

ENHANCING THE “UNION OF EQUALITY” STRATEGY 2021-2030



FOR A MORE HOLISTIC FOCUS ON EDUCATION

By Sampo Kolu

QUEST Youth Advisory Board
member

6 February 2026

As a person with a physical disability, my personal experience has shown me how systems designed for a 'norm' can fail individuals who fall outside it, whom society perceives to be outliers, even when they are fully ready and able to contribute intellectually.

My experience

One of my battles for equal access to education took us all the way to the Finnish courts, where we had to argue with the municipality about whether they needed to accept that I needed a personal assistant in school to help with my movement disability – which my doctors had made clear was needed. During this time, I had to go online schooling for half a year, where I became very lonely, after which I went to school in Estonia, going back and forth between Finland and Estonia by boat. We lost the case. For a time, I couldn't accept it. No matter what proof or medical papers we gave them, the municipality's stance showed how legal frameworks can be used to gatekeep inclusion rather than guarantee it. And besides failing me as a child and a student, these barriers seem to also deprive schools and communities of diverse perspectives and talents.

Suggestion 1: Speedy decision making (On section 5.1)

In my opinion, an accommodated, not segregated education is a human right of all disabled people, as is my right for full participation in education, and the decision-making process should not take very long to admit these rights. It took two months to get a main and an appeal decision in the process of attempting to execute my basic human right. This was before any court proceedings.

The **section 5.1** does not **really have a part** that focuses on **speedy, not just equal, proceedings for the execution of these fundamental rights, which is essential in my opinion. A paragraph like this should be amended:**

"Justice should not only be given by courts. The Union strives to minimise the necessity of the legal pathway for persons with disabilities to be a last resort, especially in the implementation of basic rights set by the UNCRPD, and instead favor mainstream processes to reduce the burden of demanding such rights. Regardless of the process, it should be speedy and efficient at recognising disabled persons' rights and providing accommodation when a need for it occurs."

Amendments to Section 5.3

Suggestion 2 : A new inclusionary framework

I have been in a lot of different schools, it is sometimes unclear what they promise, and don't, about my `inclusion` in the school environment.

A common European framework for inclusive education would help. Schools that would be asked to comply in Member States that had implemented this framework would be asked to make a report answering three questions and publish them on their webpages:

1. How does the school create a welcoming and inclusive school culture
2. How does the school develop and implement policies that support the inclusion and participation of all students?
3. How does the school develop and adapt its everyday practices to reflect inclusive values and respond to student diversity?

The idea is that the school openly responds to all of the questions and details everything that they promise, and don't, in terms of everything inclusion related, not just special needs. Obviously, to not make it into a box-tick, we would force them to tell specific pieces of information in the framework: For example, which spaces in are accessible and which are not, whether the entrance can be accessed by ramp, whether the material is digital (for hand-eye coordination problems, for example), practical things.

The EU, as it has a shared competence on this topic, could support the implementation of such a framework in Member States by publishing it as a Council recommendation, similar to the Pathways for School Success initiative.

This should be a part of the possibilities mentioned in the strategy. The strategy should also mention the difficulties in accessing information with a paragraph like:

“ Easy access to information about inclusion in schools is also a possible challenge. The EU should investigate a possible framework opted-into by member states, which would require schools to publish a report about their inclusionary promises and services, and provide specific details. This would reduce the redundancy in distributing such information and provide carers and students with disabilities with a consistent source for this information. No structured information exists, however, on such a need for a coherent source, so the Union should investigate the need for this.”

Suggestion 3 : Cementing a promise of a school inclusion award

I visited the EU parliament for a World Children's day event, attended by several members of the Commission: Micallef, a deputy of Ms. Katarina Ivankovic, Marie-Cecile Rouillon. In this event, I suggested an award similar to the Access City Award for schools that are truly inclusive. I feel that this would be a logical step considering the success of the Award that has been mentioned in the strategy, and the deputy of Ms. Ivankovic seemed to accept it and asked Commissioner Micallef to **“note it down.”**

Evidence of this:

Confirmation about the award



I would like a formalization of this promise, if intended to be kept, as one of the initiatives mentioned at the end of section 5.3.

For further information, please contact :



Sampo Kolu
QUEST Youth Advisory Board Member
sampo@quest-eu.org

