

# Targeting Teacher Education and Professional Development for Inclusion

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## Abstract

Teachers around the world are likely to encounter students with varied backgrounds and experiences, strengths and weaknesses in their classrooms. The paper reviews the literature and available data on how teachers can be agents of inclusion in education. It focuses particularly on how teacher education and professional development systems can assist in this task. It then describes the challenges present in the existing design of systems and offers recommendations for ways forward. The article is based on the research conducted for the 2020 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report (UNESCO, 2020). Hence, it takes a broad view of inclusion in education, not limited to any groups, but rather focused on learning for all learners. The paper emphasises the central role teachers can play in accommodating students of all abilities and backgrounds. It also highlights the importance of relevant internationally comparable data on teacher training, as part of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and particularly its target 4.c. Finally, the paper discusses the challenges and ways forward in supporting and strengthening teachers' role in building inclusion in education.

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## **Targeting Teacher Education and Professional Development for Inclusion**

The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) emphasises the need for quality learning for all learners. Thus, inclusion is firmly in the centre of the 2030 agenda. Inclusive learning, though, cannot happen without the commitment of trained and qualified teachers. Inclusion-centred teacher training and professional development systems are needed to empower teachers around the world. Target 4.c, which considers teachers, falls within the implementation targets. But as the 2020 Global Education Monitor (GEM) Report emphasises teachers' 'individual and collective role as active agents of educational development' is crucial in reaching the goal of learning for all (UNESCO, 2020).

As education systems accommodate more diverse student populations, classrooms are changing. Teachers around the world are increasingly likely to encounter students with varied backgrounds and experiences, strengths and weaknesses (UNESCO, 2020). The current paper reviews the literature and available data on how teachers can be agents of inclusion and how teacher education and professional development systems can assist in this task. It also describes the challenges present in the existing design of systems and offers recommendations for ways forward. The 2020 GEM Report on inclusion and education covers each of these factors in turn, identifying factors contributing to full inclusion, or exclusion, of learners, and helping balance the books for all. The central role of teachers for accommodating students of all abilities and backgrounds is clear—and had also emerged in the context of the 2019 GEM report, *Building Bridges, not Walls* (UNESCO, 2019), which focused on migration and displacement.

The paper is based on the research conducted for the 2020 GEM Report (UNESCO, 2020). In doing so, it takes a broad view of inclusion in education, not limited to any groups, but rather focused on learning for all learners.

### **What do we know about the state of Teacher Education around the world?**

To support inclusive teaching and learning, teachers need to recognize the experiences and abilities of every student and be open to diversity. While many teacher education and professional learning opportunities are designed accordingly, others might still be entrenched in the views of exclusionary practices. In addition, many teachers might be missing out on any kind of professional training. Target 4.c recognises the importance of trained and qualified teachers. Similarly, inclusive systems can only be built on trained and qualified professionals with the relevant skills, knowledge and a level of autonomy to drive the learning in the classroom.

In considering target 4c and its importance for inclusive systems, it is worth noting that trained and qualified teachers are not necessarily the same. Qualified refers to the minimum academic qualifications necessary to teach at a specific level of education in a given country, usually related to the subject(s) teachers teach. Trained refers to a teacher who has completed at least the minimum organized teacher-training requirements (pre-

service or in-service) to teach a specific level of education according to the relevant national policy or law (UIS, 2018). Hence, these terms are complementary and a teacher can be qualified, trained, both or neither. However, in practice, the distinction may not be straightforward and dependant on the context, with different countries using different terminologies. In reporting to UIS, less than one-quarter of countries submit distinct values for qualified and trained teachers (UNESCO, 2020).

Unfortunately, data on the extent to which teachers receive the necessary education and qualifications is scarce around the world. For instance, as the 2020 GEM Report shows, only about 58% of sub-Saharan African countries have reported data on primary and 25% on upper secondary education since 2016. Of the six most populous countries, only the United Republic of Tanzania has regularly reported the number of teachers in primary education. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa last reported in 2015, and no data in the UIS database is available for Ethiopia, Kenya—other than UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) estimates - and Nigeria (UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, cross-country comparability of the data suffers from a lack of clarity around the international standard of teacher training. UIS aims to tackle this challenge with a new international standard classification for teachers, which would code programmes by education level at which teachers work, the minimum required level of education to participate and the duration of programmes in years (UNESCO, 2020).

The available data shows that in many countries, particularly in low-income contexts, large proportions of teachers are not trained. For instance, according to the most recent UIS data, in sub-Saharan Africa, only 49% of pre-primary, 64% of primary, 58% of lower secondary and 43% of upper secondary school teachers received minimum training according to national standards. Female teachers are as likely to be trained as male colleagues, overall, but some differences exist within education levels and regions (**Table 1**).

As Table 1 indicates, large differences in terms of teacher preparation also exist between education levels within countries. In particular, pre-primary school teachers are less likely to be trained. For instance, the Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which collected data in nine countries on early childhood care and education (ECCE) staff characteristics, showed that not all were trained to work with children, even in high-income countries. For example, in Iceland, only 64% of ECEC teachers went through training (OECD, 2019).

As a result, with little or no training, teachers might be left with insufficient and/or inadequate support for inclusion. The 2018 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) has shown that the percentage of teachers teaching in classes with more than 10% of students whose first language is different from the language of instruction ranged from 2% in Japan and Hungary to 50% in the United Arab Emirates, 58% in Singapore and 62% in South Africa. But not many teachers are trained to deal with such diversity. In OECD countries, on average, a little more than one-third of teachers (35%) reported that their formal teacher education or training covered teaching in multicultural

**Table 1 Percentage of trained teachers, by education level, 2018**

	Pre-primary			Primary			Lower secondary			Upper secondary		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
World	..	..	..	85	87	81	84	85	82	..	..	..
Sub-Saharan Africa	49	47	56	64	63	65	58	59	58	43	47	41
Northern Africa and Western Asia	82	82	84	86	85	87	84	85	83	86	87	85
Central and Southern Asia	..	..	..	73	73	72	78	78	77	81	89	75
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Latin America and the Caribbean	76	76	66	90	90	87	83	82	83	82	83	81
Oceania	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Europe and Northern America	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Low income	44	45	36	72	74	70	..	..	..	..	..	..
Lower middle income	..	..	..	76	79	73	78	80	76	79	84	74
Upper middle income	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
High income	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

Source: UIS database.

and multilingual settings. This varies from over 70% of more teachers receiving such training in the United States, Singapore and New Zealand, for example, to less than 25% receiving such training in France, Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Even when they are trained, only just over one-fourth felt well or very well prepared to teach in such settings. Within the same survey, 62% reported receiving training to teach in mixed-ability settings (OECD, 2019).

A review of initial and continuing teacher education for diversity content across 49 countries (April et al., 2019) found that just over 30% of the programmes were government-supervised, offered or funded. The other programmes were provided by universities, teachers' unions, and non-government and private organizations. About 63% of the government programmes, but hardly any of the others, were mandatory. Moreover, programmes emphasized general knowledge over practical pedagogy. Only one out of five programmes prepared teachers to anticipate and resolve intercultural conflicts or be familiar with psychological treatment and referral options for students in need, which our recent paper showed was so urgently needed by many.

At the same time, there is a positive trend whereby more and more countries are

changing their teacher education programmes to be more targeted towards inclusion. A review for the 2020 GEM Report (UNESCO, 2020) through the Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER) on inclusion and education found that out of 168 countries analysed, 61% provide for teacher training on inclusion, either general or targeting a group at a disadvantage. Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by Europe and Northern America, are the regions where this happens most. Moreover, among the countries with education sector plans, 49 plan to provide teacher training on inclusion, either general or directed at a target group. Yet, in many countries, inclusion and thereby the training for inclusion was understood through a narrower lens. The review found most efforts focused on learners with disabilities, though there were some efforts towards a whole-school approach and system transformation to build inclusive school communities and cultures (Lehtomäki et al., 2020). Despite the progress made by many countries in terms of teacher education, there often has been little or no attention to how children learn or how disability may affect learning (IDA, 2020). Even among the inclusion-oriented pre-service teacher education programmes, many tend to focus on content knowledge about how to address challenges various types of learners might encounter, rather than capitalise on the strengths they bring to the system. The risk of this approach is that these modules end up emphasizing differences between learners and reinforcing the very divisions that create barriers to inclusion (Florian, 2019).

### **The Need for Professional Development Programmes for Inclusion**

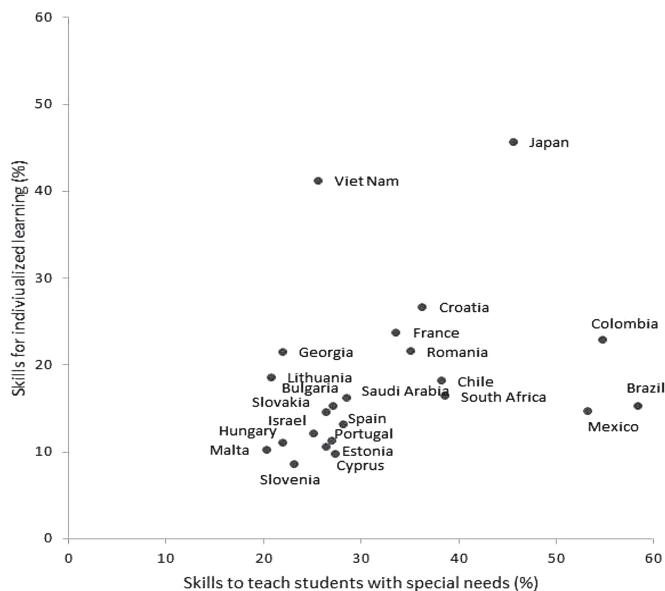
Teacher Professional Development for inclusion, in addition to the pre-service programmes, is widely recognised as a high priority for many, if not most, countries. For instance, the International Disability Alliance (IDA) 2020 Flagship Report calls for significant investments, including human, social and financial, to be made in recruiting and training qualified teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who can provide inclusive and quality learning for all learners (IDA, 2020).

Worldwide many teachers express the need for pre-service training in inclusion. For example, about 25% of teachers from over 40 systems who participated in the 2018 TALIS reported a high need for professional development on teaching students with special needs, and in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, the share was over 50%. About 15% reported a high need for personalized learning training, rising to over 40% Viet Nam (**Figure 1**). Challenges exist even in high-income countries. In France, more than one in three teachers reported to be in a high need for professional development on teaching students with special needs; the share rises to about one in two in Japan (46%). In the Netherlands, one in five teachers with at least two decades of experience reported considerable difficulty dealing with students with post-traumatic stress disorder, and 89% said they had encountered at least one such student (Alisic et al., 2012).

Some countries offer training on disability as part of a larger teacher development and support system. In Singapore, all teachers in mainstream schools receive training to develop

### Figure 1: Teachers need more opportunities for professional development on inclusion

Percentage of teachers reporting a high need for training in four inclusion-related areas, selected middle- and high-income countries, 2018



*Note:* Education systems selected are those in which teachers reported a higher than average need for professional development on teaching students with special needs, i.e., students in whom a special learning need has been formally identified because of mental, physical or emotional disadvantage.

Source: Based on data extracted from *OECD (2019) and analysis by 2020 GEM Report (2020)*

a basic understanding and awareness of disability. In addition, some teachers in every school undergo more extensive training to develop deeper knowledge and skills to support students with disabilities. Specially trained Allied Educators in primary schools work closely with teachers to identify and provide additional learning and behavioural support to students with mild disabilities (OHCHR, 2016). In Canada's New Brunswick province, a comprehensive inclusive education policy introduced training opportunities for teachers to support learners with autism spectrum disorders (New Brunswick Government, 2019).

Most often, in-service teacher education for inclusion tends to focus on specific skills to address the needs of learners with disabilities and other target groups. Teachers need the knowledge to identify special needs and refer students to complementary services. Fiji's 2016 Policy on Special and Inclusive Education recognized the need to train teachers in screening and referring disabilities (Fiji Ministry of Education, 2016). In Gujarat state, India, mental health and education services cooperated to create a training programme for early identification of students with dyslexia and other special needs. The programme started in 2019, training 80 educators to pick up early signs of disorders and connect affected students to relevant services (Shastri, 2019).

In high-income countries, the increasing number of incoming refugees has prompted the development of two approaches that are highly consistent with inclusive teaching. The culturally responsive teaching approach to teacher education focuses on skills and attitudes teachers need to teach diverse student populations (Villegas and Lucas, 2007). In the second approach, geared towards content and language integrated learning, teacher development courses support teachers in helping students who may not speak the language of instruction, enabling diverse learner groups to use languages as both a communication and learning tool (Coyle et al., 2010). Language is also central to the training of teachers in many countries in Latin America. For instance, in Paraguay, the Plurilingual Educational Plan for Indigenous Peoples 2013-2018 foresaw the Design and implementation of teacher training with a right, intercultural and multilingual approach for each of the Indigenous Peoples. The 2007 Law No. 3231, also called "Indigenous Education Law," emphasised teacher training and called for the creation of training, specialization and training centres for indigenous teachers (Paraguay Government, 2007). In Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia, teacher training tends to focus on mother tongue-based multilingual education.

Gender is a relatively common inclusion-related topic in in-service training. Teacher training for gender-sensitive STEM education is of particular high-need in most countries, given the prevailing low number of female engagement in STEM topics, relative to males (UNESCO, 2016). In Nepal, the National Centre for Educational Development incorporated a gender awareness module in its teacher professional development programme (OHCHR, 2017). Uganda's 2018 National Teacher Policy included development and a pilot of guidelines to equip teachers with basic knowledge about gender concepts and skills for gender-responsive pedagogy in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. (UNESCO, 2019).

It is also important for teachers to understand the terms used within LGBTQ communities to break the stigmas, prejudice and discrimination. Moreover, a better knowledge helps them to understand gender identities. A survey of 98 teachers in grades 6 to 12 in four states in the United States showed that: high level of teachers training specifically on LGBT youth, the presence of an active gay straight alliance (GSA) and a clear anti-bullying policy in the school, were all related to a higher frequency of supportive behaviours to LGBT students (Swanson and Gettinger, 2016). However, in most countries, teacher education related to inclusion and safety of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students is a neglected and contentious area. A survey in Albania revealed that less than half of teachers reported having enough information on LGBTI rights, and two-thirds did not react when LGBTI adolescents were bullied (Pink Ambada, 2018). Backlash in the media halted a series of workshops in Tirana schools aimed at eliminating discrimination based on sexual orientation in a pilot project of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (ILGA Europe, 2019). A survey carried out by a teacher union and released by the Scottish government in 2018, revealed 70% of 300 and more teachers interviewed said they had received no training in LGBT+ issues in the past five years

(Seith, 2019). Scotland's LGBTI Inclusive Education Working Group, established by the government, recommended pre-service and in-service training to raise awareness among teachers and ensure that they maintained 'their awareness of current LGBTI issues for learners, sustaining their confidence to teach' (Scottish Government, 2018).

### What kind of preparation do teachers need to support inclusive teaching?

As the previous section showed, there is a need for countries to step up the process of teacher education and embed it more in a broad inclusion framework. In doing so, a number of different models could serve as the basis of such redesign and adaptation. The starting point for the process can be an agreement on the core areas of competency that can guide teacher education and professional development for inclusion.

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (European Agency) identified four core values and associated competence areas (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2012). Instilling these values –supporting all learners, working with others, valuing learner diversity and engaging in professional development – should lead to teachers who have high expectations for all learners (**Table 2**). The framework's implications for teacher attitudes, methods and professionalism should be addressed head-on and not as afterthoughts in teacher education.

The framework proposed by the European Agency is consistent with many other organisations' advocacy work. For instance, the IDA calls for education system reform

**Table 2 Core values and competence areas of inclusive teaching**

Core values	Competence areas
Support all learners	Promote academic, practical, social and emotional learning for all Engage effective teaching approaches in heterogeneous classes based on an understanding of a variety of learning processes and how to support them
Work with others	Work with parents and families to engage them effectively in learning Work with other education professionals, including collaboration with other teachers
Value learner diversity	Understand inclusive education (e.g., it is based on a belief in equality, human rights and democracy for all) Respect, value and view learner diversity as an asset
Engage in professional development	Be reflective practitioners (i.e., systematically evaluate one's own performance) View initial teacher education as the foundation for ongoing professional learning

*Source:* Based on European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2012).



that would empower teachers with the “knowledge, skills and competencies to respect disability as part of human diversity” and support for teaching and learning methods that are based on students’ strengths rather than remediation. It also highlights the need for curriculum reforms that would support flexible, individual pathways “leading to the competencies needed in the 21st century” (IDA, 2020, p.30).

Inclusive approaches to teaching also require teachers to take responsibility for all learners by making a range of options available to everybody in the classroom rather than offering a set of differentiated options only to some (Florian and Spratt, 2013). For instance, adapted, learner-centred approaches that establish measurable academic goals, address strengths and challenges related to learning, and mitigate social and behavioural challenges may be particularly suitable for students with disabilities (Hayes et al., 2018). To meet the standard of inclusion, these approaches should be applied in ways that do not exclude some learners from opportunities available to others.

### **Teaching at the Right Level and Escuela Nueva as Examples of Programmes Based on Inclusion Principles**

Inclusive approaches to teaching are based on the recognition that many students are not actively participating in the learning process. Such approaches reject methods that label and segregate students on the basis of characteristics, strengths or weaknesses. An example that has received a lot of attention is the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) programme in India, which was developed in 2002 by Pratham in response to learners being left behind (Pratham, 2020). The approach has since been expanded to rural areas and outside India. It departs from more traditional approaches by emphasizing clearly articulated learning goals instead of covering an entire textbook. It focuses on active teaching through simple daily activities that involve children working in groups. The instructional process starts with a basic assessment of children’s learning levels and forming groups for instruction by level rather than grade. Other assessments track progress and make corrections to the course. As children progress, they move quickly into more advanced groups. Teaching–learning activities are based on the belief that children learn best through a combination of activities carried out in big groups, small groups and individually, some shared by all groups and others tailored to the group level. (Pratham, 2020).

By 2017, the model was in use in 4,210 schools across India, reaching over 200,000 children (Banerjee et al., 2017). As of 2019, variations of the TaRL approach are being applied in 12 countries in Africa and 3 in Asia. For instance, the Catch Up programme, piloted in 80 schools in Zambia, increased the share of students able to complete a two-digit subtraction from 32% to 50% and the share of those able to read a simple paragraph or story from 34% to 52% (Teaching at the Right Level, 2019b). In Ghana, the STARS programme, run in partnership with the Ministry of Education and other public authorities, focuses on equipping teachers of grades 4 to 6 to understand the reasons behind low achievement and to offer appropriate responses (Teaching at the Right Level, 2019a).

TaRL shares features with other inclusion-oriented teaching approaches. Escuela Nueva, which began in Colombia in 1975, has expanded to 14 other countries, including the Philippines and Viet Nam (Le, 2018). It promotes active and participatory learning, with teachers serving as facilitators. It fosters skills development in multigrade instruction and encourages collaborative teacher relationships and parental and community engagement (Colbert and Arboleda, 2016). Save the Children's Literacy Boost programme has been implemented in more than 30 countries (Save the Children, 2019). It aims to improve children's reading skills by training teachers to keep students engaged. In Ethiopia, girls participating in the programme were 43% more likely to stay in school than their peers in schools without it (Dowd et al., 2013).

### **Challenges and ways forward in supporting teachers' role in building inclusion in education**

Even with the best policies and training programmes in place, there might be limits to how much teachers act for inclusion if they do not possess positive attitudes towards learning for all students and supporting diversity in their classrooms. Importantly, biased or prejudicial attitudes can affect student achievement, even when they are not explicit. For instance, a study in Italy found that girls assigned to teachers with implicit gender bias underperformed in mathematics and chose less demanding schools, following teachers' recommendations (Carlana, 2019). A study based on a subsample of 19 classes with 354 first-grade students in Germany found that teachers' early expectations predicted student learning in the first year of school. The effects of teachers' attitudes were most pronounced in reading. The hypothesis made is that teachers treat students differently based on preconceived ideas (Gentrup et al., 2020).

Teachers' biases and attitudes can also affect the school climate. In Latin America, a report published by sought to identify the challenges faced in seven countries in the region in creating safer and more inclusive schools for LGBTQ students. A study by GLSEN and Todo Mejora in Latin America found that the majority of LGBTQ students reported hearing homophobic remarks from teachers or other school staff (Kosciw and Zongrone, 2019).

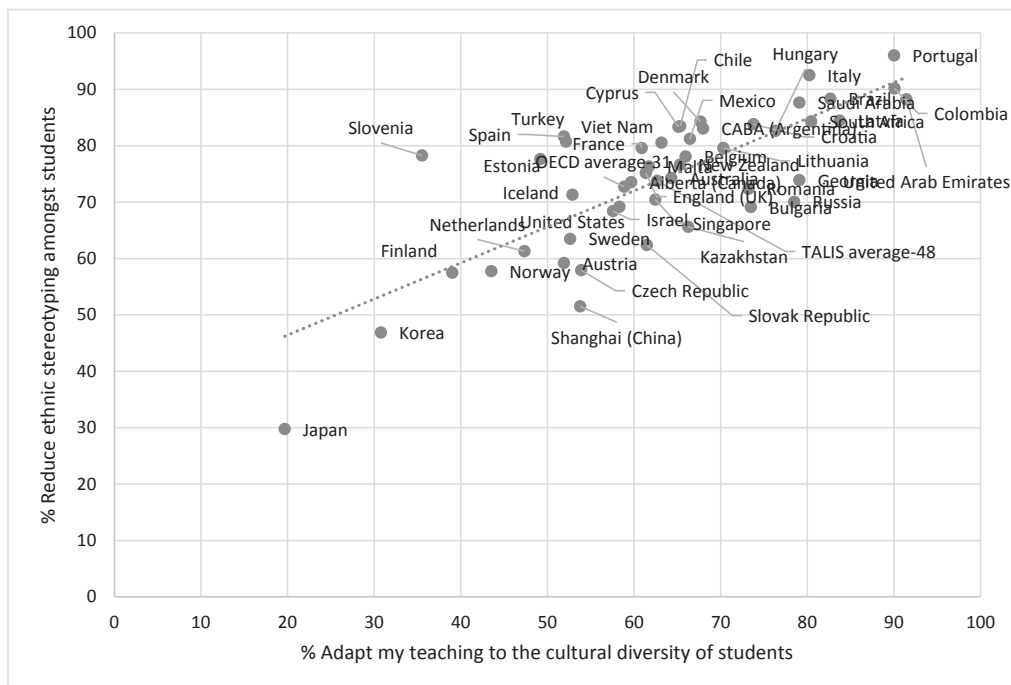
Many studies found that teachers had positive attitudes towards inclusion but also had reservations, either because they were not empowered to overcome certain barriers or because they believed the education system and learning environment were not supportive. A survey found that teachers in Finland questioned the feasibility of inclusion and its merit for all students without fundamental shifts in the system and investment levels. Some respondents saw inclusion policies as a cover for cost-cutting (Honkasilta et al., 2019). In Japan, teachers expressed generally positive attitudes towards inclusion but had concerns about implementation, partly due to lack of belief in their ability to carry out activities that would achieve inclusion (Yada and Savolainen, 2017).

More generally, responses to diversity in schools vary largely according to the type of diversity issues. However, such responses depend crucially on the attitudes of teachers

and other education staff to equity and diversity (OECD, 2019). In this respect, the TALIS data suggest that 98 and 97% of principals in OECD countries report that “many” or “almost all teachers” consider it is important to treat, respectively, male and female students and students from all socio-economic backgrounds equally. Yet differences emerge in the extent teachers consider important other issues such as encourage students from different socio-economic backgrounds to work together and be responsive to differences in students’ cultural backgrounds. In this respect, a close relation emerges between the extent to which teachers adapt their teaching to the students’ cultural diversity and reduce ethnic stereotyping among them. South Korea and Japan were among the countries with the lowest percentage of teachers adapting their teaching to students’ cultural diversity and reducing ethnic stereotyping among the latter. One reason may be both countries’ relative ethnic homogeneity and recent exposure to immigration. By contrast, almost all teachers in Colombia, Portugal and the United Arab Emirates adapted their teaching in diverse classrooms (see **Figure 2**).

**Figure 2: Not all teachers adapt their teaching to the cultural diversity of their classrooms**

*Percentage of teachers who adapt their teaching to the cultural diversity of students ‘quite a bit’ or ‘a lot,’ among selected middle- and high-income countries, 2018*



*Note:* Responses refer to a sample of teachers reporting that they have taught a culturally diverse classroom.

*Source:* OECD (2019).

While inclusive teacher education may not be a guarantee for a positive attitude, it can have a positive impact on attitudes about inclusion. A study comparing Canadian and German pre-service vocational teacher education found Canadian teachers more likely to have positive attitudes regarding inclusion and their capacity to create inclusive classrooms, partly because of the more prominent role inclusion played in training (Miesera and Gebhardt, 2018). In the Seychelles, teachers who had inclusive education training reported higher endorsement of the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and more positive beliefs about the practice (Main et al., 2016).

The context of teachers' work is also an important factor to consider, as teachers may not be immune to social biases and stereotypes. A study comparing the general and teacher populations in the United States between 1985 and 2014 found that educators had less negative racial attitudes. However, much of these differences could be explained by the educational attainment of the latter, who were more likely to have a bachelor's degree than the general population. In 2014, 4% of pre-primary, primary and secondary school teachers believed inequality was mainly due to African Americans having less innate ability to learn, and 31% believed it was mainly due to African Americans lacking motivation or willpower to pull themselves out of poverty (Quinn, 2017). In Mexico, prejudice influenced teacher attitudes towards the inclusion of Mayan children (Osorio Vázquez, 2017). Roma parents in Europe cited discriminatory teacher behaviour, such as bullying and ostracization, as a key safety consideration for their children (Albert et al., 2015; O'Nions, 2010).

### ***The Importance of Enabling Working Conditions to Ensure Inclusive Teaching and Learning Environments and an Inclusive Teaching Workforce***

Beyond the training programmes, which provide teachers with inclusion-relevant knowledge and skills, the appropriate working conditions can also make a difference between inclusion classrooms as an idea and a reality (Grindal et al., 2016). High pupil/teacher ratios, lack of education support, weak professional teacher networks and lack of autonomy over content can prevent teachers from making classrooms inclusive (UNESCO, 2020).

In Cambodia, despite teachers' strong support for child-centred pedagogy, classroom practices relied on more traditional, passive methods. Teachers questioned the feasibility of applying child-centred pedagogy in the context of overcrowded classrooms, scarce teaching resources and overambitious curricula (Song, 2015). In India's Tamil Nadu state, teachers who did engage in child-centred, activity-based learning methods reported difficulty in adhering to the principles of tailored, one-to-one or small group teaching methods in large and under-resourced classrooms (Singal et al., 2018). In South Africa, while teachers favoured inclusion, they perceived the education system to be too under-resourced to enable implementation. Policy ideals were disconnected from the challenging reality of schools, undermining inclusive teaching and learning (Engelbrecht et al., 2016).

Inclusion can also suffer as a result of pressure on teachers to comply with accountability mechanisms, which can lead to tension between external policy and professional autonomy (Ben-Peretz and Flores, 2018). This is especially true if policy calls for a standardized approach, which may conflict with meeting the diverse needs of learners (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2012). Teaching to the standardized content requirements of a learning assessment can make it more difficult for teachers to adapt their work, for instance, to reflect students' cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, enabling environments are important for ensuring that the teaching workforce is more inclusive. Many education systems struggle to achieve diversity in terms of ethnic, gender or disability aspects reflect in their teaching cadre. Lack of diversity is fuelled by barriers at each step, from entering initial teacher education programmes to teachers' retention in the profession (European Commission, 2017). Moreover, structural inequality plays an important role in preventing a more diverse teaching force. For instance, lower proportions of students with disabilities pursue tertiary education (UNESCO, 2020). As a result, the inclusion in the teaching force cannot be possible without addressing the education system and the barriers to the teaching profession in a holistic manner.

Research from different regions points out the benefits of more inclusive teaching personnel. For instance, in India's Jharkhand state, increasing representation of various ethnic groups among teachers was accompanied by the increased enrolment of students from different ethnic groups (Borker, 2017). In the United States, teacher diversity has had a positive effect on student performance and improved student perception of teachers, particularly among students with minority backgrounds (Cherng and Halpin, 2016; Egalite et al., 2015). IDA has called for the inclusion of teachers with disabilities as a part of a win-win-win strategy for inclusive education. Such teachers can serve as role models to children and youth with and without disabilities. Moreover, they are resources to the inclusion process, acting as support experts for children and youth with disabilities (IDA, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

Target 4.c recognises the importance of trained and qualified teachers without whom inclusive systems cannot exist. While many countries have made progress in preparing teachers to support all students, collaborate with others, value diversity and engage professionally, others struggle to change attitudes, equip teachers with the skills needed to support all learners, and provide supportive working environments. Teachers may not receive sufficient or appropriate pre-service education or in-service professional development. Lack of training can compromise their ability to promote the learning potential of all students. Lack of information about the training can also effectively prevent countries from mobilising efforts to improve the system. As a result, information collected for the target 4c can help countries target the areas where support is needed the most.

Questions remain about what constitutes high-quality training and how it should be delivered in different parts of the world. Despite several efforts being under way, they tend to be inconsistent. The extent to which teachers believe in the feasibility of the provision of inclusive education to all is essential to dismantling discriminatory beliefs, which may stem from personal convictions or reflect wider social norms. Scepticism can also reflect system inefficiency, as when teachers are given insufficient autonomy, education or guidance to build effective collaboration with peers and support personnel.

Teacher diversity often lags behind population diversity, sometimes as a result of structural problems preventing members of marginalized groups from acquiring qualifications, teaching in schools once qualified and remaining in the profession. Systems should recognize that these teachers can bolster inclusion by offering unique insights and serving as role models to all students. Alongside the skills that teachers may or may not have, the tone of teaching is almost as important. This is why school leaders' and teachers' motivation for and commitment to inclusive education are essential and should not be taken for granted, even in systems where teacher training for inclusion exists. There is no way that inclusion in education can be realized without teachers with inclusive attitudes, values and practices; without teachers committed to being the fuel for change and the advocates for a paradigm shift. Moreover, the attitudes towards are inclusion are also important and can impact students' learning. This is why school leaders' and teachers' motivation for and commitment to inclusive education are essential and should not be taken for granted, even in systems where teacher training for inclusion exists.

Moving forward, a trained and qualified teaching workforce is essential in order to realise the promise of SDG 4 of providing quality learning for all. Global reporting for and monitoring of target 4c can help stakeholders understand where teacher training systems lag behind as well as shed light on the strengths of the systems around the world. As a result, resources can be directed where they are needed the most, in order to strengthen teacher education and professional development in advancing the role of teachers as agents of positive change towards inclusion in education.

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