# *The main barriers to inclusive education: lack of political will and fear to change*

Why do we not yet have inclusive education? Which are the main barriers in society making it difficult to have fully inclusive educational settings in Europe? These questions were debated during the EASPD annual conference “Inclusive teaching programmes: Let’s develop it together!” from 22 to 23 October 2015. Looking at the state of play with regard to the implementation of article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the EASPD conference showed practical examples on how to make education more inclusive. It also was an opportunity to identify the main reasons deterring the realisation of inclusive education.

Since its adoption, the CRPD has brought a new way to understanding “disability” that entails the combination of two elements: the physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment of the person and the barriers in society. Therefore, the enjoyment of human rights for persons with disabilities depends not only on the individual abilities but also on the degree of accessibility in the environment of the person. That explains why the implementation of the CRPD principles is very slow. The inclusion of persons with disabilities in the general education system should start by adapting and changing the system itself with the involvement of teachers, persons with disabilities, families, support services and policy-makers.

Changing attitudes in the general education systems:

accessibility, training and political will

Most countries have developed a special education system that runs in parallel to the general one. These parallel systems persist because of the belief that a certain percentage of children, such as those with severe disabilities, cannot be included into the regular educational environments. The existence of the special schools and other special education settings has resulted in a lack of concern within the general education system to comply with accessibility standards –such as assistive transport, universal design or adaptive technology in the classrooms.

Another key barrier for inclusion in the general education system is the teaching methods, the educational programs and availability of support. Several experts concur that the definition of school “achievement” needs to be broadened and not only be based on results. Accountability, neoliberalism, competition between educational centers are some other barriers that make it difficult to fully implement the concept of inclusive education in the general system. In addition, there is a shortage of qualified staff in the general education system and a lack of training available for teachers to adopt inclusive attitudes, approaches and teaching methods in accessible formats. Therefore, it is essential to develop means that respond to individual needs in the classrooms, ensure adequate resources and training opportunities for mainstream teachers and agree on common standards for qualification.

The implementation of inclusive education also needs political will. The willingness of decision makers to support the transition from segregating settings to an inclusive general educational system is another key element that could facilitate its realization. Political will also means allocating adequate resources to provide individualised support. This political will must go hand in hand with a pedagogical will, by developing inclusive knowledge and skills among mainstream teachers.