

Most professors have taught students with disabilities but few have been trained on how to do it

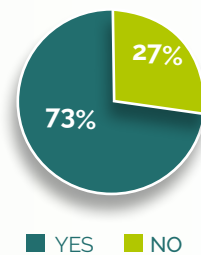
What is at stake?

Equal access to education is a pressing challenge, expressed by both the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and the Education and Training 2020 programme. However, in our societies persons with disabilities do still face barriers that hinder their chances of being fully included in higher education and vocational training.

For instance, while 36% of individuals without disabilities completed higher education, only less than 24% of those with disabilities were able to attain the same education level (EUROSTAT, 2014). In fact, on daily basis education professionals must adapt their teaching to the specific learning needs of each student with disabilities. Even so, a very small part of them have been trained on the necessary skills to undertake this task.

working with students with disabilities at any point of their academic careers, as 73% of the participants acknowledged in the surveys (Fig.1)

Figure 1
TAUGHT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES DURING THEIR TEACHING CAREER



What did we find?

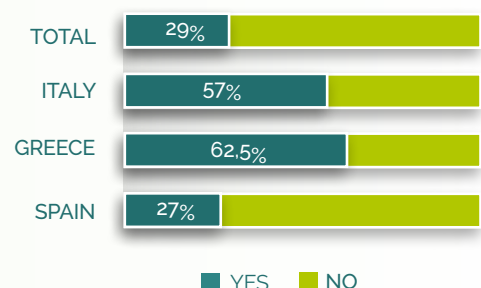
These findings emerge from the study conducted within the framework of the ALdia project, co-funded by Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, to identify the needs of students with disabilities in the education sector. The ALdia project bridges theory and practice regarding equal access to education for persons with disabilities. As such, the main project task aims to develop an innovative, flexible and online training framework encapsulated in a Massive Open Online Course in disability, building up crucial skills for inclusive education among the professionals who teach students with disabilities.

The ALdia needs assessment analysis focused on the project target groups, inquiring students with disabilities, VET trainers and university professors. The research process achieved a very significant success, collecting 583 surveys and organising four design meetings analysis in the three participant countries of the project (Spain, Italy and Greece). The scale of these figures allows for a meaningful transposition and generalisation to the EU context.

From the perspective of the professors and teachers, one of most notable findings of the ALdia needs analysis points out towards the overwhelming prevalence of the experience of

Nevertheless, the majority of these education professionals do not have received any type of training, equipping them with the necessary skills to teach students with disabilities, as the 29% of the respondents stated (Fig.2). Whereas the percentage varies depending on the country analysed, further evidence obtained through design meetings and personals interviews supports the data found in the surveys. For example, a university professor described how *"There is a lack of training of educational personnel in Assistive Technology training. Although use of Assistive Technology is made and most of the required equipment is there, at least in bigger universities, there is no in-depth and regular training scheduled"* (ALdia, 2016, p. 72).

Figure 2
TRAINING ON TEACHING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



73%
of education professionals have taught students with disabilities in universities or vocational training institutions.

Only **29%**
of education professionals have been specifically trained on teaching students with disabilities.

A Massive Open Online Course in disability for higher education lecturers and teachers working in vocational education and training (VET) would equip teachers with the necessary skills.

To underpin the relevance of this finding, from the students with disabilities standpoint, an average of more than 26% of the respondents ranked the scarcity of disability training among teachers and trainers as the biggest barrier they are forced to deal with during their education lifespan (Fig.3). While there are some disparities between the countries, the lack of disability expertise to provide reasonable accommodation adjustments for each student with disabilities hampers their possibility of progressing further in higher education and vocational training.

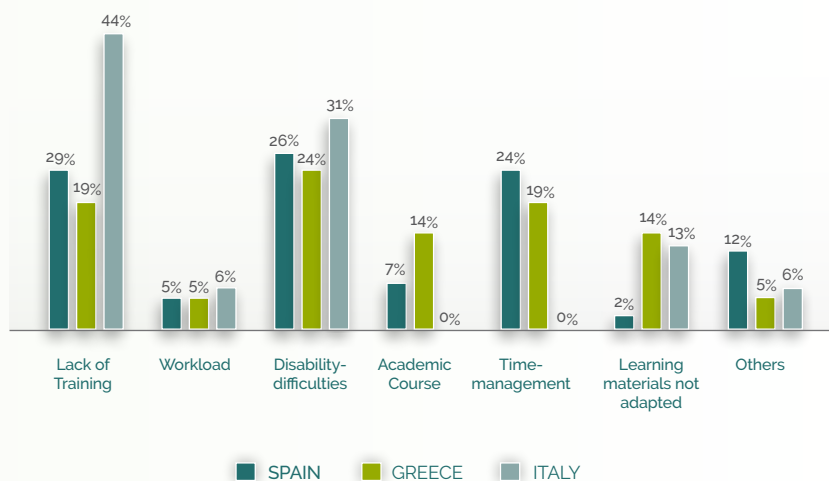
Why is it important?

The Aldia needs analysis calls for an urgent reframing of our understanding of disability in order to inform inclusive education policies in the context of higher education and vocational training. The Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) requires the Union to combat discrimination based on disability when defining and implementing its policies and activities (Article 10).

Moreover, the EU has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which in its article 24 requires education systems to be inclusive and accommodate personalized educational needs in order to remove the barriers that exclude or marginalize students with disabilities. For that reason, the Education and Training 2020 programme includes a commitment to ensure that European Union's education and training systems become accessible to all. However, when information is reported, the expenditure in inclusive education in EU barely ranges from 0.1% to 0.17% of GDP (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2016).

The glaring gaps in disability training and expertise among our education, professionals illustrated by this research, demand an innovative educative tool that directly tackles these issues. This is what the ALdia projects aims for by offering an affordable, innovative, flexible Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in disability for higher education lecturers and VET trainers. As one of the university, professors, interviewed in the design meetings, stated: *"Nowadays it is possible to receive any kind of training online in any place needed, which is preferable."* (ALdia, 2016, p. 96)

Figure 3
RANKING OF THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE IN YOUR EDUCATION



Implications for Policymakers

This MOOC should provide training that complies with the following requirements:

- A regular, flexible and updated methodology. This compels education professionals to train at regular intervals, ensuring that their knowledge and skills do not become obsolete.
- Training for both student with disabilities and education professionals should become an evolving process. Training needs must be covered and addressed all the time through new methods. Then these methods can be tested, tried, and officially certified.
- Disseminate and promote the existing resources, maximizing its reachability. Good experiences should be collected in a platform and serve as examples, as good teaching practices.

Further Reading

ALdia R2.2 Supporting students with disability in HE and VET – A needs analysis
<http://aldia-project.eu/2016/12/15/aldia-r2-2-supporting-students-with-disability-in-he-and-vet-a-needs-analysis/>

Financing of Inclusive Education: Mapping Country Systems for Inclusive Education
<https://www.european-agency.org/publications/ereports/financing>

Disability statistics - access to education and training. Eurostat Statistics Explained
http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Disability_statistics

