated with the State to transfer students with disabilities from segregated schools into mainstream educational establishments and had redirected their activities towards rehabilitation. There were 488 students learning sign language in 2016. The Ministry of Education had conducted campaigns against bullying at school, including bullying of persons with disabilities. Students with motor sensory impairments had a quota for access to higher education, giving them priority access for 2% of the total number of places available in each institution.

Despite these figures, there is still a perceptible lack of (accurate) statistics on the number of students with disabilities at university at a national level and at the different Portuguese universities, as well as in each of the faculties or on each of the courses. Furthermore, some faculties and courses are closed to persons with disabilities, such as the Faculty of Human Kinetics—with no admission for students with disabilities to the sports areas at pre-degree or degree level, even on the courses on adaptive sports—or the School of Medicine (for persons with certain disabilities). There were 285 students with disabilities matriculated at the University of Lisbon in 2016/17.

As a consequence of the lack of a specific legal framework for inclusive education at university level for students over the age of 18 with special educational needs (not covered by Decree-Law 3 of 2008), in 2016 the Support Network for Students with Special Educational Needs of the University of Lisbon (Red

SEN-ULisboa)<sup>10</sup> approved a regulation for the University of Lisbon on students with special educational needs (Order 6255 of 2016), prepared a draft for a proposed law on university education concerning access to higher education for people with educational needs (Order 6255 of 2016),<sup>11</sup> and prepared a draft of a proposed law on university education with respect to access to higher education for people with educational needs. The draft was submitted to the government and the Assembly of the Republic (Parliament).

The reply to the matters set out in the draft presented to the government and Parliament came out in the Ruling of the National Education Council (Opinion 1 of 2017) on students with special educational needs in higher education, commissioned by the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Science in response to the presentation of eight parliamentary initiatives relating to higher education for students with special educational needs and students with disabilities (Bill 321 / XIII / 2<sup>a</sup> [BE] – Exemption from matriculation for students with disabilities in the first and second years of higher education; Bill 329 / XIII / 2<sup>a</sup> [PAN] – Effective accessibility for students with Special Educational Needs in Higher Education; Draft Resolution 358 / XIII / 1<sup>a</sup> [PS] – Students with Special Educational Needs in Higher Education; Draft Resolution 511 / XIII / 2<sup>a</sup> [PCP] – For public and inclusive education in higher education; Draft Resolution 512 / XIII / 2<sup>a</sup> [PSD] – For greater inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs in Higher Education; Draft Resolution 514 / XIII / 2<sup>a</sup> [PEV] – Responses, at the level of higher education, for students with special educational needs [NEE]; Draft Resolution 515 / XIII / 1<sup>a</sup> [PAN] – Plan of action to ensure effective accessibility for students with special educational needs to higher education; Draft Resolution 516 / XIII / 2<sup>a</sup> [BE] – Support for students with special educational needs in higher education).

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10 Its main objectives are the identification, publicising, and implementation of good practices and sharing resources and knowledge in order to improve the situation of integration of students with special educational needs.

11 Order 6255 of 2016 of the University of Lisbon provides the general principles for the adoption of measure to guarantee access for all students to education and inclusion in education, by allocating resources and tools for learning and communication. It also contains specific support tools to promote integration for students with special educational needs in the university environment, foster academic success, and improve their involvement in academic life. It can be downloaded at:

<https://www.ulisboa.pt/wp-content/uploads/Despacho-n.%C2%BA-6255-2016.pdf>

In this ruling, the National Education Council limited itself to a general observation about the various parliamentary initiatives. It also emphasised the lack of existing measures at the universities to address the proposals set forth, and that this would mean an increase in public financing for the universities and polytechnic institutions. At the same time, it considered it necessary to create scientific and pedagogic programmes directed to promoting educational success for students with special educational needs, while recognising that the institutions were not ready to design or implement these programmes, so that, in addition to possible financial support, it considered it important to provide, advice and follow-up by institutions and specialists.

For its part, on 9 August 2017 the Assembly of the Republic issued its Resolution No. 195/2017 where, in accordance with paragraph 5 of Article 166 of the Constitution, it recommended the Government:

1. To implement the recommendations of the European Council and the European Commission and those set out in the CRPD, taking into account the priority areas and challenges defined with regard to inclusive education that allow for quality lifelong learning.
2. To create mechanisms to allow for periodic diagnostic exercises, in the form of surveys, questionnaires, or studies, to categorise the profiles of students with special needs and identify the pedagogical, organizational, and infrastructural strengths and limitations of institutions, including physical, digital, and institutional entry accessibility.
3. To promote the harmonisation and clarification of concepts, as well as the simplification of procedures and regulations, in order to create suitable conditions for admission to and attendance in inclusive higher education.
4. To promote, through the Directorate General of Higher Education: the publicising and dissemination of information, especially of procedures and good practices that enable students with special educational needs to integrate better into academic life; the monitoring and periodic evaluation of how these procedures and pedagogical practices are being applied to ensure an inclusive and fair higher education system.



5. To encourage, through the Directorate General of Higher Education together with higher education institutions, the creation of conditions for inclusion, coordinating with other levels of education and accompanying students with special educational needs through support units, promoting as appears fit the strengthening of strategic partnerships, particularly between health and social security.
6. To draw up and carry out an action plan for the adoption of measures that respond to the identified needs for intervention, especially with regard to the elimination of architectural barriers, the hiring of the necessary professionals and guarantee pedagogical materials appropriate to the students' needs.
7. To provide places, through special provision, for students with special educational needs, in the first and second phases of the national entrance exams for entry to higher education.
8. To study the possibility, in the higher education financing model, of allocating specific funds according to the number of students with special educational needs and to their specificity, with a view to creating conditions for more inclusive higher education.
9. To increase the educational social action budgets allocated to students with special educational needs by 60%.
10. To expand access to educational social action scholarships for students with special educational needs.
11. To collect and make available statistical information regarding the degree of employability of graduates with special educational needs in the labour market.

### **3.2.1 | The Inclusive Campus at the University of Lisbon, Portugal**

In May 2015, the Law Faculty of the University of Lisbon (FDUL), in its internal rules, approved the Regulation on Support for Students with Special Educational



Needs.<sup>12</sup> This Faculty is part of the support network for students with special educational needs at the University of Lisbon, which approved the Regulation for the University of Lisbon on students with special educational needs in May 2016<sup>13</sup> and prepared the draft proposal for a law on university education with respect to access to higher education for people with special educational needs cited above. Thus FDUL was involved with the INnetCAMPUS Project at the same time as its working group was preparing this document on law proposals. So the importance of the INnetCAMPUS Project for FDUL went beyond being an issue of national importance, as the INnetCAMPUS Project emphasises the need for a legal framework and a policy of inclusion for people with disabilities in higher education and helps in the construction of an integrated solution through a system or network for the exchange of good practices and experiences.

The INnetCAMPUS therefore proved very useful in serving as a tool for diagnosing the university community's needs and raising awareness at a time when it was debating this very issue.

Recently, despite the fact that there are no limitations or barriers for students with disabilities at FDUL, out of a totality of about 4,500 undergraduate and graduate students, 200 faculty, and 50 civil servants, there were only 6 students with special educational needs enrolled in academic year 2017, 2 in the degree programme and 4 in graduate programmes. In this context, FDUL's office for students with special needs follows up each year on students who are not identified as students with disabilities but who show real evidence of certain conditions, mostly related to psychosocial issues, such as depression and psychosis. On average, they follow up on 6 or 7 students in this situation each year.

While FDUL's Office of Social Responsibility tasked with supporting students with special needs, has no health professional—a fact related to financial restraints—FDUL has an agreement with the Faculty of Psychology and is in an informal collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine, with the assistance of volunteer medical staff.

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12 Source: <http://www.fd.ulisboa.pt/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/12.2015-Regulamento-do-Apoio-aos-Estudantes-com-Necessidades-Educativas-Especiais.pdf>

13 Order no. 6255/2016, available at: <https://www.ulisboa.pt/wp-content/uploads/Despacho-n.%C2%BA-6255-2016.pdf>

The FDUL building has physical access with lift and ramp access for students with reduced mobility. Even so, some accessibility problems were identified thanks to INnetCAMPUS, such as the gradient of some ramps and problems with bathrooms. The building also has a specific room for SEN students, now close to the Office of Social Responsibility and assistance staff, where they can digitise books, make use of computers with specially designed software, leave their belongings, and even rest. The Faculty library has inclusive resources.

As for the Bill that was presented to the Portuguese government and Parliament, this was strongly influenced from the start by the development of the INnetCAMPUS Project at the University of Lisbon, since it highlighted the importance of and the need for a legal framework in line with the CRPD on post-compulsory education. In this respect, the development of the Campus project contributed to the presentation of this draft to parliament.

On the other hand, the Secretary of State for Education, who took part in the inauguration of the second Campus held at the University of Lisbon, announced the intention not only of creating a separate legal framework for inclusive higher education for students with special needs and inclusive activities, but also of creating and implementing a mobility programme at national level.

The National Parliament, in Resolution 195 of 2017, has echoed many of the concerns and proposals raised and presented by the University of Lisbon and has asked the Government to legislate (thorough diagnostics of the whole area, publicising information and cooperation, financial support). A report of the Government Working Group on inclusive higher education (access, financial support) has also been published.

There was also a considerable improvement in the involvement of non-university institutions with the participation, support and visibility given to this initiative by the main Portuguese sovereign bodies: being received by the President of the Republic; being received at the National Parliament, with a guided tour given by the head of one of the main parties represented in the Assembly; an opening speech with the Secretary of State for Education.

At the academic level, the Board of Directors of the FDUL itself, as a partner of the INnetCAMPUS Project and as a consequence of that partnership,



permanently assigned the only member of its staff with experience in Special Needs, a technical librarian who is now part of the FDUL representatives in the SEN Network, evaluating the institution's fitness for purpose, and material and infrastructural requirements for inclusive higher educational.

In this regard, the Board also assigned an additional faculty member to the Office of Social Responsibility, due to the Office's increased visibility and heavier workload. In summary, FDUL as a Project partner was able to recognise the Office of Social Responsibility's higher internal visibility. There was also an increase in cooperation between the Office of Social Responsibility and Academic Services.

INnetCAMPUS prompted an evaluation of the Law School facilities with respect to accessibility and suitability of learning materials. New materials (such as special software) were purchased and the conditions of the special needs room were improved.

The university teachers were invited to register for a free program at the University's E-Learning Laboratory on specific pedagogical issues related to students with special educational needs. Even so—and this highlights a negative that needs to be addressed—no teacher took part. However, the volunteer university students improved their awareness about inclusion, and at the end of the Campus week most of them asked to repeat the experience or, failing that, to sponsor an SEN student. In this respect it should be noted that one of the student volunteers is now a teacher at FDUL and has developed a particular sensitivity to the issue of special needs.

### **3.3 | Inclusive Education in Belgium**

Belgium has one of the most segregated and least inclusive education systems in Europe. In fact, the CRPD Committee in its Concluding Observations on Belgium's initial report expressed its concern about students with disabilities being referred to specialised schools and forced to attend because of the lack of reasonable accommodation in the mainstream education system.

A "Special Education Act" for students with "learning difficulties" was passed in 1970. This 1970 Act designed a completely separate education system that was to embrace three "different" populations (learners who could not

meet the requirements of mainstream teaching; learners with visual or hearing impairments; and learners with severe physical or intellectual disabilities who, up to then, had not attended school). In addition, special education schools were organised according to 8 “types” of special educational needs for the stages of kindergarten (from the age of two and a half) and primary education, and 4 “categories” of special education for secondary education. In other words, following this 1970 Act, the “special classrooms” in mainstream schools were suppressed and students with “learning difficulties” were enrolled in new buildings, in “special education schools”, buildings that in many cases were constructed outside the town centres (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018).

In 1986, the idea of normalisation and integration led to the amendment of the 1970 Act, which was then called the 1970 Act on Special and Integrated Education. With this amendment, learners with disabilities got the opportunity to attend mainstream education under the guidance of a special school. However, in practice, during the 1988/1989 school year only 750 pupils with a motor, visual, or hearing impairment were integrated into mainstream schools. The total number of pupils in special schools was almost 35,000 (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018).

In 1994, integrated education was extended to all “categories” of special education. Students with learning and behavioural problems were able to avail themselves of integration support when they moved from a special to a mainstream school. In integrated education, a staff member from a special school supports the pupils and the teacher. However, integration is still seen as extra work for pupils who have the capacity to meet the normal expectations of a mainstream school, and even the support is meant to be temporary, extending to no more than two years per school level. Only for severe disabilities (such as deafness or blindness) may assistance be permanent and integration continues to be very difficult in practice, especially for students with intellectual disabilities (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018).

Belgium ratified the CRPD in 2009, and along with ratification the government passed a decree-law that came into force in 2014 (M-decree 1/09/2014), by which they sought to attain certain objectives, including avoiding exclusion,

segregation, and discrimination. This new legal framework optimised the right to attend school freely and according to the choice of the person with disability. Specifically, since the school year 2014/2015, parents have the right to enrol their children in a mainstream school, and the school must make the reasonable accommodations necessary for all its students. When the accommodations are deemed disproportionate, the school is able to reject the enrolment and the student must enrol at a segregated school. In this way, there is currently a tension in Belgium between the educational institutions with respect to this legal framework, since the State has not offered sufficient guarantees for mainstream schools to make the accommodations and give the support necessary for their students with disabilities.

All the same, Belgium still retains its “categories” of special education. In terms of secondary education, the four categories of segregated education systems for students with disabilities are:

**Category 1:** provides a social education with a view to integration into a sheltered living environment.

**Category 2:** provides a general and social education, training for work with a view to the students’ integration into a sheltered living and working environment.

**Category 3:** provides a general and social education, as well as vocational education with a view to the students’ integration into a mainstream living and working environment.

**Category 4:** prepares students to continue their studies in higher education with a view to integration into an active life.

As inclusive education has still not been realised as an absolute right, as the segregated educational systems for children and young people with disabilities is only organised as far as secondary school level, and owing to the lack of progress in regulation, it is not surprising that young people with disabilities leave the educational system after gaining their certificates of secondary education. In consequence, it is extremely rare to find young people with disabilities attending tertiary-level education in Flanders. There is also a lack of clear and accurate

statistics on the number of students with disabilities in higher education at a national level. Belgium, therefore, shows no urgency in extending inclusive education to tertiary-level education.

The CRPD Committee (2014) in its Concluding Observations on the initial report presented by Belgium, “requests that the State party implement a coherent inclusive education strategy for children with disabilities in the mainstream system and ensure the provision of adequate financial, material and human resources. It recommends that the State party ensure that children with disabilities receive the educational support they need, in particular through the provision of accessible school environments, reasonable accommodation, individual learning plans, assistive technology in classrooms, and accessible and adapted materials and curricula, and guarantee that all teachers, including teachers with disabilities, receive comprehensive training on the use of Braille and sign language with a view to improving the education of all children with disabilities, including boys and girls who are blind, deaf-blind, deaf or hard of hearing”. The CRPD Committee also recommends to Belgium that “inclusive education should form an integral part of teacher training at university” and in mainstream training in the university service.

### **3.3.1 | The Inclusive Campus at Artesis Plantijn University, Antwerp, Belgium**

The primary motivation for Artesis Plantijn University in Antwerp to take part in the INnetCAMPUS project was related to the fact that there is no real development of new regulation with respect to inclusive education in Belgium, to the point that current regulation omits tertiary-level education.

Artesis Plantijn University in Antwerp, through its Study Centre for Inclusion—which combines research, training, and practice on inclusion in education, leisure, care, and employment—plays a dominant role in promoting inclusion in Flanders. After some successful university experiences for students with disabilities, the university set out to take a structural step forward towards inclusion in university education. In this context, INnetCAMPUS was the perfect opportunity to raise awareness with university staff and faculty at all

levels. In addition, Artesis Plantijn University aims to take a central role in the social debate, publicising and creating social awareness on the importance of inclusion in university education. It aims, in the long term, to be more fully involved in developing other projects on inclusive education, both nationally and internationally.

Through the INnetCAMPUS Project, they managed to introduce the concept of inclusion at different levels within the University itself. The Project gave impetus to developing new projects on inclusion—and support for them—from different university departments, raising awareness among university staff who had little training about the rights of persons with disabilities, including management staff, administrators, teachers of other study programs (Communication, Journalism, Information Technology), receptionists, library staff. This will facilitate putting true and full inclusion into practice in the future.

The implementation of the INnetCAMPUS Project at Artesis Plantijn University in Antwerp was complex because the reality of the starting point was far from the ideal in terms of inclusion. At first, when the call for students with disabilities to participate in the inclusive Campus was circulated among all the special education schools preparing their students to continue post-secondary education, there was not a single response from any one of them. Faced with this situation, those responsible for the Project at Artesis Plantijn University in Antwerp decided to call the schools with the proposal of going to them to give information sessions for students and parents, and also to check whether the previous invitation had been circulated among the students with disabilities and their parents. After this second call, the educational institutions all expressed no interest in the Project and stated that they were unwilling to inform either the students or their parents about the opportunity.

While this response was somewhat consistent with expectations for the pilot inclusive Campus in Antwerp, after that test run was successful, the organisers were confident they would have less difficulty finding participants in its second year. The lack of enthusiasm at the schools was a further indicator that there is still a lot of work to do in order to change people's mentality towards inclusion in the Antwerp education system.





During the Project's first year, there were few Belgian participants for the pilot Campus in Antwerp; however, they did manage to fill the places for participants at the pilot Campuses in Lisbon and Granada. This raised the question of whether the Belgian participants signed up for INnetCAMPUS more for the foreign experience or for interest in higher education. Conversations with the students led to the conclusion that they had internalised the idea that higher education was not a option open to them.

During the second year, in contrast to the pilot Campus, the Project was supported by the university's General Directorate and by the Dean's Offices of all the Faculties. In this way, the invitation to apply reached a wider audience amongst the teachers, which resulted in the participation of more teachers and more academic study programs. The logistical organisation also received greater support from the Faculty of Health and Social Assistance.

Although the INnetCAMPUS Project was a positive experience in general for the Belgian students with disabilities who participated, they, their families, and their teachers are still not convinced or well informed about the inclusive paradigm. This Project for transition between secondary education and university provided by Artesis Plantijn University in Antwerp is an example for those young people with disabilities and their parents who remain sceptical about their skills and talents, by supporting the expectation that students with disabilities can participate in higher education.

The Project had a very good response from teachers, eliciting the commitment and the intention to participate in future inclusive projects. In addition, INnetCAMPUS was positively evaluated by the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Health and by the university's Social Work Office. In this regard, the Directorate of Programming at the university's Social Work Office and the Faculty of Health decided to start a national inclusive project at the university during the following academic year: an inclusive programme called "Open Week" for Belgian students with and without disabilities. In order to make this national inclusive project become a reality, both mainstream schools and special education schools were invited to participate in the "Open Week", with several courses in a variety of study programmes on offer.



INnetCAMPUS introduced the issue of inclusion at different levels within the university community of Artesis Plantijn University. Not only is there now support to develop more projects on the topic of inclusion within the university, but awareness about people with disabilities was raised at all levels: management, administration, faculty, reception, and library. In the long term, the university plans to become more involved in other national institutions and international inclusive projects.

## 4 | THE INnetCAMPUS PROJECT: THE SOCIAL IMPACT FOR PARTICIPANTS AND ON THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

As already stated in the introduction, the INnetCAMPUS Project has received a very positive general evaluation from all the people and institutions involved in it. Based on the surveys carried out among the participating students with disabilities, the responders all gave very positive evaluations and 100% would recommend the experience of attending one of the Inclusive Campuses to other students.

Evaluating the experience at the Inclusive Campus as a bridge to the University, 62% of respondents considered that the experience was positively or very positively rewarding and that the Project improved their perception of continuing university studies, even boosting their motivation to continue their studies at university. Meanwhile, the remaining 38% considered that it was not decisive, because they had already taken the decision to continue their education at university when they attended the Campus. In fact, at the time the Project ended (August 2018), 56% of the participants were already attending university, while the remaining 44% stated that they were still in secondary education and that, once completed, they planned to move on to study at university. Their vision and expectations after this experience made them consider studying at other European universities outside their home country.

Several participants, for example, stated that the INnetCAMPUS Project motivated them to continue at university, to study at foreign universities, and to travel around Europe.

One participant of the Campus of the University of Lisbon in 2017, currently a student on the degree course of Hispanic Philology at the University of Granada said:

*“So the question is: What did it mean for me to participate in INnetCampus? Well, a before and an after in my life, since it literally changed my vision of life, as well as of university. It’s made me grow as a person and show myself that I am capable, that it’s closer, that I can stand on my own and that the limit is only where you want to put it.*”

*“This trip taught us one important thing: our disabilities don’t matter. With effort and hard work we can study, travel, and accomplish all of our goals. It can be difficult, more complicated than for other people, but not impossible. This is the real purpose of this program, not getting to know Europe or improving our level of English. The real purpose is for us to learn that the world is full of people who want to help us and make everything more inclusive so that our dreams can come true. If we make an effort and work hard, these dreams will come true very soon.”*

As part of the evaluation of the INnetCAMPUS Project, assessing the impact on the families is considered important, so 25 parents were contacted by telephone and interviewed in semi-structured form.

In relation to the parents’ desire for their children to participate in the Project, all of them stated that they intended for their children to be enriched at all levels. We found two important attractions: on the one hand, getting to know and sharing accommodation with other people with disabilities and, on the other, the fact that English was the working language, as they considered that knowledge of this language had important value for the children’s education.

With for a few exceptions, all of them stated that in general their expectations were successfully fulfilled and they rated the experience for their children very positively.

Regarding the possibility and the desire of their children to move around internationally, the majority stated that experience of the Project had served to remove their fear.

*“Avenues have been opened to her and she knows that there are more options, that there are options beyond those that we as parents had initially considered. The fact of being able to do an Erasmus, well, it’s been raised and it hadn’t been raised for us before, we saw it as impossible. Now we see it as a little more possible. (Father of a participant in the Campus at the University of Lisbon in 2016).*

Faced with the question of whether families have perceived any change or progress in their children’s levels of independence, in their way of relating, or in some other aspect of daily life, we have observed that the parents of quite a

significant group of participants state that the experience of the Programme has meant a significant change in their lives (n=16) in aspects related fundamentally to self-esteem, motivation, safety, and social participation.

*"I expected everything to go very well, and it did. I was delighted. I expected him to open up to other children. He's very shy, very shy, he's a very shy child and he's opened up a lot. He's very happy, really happy." (Mother of a participant at the University of Granada Campus in 2017).*

*"Now he doesn't mind being with other people who have disabilities. Now he likes it. Now he values being with them more and likes being with them, before he didn't want to be with any of them. He has gained a lot in that. Now he no longer sees a problem in others having disabilities; before he didn't want to. Now that he's got to know other types of disabilities, he sees that he can relate perfectly." (Mother of a participant at the University of Granada Campus in 2016).*

*"My son learned a lot and the experience was amazing! He came home tired, but completely relaxed, more independent and more confident about himself. He really enjoyed the contact with the other participants, the monitors and staying abroad. I am aware of the difficulties about travelling with a wheelchair, so thank you for assisting him when he needed help and for giving him a very pleasant experience!" (Mother of a participant at the Campus at Artesis Plantijn University in Antwerp in 2017).*

*"In the short period she's back, I noticed she gained maturity. This experience stimulated her to think about studying in higher education, even to go abroad. It was a unique opportunity, many thanks for that!" (Mother of a participant at the Campus at Artesis Plantijn University in Antwerp in 2017).*

As for the involvement of the participating universities and improvements in terms of inclusion achieved during and after the Project, we can highlight that INnetCAMPUS has had a very positive response at the three universities that took part.

As mentioned in the previous section, at the University of Granada there was an increase in the number of students with disabilities, which rose from 494 in the academic year 2014/2015 (prior to the Project) to 526 in the academic year 2016/2017. Similarly, after hosting the Project, there have been improvements

in accessibility and inclusion in the entire university community, at the level of services and management, at the level of teaching and student body. Greater involvement in the teachers' participation—in terms of innovation, methodological adaptations, and teaching quality—was in evidence. During and after the Project, events and conferences to let people know about the inclusive university mobility programmes were also held. This led to an increase in the participation of university students with disabilities in European mobility Programmes.

At the Law Faculty at the University of Lisbon, although its building had access via lifts and ramps for students with reduced mobility, INnetCAMPUS prompted an evaluation of the facilities and the adaptation of learning materials, and some accessibility problems were identified, such as the slope of some ramps and faults in bathrooms. Thanks to the evaluation, new materials were also purchased (such as special software) and the conditions in the room for students with special needs were improved. As for the Campuses at the University of Lisbon, most of the participants asked to repeat the experience or, failing that, to sponsor a student with special educational needs. At the academic level, the Board of Directors of the Law Faculty itself, as a consequence of INnetCAMPUS, permanently assigned the only member of its staff with experience in Special Needs among the FDUL representatives to the SEN Network that evaluates the institution's fitness for purpose, material and infrastructural necessities for inclusive higher education. In addition, the Board assigned an additional member to the Office of Social Responsibility due to the Office's increased visibility and workload. Another impact of the Project with respect to inclusion was the subsequent development of a programme for university teachers on specific pedagogical issues related to students with special educational needs.

Following the involvement of the Secretary of State for Education of Portugal, Alexandra Leitao, in the opening session of the second Campus in Lisbon, the Ministry itself has considered developing a similar national initiative. It is therefore likely that the initiative will have continuity.

The Project's impact on social awareness and sensitization has also been remarkable, with participants being received at the Presidential Palace by the President of the Republic of Portugal.

The INnetCAMPUS Project in Antwerp faced a very different reality. The situation in the Belgian educational system and its segregated character made it difficult to involve students from the outset. On the one hand, neither the teachers nor the families believed in the ability of students with disabilities to access higher education and, on the other hand, there is not enough involvement and awareness in the movement of the associations for disability. Precisely because of this, it was one of the most interesting analyses carried out during the course of the project. And fortunately, this was all changing as the project progressed. For the students, the Project was a positive experience in general, although it was evident that families and teachers do not have a clear understanding of the inclusive paradigm.

In any case, Artesis Plantijn University of Antwerp managed to introduce the concept of inclusion at all levels within the university itself, which was a very positive achievement. The Project acted as a driving force for the development of new projects on inclusion—with support for them—from the different university departments. The Project had the support of the General Direction of Artesis Plantijn University in Antwerp and the Dean's Offices of all the Faculties, and was positively evaluated by the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Health and by the university's Social Work Office. The Project also secured the commitment of the teaching faculty to participate in future inclusive projects, such as the subsequent national "Open Week" project for Belgian students with and without disabilities, which offered several courses in a variety of study programmes.

The director of the university itself, a member of the coordinating institution of Belgian universities, transferred the initiative to this body, and it has also analysed the possibility of replicating some similar initiative among Belgian universities.

Following the completion of the project by this university, other collaboration proposals are being evaluated in order to continue with this strategic line of work in favour of inclusion at university level in Belgium.

One of the programme's great outcomes was the *Methodological Guide for the Educational Transition to University of Students with Disabilities*, recently published. The Guide emerges from analysis of Europe's shortcomings in terms

of inclusive education and the challenges remaining. It is yet another instrument in the absence of institutional action plans to improve access for people with disabilities to quality inclusive education, an absence noted by the CRPD Committee (2016).

Implementation of the Guide is aimed at the entire educational community, with special emphasis on the following agents:

- Guidance counsellors and/or educational professionals: as the main promoters of educational change and appropriate mediators to achieve inclusive education in the educational community. As training agents, as experts in educational and community resources, as advisors to students and their families, as professionals in diagnostics and socio-educational intervention, as collaborators in the development of processes for innovation, research, and experimentation, and as agents of social change.
- Students in Compulsory Secondary Education and Pre-University Education: the guide is aimed at students with disabilities in secondary education, with the aim of achieving their educational advancement in an appropriate manner and in accordance with the precepts of the right to quality inclusive education. The reasons that lead us to consider them to be direct users of the Guide are multiple: high risk of early school leaving, poor employability and low qualifications, being in situation of vulnerability and lack of rights.
- Teachers: teachers in secondary and higher education must be involved in the achieving the objectives set out in the Guide. Becoming key and active users of the Guide as the main agents in the teaching-learning process. Teachers provide the leverage for students to acquire knowledge, competences, skills, and abilities. In short, they are responsible for the necessary motivation for transition, access, and progress to higher education.
- Families: another priority target for the Guide, families are the main agents of socialisation. They must know the rights of their children in terms of education and work together to achieve academic goals.





- Public bodies with responsibility for education: they are the main agents responsible for the right to inclusive quality education and guarantors of its being fulfilled. Although they are evidently indirect agents in this case, they are fundamental because of their responsibility for compliance with the legal obligations through their control of the mechanisms and direct tools to influence change in management teams, teaching staff, and educational institutions in general.

The Guide includes a detailed proposal for action called an “Educational Transition Protocol for Students with Disabilities”, which addresses different members of the educational community. The activities presented—including objectives, content, recipients, material and human resources—are grouped as follows:

- Activities for teachers and educational professionals in secondary and higher education: training workshops, interventions in university education, intervention plan with students and their families, intervention plan between educational stages, and evaluation processes.
- Activities for families: group meetings with families, individual meetings with families, visiting post-compulsory education (high school or university), and school for parents.
- Activities for students with and without disabilities: inclusive workshops for students with and without disabilities, and vocational and professional orientation workshops for students with and without disabilities.
- Activities for students with disabilities: workshops on personal development and coaching, mentors or collaborators at university (support for students with disabilities), welcome and reception to the new stage of education.
- Joint action with all agents: “Inclusive Campuses. Campus without limits”.

The Guide also provides a series of general recommendations regarding: inclusive pedagogies to be implemented in the classroom (active methodologies), tools to empower students with disabilities, dissemination, and collaborative networks.

## **5 | RECOMMENDATIONS**

After implementing the project and taking into account the shortcomings detected and the opportunities for change arising within the framework of the European Higher Education Area, we consider that the presence, participation, and progress of persons with disabilities in higher education must be guaranteed by a variety of strategies and actions, which we propose here:

- i. To carry out interventions to modify and improve the educational and social reality in the field of university education: to diagnose intervention priorities, taking into account previous analysis of the educational reality in terms of inclusion at universities; to construct truly inclusive educational environments; to configure a network of Inclusive European Universities that will serve as a meeting place for reflection and exchange of good practices; to use this to guarantee the right to inclusive education at this academic stage.
- ii. To adapt university statutes to the current regulations on quality inclusive education, using as reference the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the provisions established by its Committee with respect to Article 24 (Education).
- iii. To draw up a plan for intervention between educational stages: to achieve a concerted and coherent working process across all educational stages, so that there are no fault-lines in the transitions between different academic stages; to determine common objectives and concrete pedagogical actions that guarantee inclusive education at all educational stages; to draw up an intervention plan that embraces everything from the transfer of information and documentation between institutions to the actual reception of students at the new institution; to guarantee an adequate transition between stages that does not fail due to a lack of adaptation and support systems in the educational systems.
- iv. To carry out an intervention plan with the students and their families: to design a work plan aimed at secondary school students with disabilities and their families; to involve the entire educational community (secondary and

higher education) in these actions, as well as the social environment and its resources (movements and associations for people with disabilities and special needs, social and community services, etc.); to draw up a coherent and useful proposal for the target groups in order to deal successfully with transition to the next educational stage.

- v. To plan visits and a programme of positive action for the post-compulsory educational stages: upper secondary school and university.
- vi. To carry out activities with the families of students with and without disabilities: individual activities with each family and group activities with all the families of students with and without disabilities.
- vii. To carry out joint and coordinated action with all the agents in the educational system: students, teachers, families, counsellors and/or professionals, educational institutions, and public bodies with responsibility for education.
- viii. To implement inclusive workshops, training workshops, and vocational and professional orientation workshops for students with and without disabilities.
- ix. To promote the use of inclusive pedagogies at all educational levels, such as:
  - Project learning: students plan, implement, and evaluate projects that have real-world application beyond the classroom (Harwell, 1997).
  - Gamification: a type of learning that is gaining ground in training methodologies due to its playful character, which facilitates the internalisation of knowledge in a more entertaining way, generating a positive experience in students.
  - Multilevel teaching: an approach that assumes individualisation, flexibility, and inclusion of all learners (in the common classroom), without distinction or exclusion due to their level of skills (Schulz & Turnbull, 1984).

- Universal design for learning: a conception of educational accessibility understood as an essential condition to guarantee equal opportunities in the classroom and comprising three principles of action: i) offering different options to approach/present contents, the what of learning; ii) offering several options for action and expression/participation, the how of learning; iii) offering multiple means of engagement/involvement, the why of learning.
- x. To use tools to work on empowering students with disabilities, working holistically and across the programme, addressing fundamental aspects of personal development such as: self-concept, self-esteem, self-motivation, assertiveness, resilience, empowerment. Aspects that can be worked on with techniques such as neurolinguistic programming or coaching, personal workshops, the deployment of mentors or university collaborators, as well as with other sets of dynamics.
- xi. To integrate future inclusive projects in the university curriculum, in such a way that putting these into action involves mainstreaming of subject matter and materials.
- xii. To ensure regulatory support at institutional level, guaranteeing the right to education for students with disabilities, in an inclusive university environment, and with a structure that drives and promotes inclusion activities, such that they necessitate mainstreaming.
- xiii. To disseminate information on inclusive projects: to bear very much in mind, during activities, the need to put into effect a plan of communication. This communication plan should aim to circulate and publicise at three moments: before, during, and after. With regard to circulation of information before an activity, it would be advisable to organise a presentation event, with the presence of representatives from the field of education at all stages, representatives of the administrative bodies, students with and without disabilities and their families, as well as any groups from the social community/environment collaborating in the initiative by contributing resources. The local media should be invited to the presentation event to ensure the greatest possible publicity for the initiative. It is also important



to communicate and publicise the different activities being carried out. In this case, of particular importance is publicity through social networks/ social media, as tools for transmitting activities in real time. Finally, once the project has finished, and the data obtained have been analysed and evaluated, it is essential hold an event to announce and convey the most important conclusions and to express the results so as to show how far the planned objectives have been achieved, as well as the desirability of continuing with activities of this type to influence the educational and social reality of people with disabilities.

- xiv. To promote collaboration networks: spreading good practices can be achieved by developing a social collaboration network that promotes activities to realise the rights of persons with disabilities in the community environment. In the INnetCAMPUS Project mobility was fundamental for true inclusion not only of students with and without disabilities but also of students from different countries and social contexts. The immediate upshot is the formation of support networks between European universities, enabling them to share experiences and knowledge that go together with best and good practices in areas pertaining to the guarantee of inclusive quality education.

## 6 | INDICATORS FOR IMPROVING INCLUSION AS PART OF THE HUMAN RIGHT TO QUALITY EDUCATION

European universities are currently immersed in a process of reflection and profound change provoked by the need to adapt to the new challenges of the modern knowledge and innovation society. Universities are thus rethinking their roles and, together with teaching, research, and the transfer of learning, generating social value is also considered important, as it must be borne in mind that universities are great agents for social transformation and change. All are now competing to attain the best levels of excellence and competitiveness, but when we talk about excellence in universities, we tend only to think of international ranking and indicators that give the best positions in the tables. However, such rankings still lack some indicators that definitely reflect universities' excellence accurately but that are not usually taken into account. These indicators include social responsibility and a commitment to diversity and inclusion. We could, therefore, speak of excellence and quality insofar as these inclusive universities contribute to social cohesion, guaranteeing equal opportunities, and avoiding discrimination.

In evaluating universities' quality and excellence, it should therefore be essential to take their commitment to inclusion into account, in order to achieve inclusive universities for inclusive societies.

Among the indicators to be assessed, the following stand out:

- Number of students with disabilities.
- Number of teaching and research staff with disabilities.
- Resources allocated to the support service for students with disabilities.
- Accessibility—to buildings and facilities, and on digital and technological platforms.
- Support resources available.



- Guarantee of curricular adaptations.
- Specific grants for students with disabilities.
- Promotion of disabled students in international mobility programmes.
- Presence of disabled people on representative and governing bodies.
- Specific rules governing the right to equal opportunities for students with disabilities. (Statutes and/or regulations.)
- Inclusion of disability, accessibility, and design for all in study plans and undergraduate and postgraduate training plans.
- Inclusion of disability in R&D&I activities promoted by the university through chairs, projects, or research centres.
- Inclusion of the disability variable in accreditation systems for eligibility to access university teaching, in order to facilitate identification for reserving public employment vacancies.

## 7 | FINAL REFLECTIONS

Based on the surveys and the analysis of the overall impact of the project, the INnetCAMPUS Project can be assessed positively, having met the objectives that were initially set out and even having added a new dimension and possible future courses of action.

For the ONCE Foundation, the promoter of the Project, which has as its mission the social inclusion of people with disabilities, it has been very positive to contribute to involving many national and European institutions in the objective of encouraging and promoting higher education for people with disabilities. Above all, this is based on the conviction that having a quality education is essential to obtaining qualified jobs that allow for a life path that is full, with autonomy and freedom. Three partner universities, in Granada, Lisbon and Antwerp, have participated in the project, but in the end many institutions have been involved in this challenge, including national agencies for the internationalisation of education, the European Disability Forum, fifty European universities, networks of experts, administrative bodies, etc.

One of the most important conclusions for the objective of the project is that barriers of attitude, information, and environment continue to hinder access to higher education and to be a great burden for persons with disabilities.

One of the main barriers that we have observed in the entry of students to higher education, is at the level of secondary education, where students are most at risk of dropping out of school.

Another of the great barriers has to do with lack of knowledge on the part of teaching and administrative personnel at the universities about the needs of the students with disabilities in the classroom and their rights to things such as curricular adaptations where necessitated by disability. Disability is considered as a condition of the person and not as a social aspect, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and not valuing people's abilities. For example, in the case of Spain, the CRPD Committee (2017) in its *Inquiry concerning Spain carried out by the Committee under article 6 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention* has



observed “that measures adopted in post-secondary teaching institutions are one-off and not systematic, and that the post-secondary teaching system does not adequately accommodate persons with disabilities. A considerable number of persons with disabilities therefore decide to continue their post-compulsory education through distance learning in order to avoid the accessibility and inclusion problems encountered in physical universities. Figures from the National University of Distance Education, which combines online learning with classroom learning, show that 40% of the university’s students have a disability.”

For European universities in general, disability continues to be largely unknown and inclusion does not seem to be a priority in university policies, despite being established as a priority in the different regulatory and strategic frameworks. The main source generating discrimination is fear, fear of the unknown. Even so, it is necessary to assess some important advances in recent years.

In view of the references given in the course of this report, we believe that in the field of quality inclusive education, what most helps to protect, promote, and guarantee access to quality inclusive higher education as a human right is precisely education. In any case, the European Union as an organisation that has ratified the CRPD, and the member states that have also done so, have obligations (through Article 4 of the CRPD) at three levels, to “respect, protect, and fulfil”, which includes the corollary obligations of facilitating, promoting, and providing.<sup>14</sup>

Vandenhole (2005) argues that this threefold typology of obligations for the State—which is generally and primarily used to identify obligations relating only to economic, social, and cultural rights—can usefully be applied in relation to all human rights, including equality and non-discrimination. The typology, Vandenhole explains, can be considered a further refinement of the common distinction between negative and positive obligations and between direct and indirect effects. Thus, he points out that the obligation to “respect” requires abstention from interference, i.e. not taking any discriminatory action. In order

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<sup>14</sup> See the Committee on ESCR (2005). Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment N. 16 on Article 3: the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), E/C.12/2005/4, 11 August 2005.

to respect the right to non-discrimination, States have an obligation not to adopt any discriminatory legislation or practice, to modify or repeal any existing legislation, and to end discriminatory practices and measures. The obligation to “protect” imposes an obligation on the State to prevent third parties from discriminating. The obligation to “fulfil” requires the State to adopt legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial, promotional and other measures towards the full realisation of the right to equality. The sub-obligation to “facilitate” requires the State to take positive measures to help individuals enjoy their right to equality. Such measures may consist of legislative measures, action plans, strategies, and programmes. Another important way to facilitate equality, according to Vandenhole, is to make effective remedies available in the event of violations. The obligation to “promote” obliges the State to take measures to ensure adequate education, information campaigns, and awareness-raising on equality and non-discrimination. The obligation to “provide” comes into play when individuals or social groups are unable, for reasons beyond their control, to see the right to equality realised through the means at their disposal. Thus, the State may come to provide *de facto* equality through affirmative action (Vandenhole, 2005).

In this regard, it is necessary to truly implement the human rights model which the CRPD Committee has been insisting on,<sup>15</sup> of inclusive, quality, post-compulsory education so that university students are seen as subjects of rights and not mere social beneficiaries.

According to the INnetCAMPUS Project, we conclude that these discriminatory practices have not been countered by consistent public policies in each of the three States party to the CRPD.<sup>16</sup> One of the common factors in the three university spaces that have participated in the Project is that each university, in an isolated manner, has made advances towards quality inclusive education. That is to say, the improvements implemented have been based on the knowledge acquired through implementing the INnetCAMPUS Project. This is positive in terms of

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15 See, for example, General comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education, CRPD/C/GC/4.

16 This is also commented on by the CRPD Committee in the report on the Inquiry concerning Spain carried out by the Committee under article 6 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, CRPD/C/20/3, 2017.



evaluating our Project, but it is worrying that the mainstreaming of disability is still exceptional in university education.

The effort made by the participating universities partners in the Project and the influence they have had on their university community is more than welcome.<sup>17</sup> However, for quality inclusive education in universities to become a reality, it is not enough to have isolated projects, but a long-term policy is required and one that comes from State and the Ministries that provide budget allocations for education in order to guarantee the human right to quality inclusive education.

We believe that the positive evaluation of this project has managed to sensitise the participating university community into becoming aware of persons with disabilities as subjects of rights and as beneficiaries of the right to education in the university environment, thus promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal footing with others. In this regard, the provisions of the CRPD on awareness-raising (Article 8) are taken into account. The faculties and groups that joined as partners in the INnetCAMPUS Project have fought against harmful stereotypes in their own university community by implementing this Project and, above all, have promoted awareness of the capabilities of persons with disabilities and of what they can contribute to society. In addition, the descriptions made by each partner group involved in the Project show that receptive and positive attitudes have been fostered in the university community, through the participation of volunteer students without disabilities from the same university. In short, an attitude of respect for the rights of people with disabilities as university students has been fostered.

On the other hand, putting the INnetCAMPUS Project into effect has served as a stimulus and impulse for other national actions and projects aimed at improving educational inclusion, where, for example, aid programmes have been intensified to promote the international mobility of students with disabilities.

The INnetCAMPUS Project has also been very useful as an inspiring experience to implement a policy of equality in the university environment, mainstreaming disability as a social situation of potential university students. In this regard

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17 See the experiences of each of the partner organisations above.



and based on the experience we have had in these three years, it seems worth recommending to universities that they open channels of ready communication and collaboration with each other, exchanging experiences and good practices in order to promote actions to implement the rights of people with disabilities in the community environment. In this network, we believe it is also important to find a channel for dialogue with secondary schools, where we observe the largest number of students with disabilities leaving the educational system because of environmental and attitudinal barriers.

The sustainability of the project is guaranteed with other future actions based on what has been learned and moved forwards by its development and implementation.

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