

Social Inclusion Implementations

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This Student Guide is a comprehensive document designed to provide additional recommendations and practical implementations based on the original INGENIUM Guide. It aims to support higher education institutions in further developing inclusive environments, ensuring equal opportunities and active participation for all students, especially those from marginalized or underrepresented groups.

The guide builds upon the definitions, frameworks, and strategies outlined in the original INGENIUM Guide, proposing specific, actionable measures tailored to institutional contexts. It addresses barriers to inclusion across various dimensions, including socio-economic status, disability, age, gender identity, ethnicity, race, culture, and religion. The recommendations align with internationally recognized standards and key global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)², and the Okanagan Charter³.

New strategic measures, including inclusive teaching and curriculum design, structural support for marginalized students, health and wellbeing initiatives, digital inclusion strategies, identity and safety protocols, and enhanced monitoring and data utilization practices, are specifically extended to complement the already existing INGENIUM Guide.

This guide serves as a valuable resource, empowering universities to cultivate equitable, accessible, and inclusive learning environments that reflect and celebrate student diversity.

¹ United Nations. (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Retrieved from <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

² European Higher Education Area (EHEA). (2020). Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA. Retrieved from <https://ehea.info/>

³ World Health Organization & International Union for Health Promotion and Education. (2015). Okanagan Charter: An international charter for health promoting universities and colleges. Retrieved from <https://www.healthpromotingcampuses.org/>

CHAPTER 0: General Description

Definition of Social Inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the active process of ensuring that all individuals—regardless of gender, ability, socio-economic background, ethnicity, or other characteristics—have equal opportunities to participate fully in academic, social, and professional life. According to INGENIUM and organizations like UNESCO⁴ and the EU⁵, it involves removing barriers and promoting access, respect, and equity within higher education institutions.

Importance of Social Inclusion in Higher Education⁵

Social inclusion plays a critical role in higher education for several reasons:

- **Access:** It guarantees that all individuals, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalized groups, can access university education without systemic or financial obstacles.
- **Equity:** It shifts the focus from equal treatment to equitable opportunities, recognizing that different individuals require different forms of support to succeed.
- **Student Success:** Inclusive environments increase student engagement, retention, and performance, especially for first-generation students, minorities, or students with disabilities.
- **Institutional Quality:** Universities that embed inclusion into their mission and structures improve their responsiveness, resilience, and innovation potential.
- **Democratic Values:** Social inclusion fosters diversity of thought, mutual understanding, and participatory governance—key principles for democratic societies and institutions.

⁴ UNESCO. (2017). A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254>

⁵ European Commission. (2020). Communication on achieving the European Education Area. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0625>

Connection to International Frameworks

The INGENIUM Alliance’s approach to social inclusion aligns with several major international frameworks:

- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹:**
 - **SDG 4 – Quality Education:** Promote inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.
 - **SDG 5 – Gender Equality:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, including within educational and leadership contexts.
 - **SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities:** Reduce inequality within and among countries, including through equitable access to education, services, and opportunities.
- **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)²:** Principle 9 explicitly states that “community engagement in higher education should promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.” EHEA also encourages removing barriers to mobility and ensuring that socio-economic background does not determine academic outcomes.
- **Okanagan Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges³:** This charter challenges higher education institutions to “embed health into all aspects of campus culture,” explicitly including equity, social justice, and community wellbeing. It is one of the core foundations of the “Healthy Campus”⁶ initiative that INGENIUM supports.

⁶ INGENIUM Alliance. (2024). D9.4 INGENIUM for a Healthy Campus: Preliminary guidelines and recommendations

CHAPTER 1: INGENIUM Proposals for Social Inclusion

1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS⁷

The INGENIUM Action Plan recognises that students from low socio-economic backgrounds face financial, geographic, and cultural barriers. INGENIUM universities are asked to:

- Create institutional emergency funds to advance or supplement mobility grants for students facing financial hardship.
- Establish an INGENIUM Post-Graduate Scholarship for low-SES students to promote international mobility and post-graduate access.
- Align Erasmus+ payment procedures to prevent delays that disproportionately affect financially vulnerable students.
- Offer housing, food, and transport support at the institutional level (e.g., rent subsidies, free meals, or public transport discounts).
- Implement academic mentoring and guidance programmes for students who work while studying or lack family support.
- Promote inclusive participation in student life and raise awareness of economic diversity to reduce stigma and exclusion.

2. DISABILITY & AGE⁸

To ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities and of all age groups, INGENIUM universities commit to:

- Automatically recognise disability documentation across partner institutions to simplify support during mobility.

⁷ INGENIUM Alliance. (2024). D9.1 INGENIUM Action Plan for Equity and Inclusion. Chapter 4, pp. 34–36; Table 4, p. 36

⁸ INGENIUM Alliance. (2024). D9.1 INGENIUM Action Plan for Equity and Inclusion. Chapter 2, pp. 20–29; Table 2, pp. 26–29

- Conduct institutional accessibility audits, including physical spaces, digital platforms, and learning environments.
- Appoint disability contact officers or establish central units responsible for coordination and support. Ensure full access to support services, such as interpreters, note-takers, adapted exams, technical aids, and mental health counselling.
- Provide flexible learning and working formats, including part-time studies, online learning, and multimodal options.
- Develop inclusion training for staff and students addressing stigma, accessibility, and age-related discrimination.
- Support transitions from secondary to higher education through outreach programmes and disability service coordination with schools.

3. GENDER AND INTERSECTIONAL INCLUSION⁹

The Gender Equality Strategy of INGENIUM seeks to dismantle systemic and institutional barriers based on gender identity⁵. Key actions include:

- Developing and mandating gender training for all university roles, including leadership, researchers, teachers, and students.
- Integrating gender equality into all policies, recruitment practices, curricula, budgets, and communications.
- Setting gender representation targets (e.g., 40% minimum representation of each gender in committees and decision-making bodies).
- Collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data to identify disparities in pay, roles, hiring, and access to resources.
- Providing reporting mechanisms for gender-based violence and harassment, with institutional protocols and legal compliance.
- Recognising non-binary identities, allowing name changes (e.g., Alias Careers), and updating administrative systems accordingly.
- Encouraging work-life balance through policies on parental leave, flexible hours, and care responsibilities (esp. for women).

4. RACE, RELIGION, ETHNICITY & CULTURE¹⁰

To address systemic racism and cultural exclusion, INGENIUM partners are instructed to:

- Implement anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies, and make them publicly accessible and enforceable across institutions.
- Provide race equality training for staff, students, and administrators at all levels.
- Create anonymous reporting systems for racial or religious discrimination incidents, and monitor their usage.
- Celebrate multiculturalism through events (e.g., International Student Day, Zero Discrimination Day, Global Diversity Month).
- Form working groups and student associations to promote cultural awareness, including student ambassador initiatives.
- Ensure anonymous or inclusive recruitment procedures, including diversity statements and anti-bias interview panels.
- Promote cultural sensitivity and multilingual support, especially for international students and migrant communities.

⁹ European Commission. (2020). Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en

¹⁰ INGENIUM Alliance. (2024). D9.1 INGENIUM Action Plan for Equity and Inclusion. Chapter 3, pp. 30–33; Table 3, p. 32

5. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM¹¹

To promote structural inclusion and long-term change, INGENIUM recommends:

- Creating an Inclusive University Charter that institutionalises diversity and inclusion across all universities in the alliance.
- Developing a shared EDI e-learning platform with certified training, digital badges, and best practices.
- Establishing mentoring programmes and peer support groups, especially for underrepresented students and staff.
- Forming inclusive curriculum task forces to evaluate and revise course content, integrating diverse voices and global perspectives.
- Embedding Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into teaching, with flexible assessments and interdisciplinary methodologies.
- Partnering with external community organisations to engage vulnerable or marginalised populations in educational outreach.
- Launching inclusive summer/winter schools to promote representation in areas like STEM (e.g., STEM schools for girls).

¹¹ INGENIUM Alliance. (2024). D9.1 INGENIUM Action Plan for Equity and Inclusion. Chapter 5, pp. 37–41; Table 5, p. 40

6. MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY¹²

To guarantee implementation and transparency, the plan requires each university to:

- Complete an institutional matrix identifying 3–5 transformation objectives, barriers, actions, timelines, and responsible agents.
- Conduct regular surveys and focus groups with students and staff on inclusion, harassment, and well-being.
- Use disaggregated data and intersectional analysis to monitor gender, age, disability, SES, and racial representation.
- Hold annual or biennial inclusion reviews and ensure consistency with national legislation and INGENIUM standards.

¹² INGENIUM Alliance. (2024). D9.1 INGENIUM Action Plan for Equity and Inclusion. Annex 4, pp. 83–84

CHAPTER 2: Strategic Implementations for Inclusive Higher Education

This chapter proposes a set of concrete and innovative strategies to address persistent barriers to inclusion in higher education. Unlike existing frameworks such as the INGENIUM Action Plan, these measures go beyond institutional commitments and propose mechanisms of transformation grounded in pedagogy, infrastructure, technology, and community engagement. The policies are grouped into six strategic axes.

2.1. Inclusive Teaching and Curriculum Design

Problem: Most higher education institutions do not adapt their pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of neurodiverse students, nor do they include minority perspectives in their curricula.

Proposed Actions:

- Provide mandatory training for staff in inclusive pedagogy, including strategies to support students with ADHD, autism, or dyslexia.
- Redesign courses to include intercultural, queer, and decolonial perspectives, integrating student input into course planning (co-design).
- Adopt flexible formats (e.g., multimodal instruction, varied assessment tools, calm or sensory-friendly spaces).

2.2. Structural Support for Marginalized Students

Problem: First-generation students, those from low-income backgrounds, international students, and minorities often lack targeted institutional support and face additional barriers related to financial, social, and cultural capital.

Proposed Actions:

- Establish mentoring programs and peer-led support groups for underrepresented students.

- Create clear, low-bureaucracy pathways for financial aid, including emergency funding and housing guarantees.
- Ensure accessible infrastructure, such as inclusive restrooms, reserved accommodations for international students, and remote participation options.

2.3. Health, Wellbeing, and Care

Problem: Physical and mental health, nutrition, caregiving responsibilities, and individual emergencies are often neglected in university policy frameworks.

Proposed Actions:

- Introduce comprehensive mental health protocols including individualized emergency response plans and well-trained staff.
- Provide healthy food options, nutrition workshops, and campus-wide health promotion campaigns.
- Recognize caregiving (e.g., parenting, elderly care) as a factor in academic planning by offering flexible attendance, leave policies, and workload accommodations.

2.4. Technology and Digital Inclusion

Problem: There is a lack of structured guidance on the ethical and inclusive use of AI and educational technologies, which can both support and harm inclusion.

Proposed Actions:

- Develop institutional guidelines for the responsible use of AI, including tools for accessibility (e.g., voice-to-text, translation, adaptive learning platforms).
- Provide training for both staff and students on using these tools effectively and ethically.

- Regularly assess institutional platforms for digital accessibility and bias.

2.5. Identity, Representation, and Safety

Problem: Policies often treat gender, LGBTQ+ identities, race, and language as secondary considerations. Trans students, in particular, face invisibilization in bureaucratic systems.

Proposed Actions:

- Establish protocols for legal name and gender changes in university databases.
- Offer sign language courses, interpretation services, and promote multilingual communication across administrative and academic departments.
- Promote visibility and safety through anti-discrimination campaigns, cultural celebrations, and the creation of LGBTQ+ and ethnic minority networks.
- Encourage bystander intervention training and institutional allyship programs.

2.6. Monitoring, Data, and Institutional Culture

Problem: Inclusion strategies often lack proper monitoring, feedback loops, or evidence-based adjustments.

Proposed Actions:

- Implement qualitative and quantitative systems to monitor the application of inclusive practices (e.g., anonymous feedback forms, student panels, peer observation).
- Collect and share anonymized data across institutions to identify trends, gaps, and best practices, ensuring data privacy and ethical use.
- Establish periodic reviews of inclusion policies based on student and staff feedback, and publish public reports for accountability.

CHAPTER 3: Conclusion

This report has explored the concept and significance of social inclusion within INGENIUM, beginning with its definition, relevance, and alignment with existing frameworks (Chapter 0). It then examined the current landscape of policies and practices applied in INGENIUM (Chapter 1), followed by an analysis of the identified gaps and proposed solutions for enhancing inclusivity (Chapter 2). Throughout, a comprehensive focus on various forms of discrimination— gender, disability, age, race, religion, ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status—has highlighted the complex and intersecting challenges faced by individuals in higher education. These findings complement the already identified urgent need to enhance inclusivity in all areas of education and university life.