

## Policy Brief

### European Union Policy Interventions for Autism in Education.

**Objective:** To assess the effectiveness of European Union interventions for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Education.

**Design:** Overview of policy mapping and systematic reviews (SRs) of the EDUCAUS project looking at the European Union level of policy making.

<https://www.educaus.eu/country-profiles/european-union.html>

**Participants:** School age children aged with ASD across 28 EU member states.

**Search methods:** Between 2017 and 2021, we searched for non-policy documents related to inclusion in educational services at the EU level. The aim of EDUCAUS was to systematically compare policy across all EU Member States also analysing the EU wide education policy strategy for autism. Even though each policy analysis focused on a specific theme, including parental involvement, teacher education, and teacher responsibilities; we included in this policy brief the general overview at the EU level with the purpose to engage at the EU macro level stakeholders. We obtained guidance from Autism Europe for the purpose of this work.

**Key documents:** Our EU policy mapping involved a systematic search of the European Convention on Human Rights, Charter for Persons with Autism, Treaty of Amsterdam, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, Written Declaration on Autism, and the General Data Protection Regulation.

**Synthesis process:** This work aims to synthesize the policy data of EDUCAUS and contribute to modeling pathways that are associated with the development of Inclusive Education (IE) at the EU level from the perspective of autistic children and identifying policy knot points and benchmarks that were used to track the development of IE at this level.

Subsequently, key drivers that can aid the development of a policy of inclusion for children with autism at the EU level in different contexts were pinpointed as well. This is necessary to direct future policy and research endeavors for education policy pertaining education for autistic children. We wanted to capture the complexity of the EU policy process, but also to show different possible pathways and interpretations, and discuss their respective consequences for public policy practice.

We used a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), which is a suitable option to map these possible pathways and interpret their meanings in light of existing EU wide literature for several reasons.

- IE is defined as an outcome that is contingent on the combinations of different factors, which is a requirement for the usage of QCA.
- QCA formalizes and systematizes case comparison. This addresses the common concern of scientificity (i.e. based on principles of science) surrounding case studies that the case study material is compared in a loose and unformalized way.

QCA refers to a case-based methodology in which

(1) conditions and outcomes are previously identified,

(2) an examination on which of these conditions are considered necessary and/or sufficient for an outcome to occur is performed, and

(3) a systematic comparison is made to determine which combinations of conditions are associated with an outcome.

**Interventions:** Inclusive education based interventions were compared at the EU wide level

**Data collection and analysis:** This work has been published in our series of comparison papers. All studies were rated using the methodological quality of the included studies using the Quality Assessment Tool for Quantitative Studies which is a tool developed in Canada by the EPHPP with the financial support of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC).

We also include our main synthesis which is a fuzzy set analyses of the classroom interventions using the aforementioned QCA.

We reported the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) certainty of the evidence (CoE) according to the analysis conducted by the authors of the included studies.

The GRADE method (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation) aims to provide a tool for rating the quality of evidence (particularly for effectiveness) and grading the strength of recommendations.

**Main outcome measures:** A multidisciplinary group of experts agreed on analysing nine critical outcomes evolving around educational inclusion of ASD at the EU level.

**Public and patient involvement statement:** Organisations of parents of children with ASD participated in external revision of the final version of the report.

**Results:** We identified 46129 articles and policy documents that were within our scope. After excluding less reliable publications, we included, 22 for our final brief.

Each review found IE to be present in national policies of most Member States, with EU wide policy manifesting mostly through a human rights framework of equal rights. EU policy should aim at developing strategies of ending segregation-based frameworks by focusing on two legal constructs. The right to equality and the right to education which are both enacted in the European constitution. It therefore remains unclear what factors are truly influential and effective in developing educational inclusion at the EU level and how the homologation of the inclusion process should develop across Europe.

Our analysis involved investigating factors that benefit the development of inclusion from the viewpoint of human rights.

Based on available data and on our GRADE outcomes, four policy recommendations were assessed against the available evidence and their possible causal pathways as they had been identified as sufficient for the development of a IE framework at the EU level.

The following policy recommendations should be therefore considered.

1. Ending segregation of educational establishments by enacting the right to education and the universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity This was found to have a high GRADE score and the highest coverage of the possible complex solutions.
2. The enactment of framework for access to educational services using the citizens rights framework, with a moderate GRADE score.
3. Enactment of the autism chart across sectors with IE and its linkage to labour policy in adulthood as crucial for positives outcomes, was found to have high consistency with the outcome, though had little coverage and had a moderate GRADE score
4. Support for civil society organisations and co-creation of the policy process at the EU level, with a moderate GRADE score
5. Engagement with IE country level implementation policies, with a moderate GRADE score

**Conclusions:** Synthesised evidence regarding IE education for children with ASD is scarce. Our EU level review found IE to be present in EU policy, though important gaps remain and should be developed.

