

A STUDY OF ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION POLICIES

UM ESTUDO DAS POLÍTICAS DE ACESSIBILIDADE E INCLUSÃO
UN ESTUDIO DE LAS POLÍTICAS DE ACCESIBILIDAD E INCLUSIÓN

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ABSTRACT

The Inclusion of people with disabilities in education follows the historical trajectory of guaranteeing human rights. Many Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Argentina, have committed to recognizing the values of social justice and the effective participation of the university community in the development of institutional policies based on inclusive education. The objective of this study is to describe institutional inclusion policies aimed at expanding higher education access for people with disabilities at the Federal Institute of Mato Grosso (IFMT) in Brazil and the Entre Rios University (UNER) in Argentina. This is a qualitative approach based on documentary and bibliographic research. The results showed that IFMT has a recent policy for the inclusion of people with disabilities and specific educational needs, whereas UNER does not yet have an institutional policy in this regard. UNER has inclusion and accessibility committees composed of education workers who volunteer to promote education for all students with disabilities, while IFMT designates professionals to manage the topic through a paid position, offering a student assistance and inclusion coordination service. UNER reflects the Argentine context, where integration is the prevailing paradigm.

KEYWORDS: Higher education; People with disabilities; Inclusion; Brazil; Argentina.

Introduction

The educational inclusion of people with disabilities¹ follows the historical path of guaranteeing human rights and public policies for vulnerable groups around the world. Above all, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Organization (UNO), through specific conventions, such as the "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" in 2007 and the World Conferences on Education for All (since 1990), have helped Latin American countries towards expanding the possibilities and effective inclusion of this group, both in basic and higher education.

The World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the Salamanca Declaration (1994), which has both Brazil and Argentina as participating countries, constitute the main legal basis for guaranteeing the inclusion of people with disabilities and their right to education. Both declarations defend the basic learning needs of these groups that require special attention and that measures need to be taken to guarantee equal access to education. The Salamanca Declaration (1994) also emphasizes inclusion in regular classes as the ideal scenario for effective inclusion, and in this respect, this documentation is unprecedented and has opened up possibilities for the great advances of recent decades.

Brazil has been highly influenced by the international documents of which it has been a proponent, which have led to vast public policies on the rights of people with disabilities. Among these policies, we can mention the Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities (Law No. 13.146, of July 6, 2015) and the National Policy for

Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (Ministerial Ordinance No. 555, of June 5, 2007), which were drawn up on the basis of international discussions on the subject and are highly relevant.

In the context of higher education, the inclusion of people with disabilities has undergone a major transformation following the implementation of [Law 13.409/2016](#), which guarantees the right to reserve places for this population. According to the Higher Education Census, there was a 76.52% increase in the enrollment of these students between 2016 and 2021 (INEP, 2016; INEP, 2021).

In 2016, there were 35,891 undergraduate enrollments (or 0.4% of total enrollments) declared as having some kind of disability, global development disorder, or high abilities/giftedness. In the set of self-declarations, Physical Disability (12,775 or 34.8%), Low Vision (11,028 or 30.0%), and Hearing Disability (5,051 or 13.7%) appear as the most common declarations (INEP, 2016). Five years later, i.e., in 2021, the technical summary (INEP, 2021) of the undergraduate census explains that in descending order, the three most mentioned types of declaration are: physical disability (29.7%), low vision (29.7%), and hearing disability (11.6%). It should also be noted that a total of 63,404 enrolled students declared some kind of disability, disorder, or giftedness. The number of autistic people (autism and Asperger's syndrome—still referred to as such in 2016) who enrolled in college was 251 and 233 in 2016. In 2021, the category was reclassified as Global Developmental Disorder and had 4,018 enrollments (INEP, 2016; INEP, 2021).

However, in Argentina, the scenario is different from that in Brazil when it comes to education for people with disabilities. Despite being a country that is present in most of the international agreements on education for all, some authors point out that the education of this public has been carried out via integrative efforts (Madureira & Saraiva, 2023).

Argentina has several laws on the rights of people with disabilities. These include the National Constitution, which in Article 75 states: "legislate and promote" positive actions that guarantee "real equality of opportunity and treatment, and the full enjoyment and exercise of rights," particularly covering people with disabilities, children, and women (Argentina, 2016, our translation).

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities before Law N 26.378 (2008) and reinforced by Law 27.044 on the Constitutional Hierarchy of the Convention (Argentina, 2014). The guarantee of quality education is provided for in Law No. 24,521,

the Higher Education Law, which states in its article 2d: “Establish the necessary measures to equalize the opportunities and possibilities of people with permanent or temporary disabilities” (Argentina, 1995, our translation).

Higher education institutions therefore need to organize and articulate their internal policies so that people with disabilities can not only have access to, but also effectively participate in the teaching and learning, extension and research processes.

Considering this scenario, it is important to reflect on the impact of policies toward promoting access, inclusion, permanence, and participation of students with disabilities within educational institutions, especially of higher education. This proposal stems from the experience of two researchers at each of the institutions who work together on a research project: “International Network on Inclusion and Accessibility in Higher Education”—CNPq Call No. 26/2021 for Support for Scientific, Technological and Innovation Research and Scholarships Abroad Proc. 401681/2022-0.

Thus, the institutions were chosen due to the presence of these researchers in these organizations and are justified by the lack of specific publications, which also make it possible to understand inclusive education in two different scenarios. The aim of this study was to describe the inclusive institutional policies produced by IFMT in Brazil and UNER in Argentina in order to see how they guarantee accessibility for disabled students at this level of education.

The text is organized by presenting the IFMT and UNER institutions in terms of their basic characteristics: organization, purpose, public and educational proposal. This is followed by the methodology that structures this research and finally the results and discussion, which describe the institutions’ policies, structure, and proposal for inclusive education.

Methodology

This is a documentary and bibliographical study with a qualitative approach, which is characterized by using institutional documents from the universities mentioned and sources of literature produced on the subject as primary sources. Documentary analysis is carried out by taking a critical look at the documents collected in order to understand the political, economic, social, and cultural context in which they were produced (Alves *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, following the guidelines of Cellard (2008), once the documents had been selected, a preliminary analysis was carried out, taking into account the context, nature,

authorship, and authenticity of the documents, with a view to their origin and, subsequently, the actual analysis of the document. Documents published on the official websites of the educational institutions between 2000 and 2023 that related to the subject of the study were included.

The documents were analyzed based on the criteria of mentioning inclusive education, people with disabilities, special education, and inclusion. However, the analysis did not aim to quantify these words, but to understand what propositions, guidelines, and inferences the document made/makes in relation to the aforementioned topics.

As for the IFMT, the documents were accessed via the institution’s official website, <https://ifmt.edu.br/inicio/>. The institution has a [Systemic Directorate for Student Assistance, Inclusion and Diversity](#), and the documents were located on this directorate’s page via the banner entitled “Inclusive Education.” In this space, two documents were found: the “Inclusive Education Policy for Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Educational Needs” within the scope of the IFMT (IFMT, 2022) and Joint Normative Instruction 2/2023. Only the first of these, according to Table 1, will make up the study sample. Joint Normative Instruction 2/2023 presents the procedures for drawing up the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and will not be included in the scope of this work, because it does not modify or innovate in relation to the Policy that will be analyzed.

Table 1

IFMT institutional documents analyzed

Document	Year
“Inclusive Education Policy for Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Educational Needs” within the scope of the IFMT	(IFMT, 2022)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In the UNER context, the document analyzed and the information accessed were available on the institution’s official website in the “Institutional” menu. UNER currently only has one official document (Table 2). However, the *Red Interuniversitaria de Discapacidad Universidades Públicas Argentinas y Perspectiva de Discapacidad* (2019), included for this analysis, is also a reference document.

Table 2

UNER institutional documents analyzed

Document	Year
STATUTE – “A.U.” RESOLUTION 41	(UNER, 2023)
<i>Red Interuniversitária de Discapacidad Universidades Públicas Argentinas y Perspectiva de Discapacidad</i>	(Argentina, 2019)

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The results will be presented in a summary table of the documents and institutional structure presented in the institutions’ policies. The description of the information found was organized into sections, initially with IFMT and then with UNER, with the intention of describing what each university considers on the subject.

Results and discussions

As far as the institutions are concerned, the Federal Institute of Mato Grosso (IFMT) promotes not only higher education, but also professional and technological education (PTE). When it comes to the inclusion of people with disabilities in PTE, current scientific production focuses mainly on the reality of the Federal Institutes (FIs).

The creation of the FIs through Law No. 11.892 of 2008 has brought new dimensions to vocational education, as it is linked to local, regional, and national economic development policies. It thus provides technical, technological, and professional training according to the needs of each region. The FIs are present across all the Brazilian states, and in each area, they do a very important job, especially for the socio-economically vulnerable population.

The IFMT, the subject of this discussion, has 14 campuses in operation and 5 advanced campuses. Currently, it has approximately 25,000 students, in more than 100 courses distributed at the following levels: Higher Education (bachelor’s degrees, licentiate degrees, and technologies), Postgraduate (specializations and master’s degrees), Technical (with integrated high school, subsequent, concurrent and *proeja*), Distance Education (UAB and *Profucionário*), as well as short courses, such as FIC (Initial and Continuing Education).

The Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos (UNER) was created by Law No. 20.366 of May 1973 in Argentina. UNER currently has nine units in different areas of knowledge: the Faculty of Bromatology, the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, the Faculty of Administration Sciences, the Faculty of Food Sciences, the Faculty of Education

Sciences, the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Faculty of Economic Sciences, the Faculty of Engineering, and the Faculty of Social Work.

In the first quarter of 2023, the university welcomed new applicants, adding to the more than 21,000 students already enrolled in its 34 degree courses and 16 technical courses, in its 50 years of tradition as a free, public university. Academic growth has been sustained through research, extension, and infrastructures, which add up to concrete actions of articulation with the different sectors of the province (states).

After analyzing the documents, the following categories were defined: inclusive education and accessibility policy; concept of disability and inclusion in the institution; institutional structure for working in inclusive education. These categories were chosen based on reading the documents, but also considering the current literature that discusses these issues (Sasaki, 2005; Moreira & Liebl, 2023; Martins & Ciantelli, 2023; Zerbato, Vilaronga & Santos, 2021).

1. Institutional policy on inclusive education and accessibility

Both educational institutions targeted by this research have some documentary reference to the right of people with disabilities to professional and technological education and/or higher education. However, each of them has a specific set of guidelines for inclusive educational practices, which will be described in the following sections.

1.1 Inclusive education policies at IFMT (Brazil)

The IFMT has documents that indirectly deal with aspects related to inclusive education for people with disabilities, such as the Teaching Regulations and the Student Assistance Regulations. However, in keeping with the criterion of inclusion, the documents eligible to be discussed here were those listed in Table 1.

In terms of the history of inclusive and/or special education, the TECNEP Program in the 2000s was the main initiative for the inclusion of people with disabilities in federal institutions of professional education and technology. One of the main outcomes of this program was the implementation of the Support Centers for People with Specific Needs (NAPNE – *Núcleos de apoio à pessoa com Necessidades Específicas*), created in 2013 by Resolution No. 043 of the Superior Council (CONSUP). In addition to instituting the NAPNEs, it organizes guidance on procedures. The NAPNE

was instituted as a sector and linked to a Coordination of Inclusive Education in the Pro-Rectorate of Teaching at the IFMT Rectorate.

The Resolution defines that NAPNE must assist “people with specific needs at IFMT”, but there is no definition of this group. Article 6 states that NAPNE should be set up to guarantee “people with specific educational needs and other excluded groups” (IFMT, 2013, our translation) access to and permanence in education. Notably, however, this definition of target audience changes according to the approval of other documents, discussed *a posteriori*.

In Chapter II, which deals with the basic working conditions of NAPNE, the document is incisive in stating that NAPNE needs an appropriate location, material, and specialized staff for this service. It should also be emphasized that it is NAPNE’s duty, in addition to providing this service, to identify students with specific educational needs. The NAPNE multidisciplinary work team is composed on a voluntary basis and is open to the school community; for service provision, it proposes assistance from qualified professionals.

Despite being extremely important in the history of the educational inclusion of people with specific needs in the IFMT, the NAPNEs have several gaps because they do not take into account the reality experienced on the campuses. These gaps have been discussed in the current literature and include the lack of specific professionals, budget cuts, attitudinal barriers, and the obscurity of NAPNE’s duties (Tristão, Bezerra & Castro, 2018; Bueno *et al.*, 2022; Zebarto, Vilaronga & Santos, 2021). This translates, for example, into the difficulty of expanding the professional staff to work in this area, the lack of a special education teacher on some campuses, the lack of vacancies for Libras (Brazilian sign language) translators and interpreters, for specialized care professionals and for other professionals necessary for the effective development of inclusive education.

NAPNES remained the main agents for promoting inclusive education on IFMT campuses until 2021. However, from 2022 onwards, the Student Assistance and Inclusion Coordination Offices were created, which now fulfill this role of coordinating the processes of inclusive education. There is no articulation with the NAPNES, which are not mentioned in the document “Inclusive Education Policy for Students with Disabilities and/or Educational Needs” (IFMT, 2022).

In the organizational structure proposed at the IFMT, the social assistance and inclusion coordinator is the main agent executing this policy and must encourage other

sectors/people so that students can be included in all spaces, projects, and possibilities in the teaching and learning process, in extension and in research.

However, the importance of the policy in question lies precisely in initiating the process of transforming the reality of the IFMT campuses and proposing an organization to meet specific educational needs, with an emphasis on accommodating the demands of people with disabilities in the education offered at the institution.

The aforementioned policy, in turn, is part of the IFMT's Student Assistance Policy and covers a set of principles and guidelines that guide the institution's actions in order to ensure the rights to education, accessibility, and specialized educational assistance for the aforementioned students.

Article 5 of the "Inclusive Education Policy for Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Educational Needs within the scope of the IFMT" follows some very broad conceptual considerations that are in line with current proposals in legislation and literature. An example of this is the understanding of studies on accessibility which, based on the scope of this policy at the IFMT, is considered in its various dimensions: architectural accessibility, attitudinal accessibility, communicational accessibility, instrumental accessibility, and methodological accessibility (Sasaki, 2005).

Discussions/studies on universal design for learning will be revisited and discussed as a need to allow everyone to access the general curriculum, respecting students' difficulties and talents, with the use of different pedagogical/didactic and/or technological strategies (IFMT, 2020).

1.2 Inclusive education policies at UNER (Argentina)

Only two UNER institutional documents were included in this analysis (Table 2), due to the UNER Statute being the only official university document that briefly mentions inclusive education and the document *Red Interuniversitaria de Discapacidad Universidades Públicas Argentinas y Perspectiva de Discapacidad* (Argentina, 2019), which is a commitment by all public universities in Argentina to strengthen the exercise of the rights that structure the human condition as a universal condition. In other words, it is a guideline that does not point to the organization of work.

Notably, the university has a *Comisión de Acessibilidad y Inclusión*, which also has a page on the institution's official website that promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities at the university.

Despite the absence of a specific university policy, this does not mean that UNER is not working towards inclusive education. The faculties have their accessibility and inclusion committees in which teachers, students, graduates, and staff (*Personal Administrativo y de Servicios – PAyS*) participate, and they strive to promote the inclusion of human diversity as a form of social justice and human dignity, so that people with disabilities who face significant challenges can have other opportunities through knowledge, professionalization, and entry into the world of work (UNER, 2023).

Specifically, the Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos, in its participatory institutional project, defined strategic lines and objectives for the UNER in relation to accessibility and disability and the fight against sexist protocol and gender violence, defining commitments to the territory, institutional organization and integration, academic quality, research and extension, information management, and evaluation.

UNER has a *Comisión de Acessibilidad y Inclusión* (UNER, 2023) which, on its official website, divides its information into three categories: materials, places of interest, and regulations. It is worth noting that only the “materials” section has been produced by the university; the other categories are from other institutions.

The materials category refers to communicational accessibility for people who are deaf, blind, and have a specific learning disorder (SLD), sharing explanations through videos on how to create accessible materials. Resources include accessible digital texts, ranging from text style and index, text font used, contrast in texts, presentations, and alternative text; and accessible audiovisuals, such as subtitles, audio description, dubbing, Argentine sign language and the material “recommendations for adolescents” from the interdisciplinary mental health residency (RISAM) in Paraná, available in Argentine sign language.

The category of places of interest shows the support networks: *Asociación civil Tíflonexos*, *Confederación Argentina de Sordos (CAS)*, *Federación Argentina de Instituciones de Ciegos y Ambliopes (FAICA)*, and *Red por los derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad (REDI)*, as described on the official website of the *Comisión de Acessibilidad y Inclusión*². In the category of regulations, the “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” and its optional protocol and the ‘United Nations International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ (UNER, 2023) are listed.

Another important fact is that, when entering university, at the time of registration on the SIU Guarani portal (Argentina, 2024)—the system used in Argentina for education—the student has the option of informing, in the field referring to disability, whether they have any type of disability (hearing, visual, motor, psychosocial condition, or other) and reporting their needs in order to attend university with equity. With this information, the Accessibility and Inclusion Committee is informed and can schedule an interview with the student to better understand their SENs and provide all the necessary resources and accessibility support during their academic career. This interview is just one of the possible alternative ways of communicating (it can happen in other ways), and the communication channels and actions are agreed upon individually in each faculty.

2. Conception of disability in the policies analyzed

Accessibility is essential for an education based on the social model of disability, which considers that responsibility for disability also lies with society, moving away from the view centered exclusively on the individual condition, as suggested by the medical model, which focuses on normalizing interventions. It is therefore up to society to create initiatives that guarantee accessibility, regardless of the biological characteristics of individuals. Furthermore, the social model of disability goes beyond the individual perspective, which limits disability to the body, and relates it to the way society structures itself to reduce accessibility barriers (Moreira & Liebl, 2023).

It is, therefore, essential to understand how institutions perceive and name people with disabilities, so that they can then understand how accessibility is made available to these people.

2.1 Conception of disability at IFMT

Regarding the issue of nomenclature, we saw that Resolution No. 043, which established NAPNES in 2013, uses “Specific needs” and “people with specific educational needs,” while the Policy approved in 2022 uses “Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Educational Needs within the scope of IFMT.” It is important to emphasize that the expressions in all their senses and meanings are marked by the scientific and epistemological conceptions of their times. The terms “disabled person,” “person with a disability,” or “person with special needs” have been replaced throughout history with “persons with disabilities” (Santos, 2017).

However, it is understood that disability is still linked, in most interpretations, to the biomedical model of conception, by attributing a 'lack' of capacity to people's bodies. Foresti and Bousfield (2022) emphasize the importance of a model of understanding of disability that is sufficient to encompass the complexity of the term and of people's experiences.

Specificities arise in the field of education, and the position of the IFMT policy, the main institutional document for inclusion, is to use "person with disability" and "specific educational needs." This is because people with disabilities will not always have educational needs, and not all situations of educational need are related to disability.

However, the Inclusive Education Policy for Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Educational Needs states that inclusive education should be aimed at,

[...] all people regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, economic, cultural, or other conditions **[Within this group we can consider, for example,]** people with disabilities, with global development disorders, with high abilities/giftedness; young people, adults and the elderly with disabilities to lifelong education and specific learning disorders; people at risk, of remote origin or nomadic population; people belonging to linguistic, ethnic-racial or cultural minorities, discriminated against, marginalized or who present socioeconomic vulnerability (IFMT, 2022, p. 4, emphasis added, our translation).

However, the document only typifies the public and characterizes them, but does not mention what educational needs they have in order to carry out their activities at the institution. In this way, it argues that the foundations of inclusive education are broader and address all the interfaces of accessibility, but does not present the forms of this service.

2.2 Conception of disability at UNER

The university's statute, in its resolution, states: Resolution "A.U." 41 – UNER: i) Develop a cross-cutting policy of full and equitable educational and labor inclusion for people with disabilities, as well as promote a gender perspective (p. 7). However, this

document does not contain measures to guarantee accessible resources, such as a specific policy and resolution regulating inclusion.

However, by stipulating that a transversal and equitable inclusion policy should be developed, and also mentioning the issue of gender perspective, the document signals a possible opening to an intersectional look at the issue of disability.

Thus, the Argentine document for universities stresses that the concept of disability adopted is in line with the approach of the social model of disability from the perspective of human rights, the detection of barriers and their elimination (Argentina, 2019).

The social model conception is that disability does not stem from an individual problem, but rather from their interaction with society, which oppresses them due to their physical limitations and interaction with environmental barriers, such as lack of accessibility, etc. People with disabilities have to live in a society that does not want to conceive and adapt to human diversity (Oliver, 1990).

3. Institutional structure for Inclusive Education

The two higher education institutions, UNER and IFMT, have institutional structures that guide and offer institutional support for the accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities. At IFMT, the physical institutional structure is represented by the Systemic Directorate for Student Assistance, Inclusion and Diversity, in addition to the decentralized Student Assistance and Inclusion Coordination, which is present on all campuses. At UNER, this institutional structure is represented by the *Comisión de Accesibilidad de la Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos*.

Table 3 describes the physical institutional structure presented in the policy analyzed, which is mainly responsible for developing actions related to inclusive education.

Table 3
Statement of institutional structure and policy

Institution	Institutional Physical Structure	Policies Analyzed
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IFMT	Systemic Directorate for Student Assistance, Inclusion and Diversity (Rectory). Coordination of Student Assistance and Inclusion on all campuses.	Inclusive Education Policy for Students with Disabilities and/or Educational Needs.
UNER	<i>Comisión de Accesibilidad de la Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos.</i>	UNER Statute (2023). <i>Red Interuniversitaria de Discapacidad. Universidades Públicas Argentinas y Perspectiva de Discapacidad.</i>

Source: Prepared by the authors.

UNER's *Comisión de Accesibilidad y Inclusión* has a page on the institution's official website (adapted for sign language) which explains its work and provides a contact point for students with disabilities. However, there is no information on how the committee works.

Because UNER is a public institution, it is part of the *Red Interuniversitaria de Discapacidad (RID): Universidades Públicas Argentinas y Perspectiva de Discapacidad*, which is a document signed by universities in relation to the structural rights of the human condition as a universal condition. It provides important definitions on the subject of the right to education and defines it as:

[...] a public and social good, a universal human right, and a duty of the State, it is urgent to redefine its legacies and give them substance in the current debate on equality, the realization of rights, and the role of public universities in the social, political, economic, and cultural spheres of the Argentine people for greater social justice and self-determination (Argentina, 2019).

Regarding specifically the situation of disability in higher education, it establishes the responsibilities and commitment of the Argentine state to implement progressive policies to guarantee the right to education of these students—particularly in universities—as well as to integrate the perspective of disability and accessibility into all the dynamics of higher education.

The RID Declaration (Argentina, 2019, p. 2, our translation) states:

Public universities—as integral members of the Argentine State—are obligated to comply with and enforce the Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities. The right to higher education is a social, public, and free good and a human right that must be guaranteed in practice to all persons with disabilities, without exclusion of any kind and with respect for diversity, regardless of the nature of the disability, with its different ways of understanding life and the world around us, which enrich the human condition and strengthen its inherent dignity.

In this way, the RID formalizes an ethical, legal, and institutional commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities, reflected in the removal of barriers that prevent access to and participation in higher education. The document also clarifies that the RID will support actions to reflect on and review the acts that create obstacles affecting people with disabilities.

To this end, they are joining forces to draw up and approve Internal Regulations for Public Universities and the Disability Perspective, addressing accessibility issues with the "Expansion, Deepening and Operationalization of the Comprehensive Accessibility Program for Public Universities" (CE CIN Resolution No. 1503/20 ratified by Plenary Agreement No. 1104/20).

The RID and the *Red Universitaria de Educación a Distancia de Argentina* (RUEDA) jointly prepared the "availability and implementation of accessibility and reasonable adaptation strategies in distance education systems (SIED) implemented by national and provincial university institutions" (our translation), taking into account the perspective of disability and accessibility, intersectionality and the incorporation of mainstreaming and intersectionality from the perspective of disability and accessibility in the Statutes and other internal regulations governing the attributions and functions of universities.

The document also explains what an affirmative policy needs to contain: internal regulations that include or integrate the disability/accessibility perspective as well as specific regulations on disability and accessibility. Categorizations must follow the criteria of the type of regulation (Statute, Resolution, Regulations, etc.) and by the governing body that approved it (university assembly, higher councils, departmental councils, etc.).

The main purpose of this compliance is to transform the logical structures of universities, always with a view to the participation of people with disabilities in the representation of their needs in the different higher education institutions. For them to

adapt their statutes in accordance with the guidelines of the *Commission for Accessibility and Inclusion* and to establish their recognition as protagonists who have been appointed by the authorities of the faculties, falling within the scope of their own organization, demonstrating coherence and consistency.

It goes on to describe how the analysis of university policy on accessibility and disability is carried out (in its different dimensions) and divides it into four axes: Axis 1: Institutional practices for the inclusion of deaf people; Axis 2: Institutional practices for communication accessibility; Axis 3: Management processes of university policy on disability and accessibility and Axis 4: Teaching, extension, and research.

Finally, it is pointed out that academic accessibility has been addressed as the greatest weakness of the different figures that accompany the work with students with disabilities and teaching teams, such as Argentine Sign Language interpreters, pedagogical support, accessibility tutors, etc. This weakness in working conditions shows that there is a long way to go to make the disability perspective visible and integrated into budgets, regulations and internal evaluation processes that respond to physical, communication, academic and cultural barriers in order to make the right to higher education effective for people with disabilities in every Argentine university.

Through these actions, affirmative policies, support resources, and accessibility, we can achieve an essential impact on the transformation of societies in pursuit of defending the structural rights of the human condition and building democratic communities based on diversity as an invaluable pillar for the development of peoples.

The IFMT currently has a specific role for a coordinator who manages student assistance and issues related to inclusive education. In January 2022, through Ordinance No. 44, the Ministry of Education distributed Management positions and Gratified Functions between the Ministry of Education and the Institutions of the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific and Technological Education. These Gratified Functions (GF) are intended to structure the NAPNES or equivalent, set up in the teaching units (campuses and UNED) of the Federal Institutes, CEFETs and Colégio Pedro II. Thus, on the IFMT campuses, this GF became the Coordinator of Student Assistance and Inclusion, which is an extremely important milestone considering that until then the role of coordinating the NAPNES was carried out on a voluntary basis, and was a recent political action at the University.

Notably, in addition to all campuses having a student assistance and inclusion coordinator, the rectorate also has this function in a specific systemic directorate to deal with student assistance, inclusion, and diversity issues.

It is worth noting that what we had so far was the Ordinance creating and implementing the NAPNE, and with the approval of this document, the IFMT approved a very detailed inclusive education policy.

Section I deals specifically with Special Education and conceptualizes it as one of the modalities of national education that permeates the educational system at all levels and that must be offered in basic, technical, higher and postgraduate education at IFMT “[...] as a set of specialized services and resources to complement and supplement the teaching-learning process for students with permanent or temporary disabilities” (IFMT, p. 5, 2022, our translation).

The identification of students with specific educational needs is an important topic, as it involves extra-institutional issues and requires greater sensitivity on the part of the teaching and administrative staff. Just like the student who was not previously identified as having specific educational needs, the student who becomes a person with a disability during the course and even at the discretion of the student and/or family to present themselves as a person with a disability at the institution.

In this regard, the document posits that student identification can occur at the time of enrollment, when the student entered through the quota system for Persons with Disabilities; when the student identifies themselves as a Person with a Disability spontaneously, which is when the student, parents or guardians submit the request, at any time, to the Course Coordinators, the Teaching Directorate/Department, or the Student Assistance and Inclusion Coordination (CAES); and lastly, through institutional observation, which is when motivated by the service network or when teachers and/or administrative staff report specific situations to the relevant departments (IFMT, 2023).

This identification process does not have to start with a medical report. This means that care is guaranteed even if the student is in the health network undergoing a diagnosis. It is also important to note that students are guaranteed the right to refuse the support, monitoring, and other procedures provided for under Law 13.146/15, by means of a declaration of refusal (IFMT, 2023).

In terms of IFMT institutional documents, there is a more explanatory definition in 2023. The Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) was established by the “Inclusive Education Policy for Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Educational Needs”

(2022) and instructed by Joint Normative 2/2023, where the procedures for drawing up the IEP are presented. This document defines that the target audience to be served by this instruction is “students who, as a result of disability, specific functional disorders, autism spectrum disorder, transitory or permanent limitations or high skills/giftedness, require reasonable adaptations and/or curricular accessibility” (IFMT, 2023, p. 1, our translation).

The work of the student assistance and inclusion coordinator on the campuses takes place in conjunction with a multidisciplinary team, composed of: a psychologist, a social worker, an educator, a sign language interpreter, a student assistant, an educational affairs technician, and others. At least in theory. This is because in practice, the literature has pointed to major difficulties in team composition and hiring professionals at FIs in Brazil (Tristão, Bezerra & Castro, 2018; Bueno *et al.*, 2022; Zebarto, Vilaronga & Santos, 2021).

Finally, it should be noted that in the last decade the IFMT has presented extremely important institutional policies for the inclusion of students with disabilities, and in these documents, it has deepened the foundations of inclusive education and accessibility, as well as attempting to institutionalize tools, such as the IEP, that operationalize the learning and participation of these students.

IFMT and UNER: Agreements and disagreements on inclusive education policies

The IFMT has evolved in the production of educational policies for students with disabilities. Starting with a regulation in 2013 that would regulate a Support Center for people with specific needs, in 2022 the institution presented a very structured and articulated policy for this group and other possible vulnerabilities.

On the other hand, UNER does not yet have a formalized Inclusion Policy that can guarantee the admission, access, support, permanence, and graduation of students with disabilities.

Unlike IFMT, which organizes its inclusion work through a coordinating body, at UNER these processes are carried out by an *Comisión de Acessibilidad y Inclusión*, which has not yet been regulated. The support provided by the Accessibility and Inclusion Commissions, which are present in the different units of the university, is carried out entirely by faculty members, students, and administrative staff, mostly on a voluntary basis. They provide support through educational psychologists, peer tutors, and Libras interpreters when necessary.

The work of the student assistance and inclusion coordinator at IFMT is remunerated with a bonus, but this achievement is very recent. Before that, just like at UNER, the civil servants who worked at IFMT coordinating inclusion work were not paid for the work they did.

The IFMT's inclusive education policy is recent, considering that the institution has been around for a hundred years (since 1909). It only made its policy official in 2022. This does not mean that the institution is no longer working towards the inclusion of people with disabilities and/or specific needs.

At the UNER, as we have seen, there is no specific policy that focuses on the inclusion of people with disabilities. However, the work of the *Comisión de Accesibilidad y Inclusión* is anchored in the premise of the university's statute, which states that people with disabilities must be guaranteed access, on equal terms with others, to the physical environment, transportation, information, and communication, including systems and technologies, and we must be informed about how to develop proposals that do not generate new exclusions (UNER, 2023).

However, the absence of a specific policy at UNER aimed at an inclusive perspective makes it much more difficult to demand that people's rights are respected, since the few words that are mentioned in the statute do not set out clear guidelines, nor do they define who is responsible or organize the institutional structure. Policies hold the institution's leadership and authorities accountable for promoting quality inclusive education through actions that guarantee this population's right to education. However, establishing policies does not necessarily mean that they are being effectively implemented.

UNER, the Argentine university investigated in this study, complies with national legislative recommendations on inclusion. However, guaranteeing the rights of people with disabilities in higher education depends fundamentally on its institutional policies, a path that is still under construction at the institution. The recentness of this agenda is attested to by the fact that the term 'inclusion' was only incorporated into its statutes in 2023.

Another important point to mention is that Article 11, subsection N, of the National Education Law No. 26.206 states that one of the objectives and goals of the national education policy is: "To provide people with temporary or permanent disabilities with an educational program that allows for the maximum development of

their potential, their integration, and the full exercise of their rights” (Argentina, 2006, our translation). The word integration appears nine times in this document.

That said, inclusion is aimed at everyone, regardless of their differences; everyone can be together, in the same space and at the same time. It constitutes an educational paradigm based on the concept of human rights, which combines equality and difference as inseparable values, and which advances the idea of formal equity by contextualizing the historical circumstances of the production of exclusion inside and outside school (Brazil, 2008).

In Argentina, the integrationist and inclusive model is accepted as the possibility for students with disabilities to be enrolled in special schools or classrooms, thus remaining behind society (Dalberio *et al.*, 2012) in primary education. Caregivers are the ones who decide where their child with a disability will study, whether in a regular school or a special school.

The National Education Law stresses that people with disabilities must access the education system through regular schools, but in cases where the support configurations have been insufficient, the trajectory is continued in special education facilities. This terminology has changed and they are now called comprehensive formerly special, changing their functions and expanding their tasks to support educational integration in regular schools, offering complementary pathways to students with integration processes (Muñoz, 2017).

Meanwhile, the integrationist model is still in place in Argentina’s basic education system (Muñoz, 2017). This can represent a greater difficulty for these students, who, upon entering college, will interact with people without disabilities, just as they will in society and the job market. However, during their education, they did not have the opportunity to adapt to this reality, as they attended comprehensive schools with special education and had no contact with people without disabilities.

We know that in Brazil, despite institutional legislation and regulations, the paradigm of the integrationist education model is no longer acceptable in legal dealings on the subject at various levels of education, especially in the early grades of early childhood, elementary, and secondary education. However, in practice, the processes of inclusion across Brazil’s vast territory and diversity face a number of challenges, including making schools increasingly inclusive for all students, at all levels and in all systems of Brazilian education.

Final considerations

Although UNER has a committee to work for inclusion, it lacks affirmative policies that officially guarantee the admission and permanence of students with disabilities. It is hoped that this research will stimulate critical reflection on the needs and rights of all to access higher education. In contrast, the IFMT has a detailed inclusive policy, covering all levels of education, and has documents such as Normative Instruction 02/2023 to strengthen its inclusive actions.

The inclusion of minority groups in higher education around the world remains a huge challenge, and it is necessary for the academic community at all levels to be involved in the process of promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities so that these individuals can have their rights guaranteed and fulfilled and can truly experience an equitable and diverse society, enabling them to have a life with greater prospects for the future and human dignity.

This scientific production may contribute those interested in the topic revisiting and evaluating institutional policies in HEIs. Discussing policies that guide admission, accessibility, support resources and permanence at this educational level in Latin American universities is becoming increasingly necessary to combat structural ableism and corroborate an equitable society for all people, which is the central theme of this study.

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RESUMO

A Inclusão educacional de pessoas em situação de deficiência acompanha o percurso histórico da garantia de direitos humanos. Muitos países da América Latina, tais como Brasil e Argentina, têm se comprometido com o reconhecimento dos valores de justiça social e de uma efetiva participação da comunidade universitária nas produções das políticas institucionais fundamentadas na educação inclusiva. O objetivo deste estudo foi descrever políticas institucionais de inclusão na educação superior às pessoas em situação de deficiência no Instituto Federal de Mato Grosso – IFMT (Brasil) e Universidade entre Rios – UNER (Argentina). Trata-se de uma pesquisa documental e bibliográfica de abordagem qualitativa. Os resultados indicam que o IFMT possui uma política recente e detalhada para inclusão, abrangendo todos os níveis de ensino. Em contraste, a UNER, embora tenha comissões de inclusão e acessibilidade formadas por voluntários, ainda não possui uma política institucional formal para garantir o ingresso e a permanência de estudantes com deficiência. A UNER reflete o contexto argentino, onde a integração é o paradigma dominante, mas carece de políticas afirmativas que assegurem oficialmente a inclusão desses estudantes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ensino superior; Pessoa com deficiência; Inclusão; Brasil; Argentina.

RESUMEN

La inclusión educativa de personas con discapacidad acompaña el recorrido histórico de la garantía de los derechos humanos. Muchos países de América Latina, como Brasil y Argentina, se han comprometido con el reconocimiento de los valores de justicia social y la efectiva participación de la comunidad universitaria en la producción de políticas institucionales basadas en la educación inclusiva. El objetivo de este estudio fue describir políticas institucionales de inclusión dedicadas a garantizar la ampliación de la educación superior a las personas con discapacidad en el Instituto Federal de Mato Grosso (IFMT) en Brasil y la Universidad de Entre Ríos (UNER) en Argentina. Se trata de una investigación documental y bibliográfica de enfoque cualitativo. Los resultados mostraron que el IFMT tiene una política reciente de inclusión para personas con discapacidad y necesidades educativas específicas, mientras que la UNER aún no cuenta con una política institucional al respecto. La UNER tiene comités de inclusión y accesibilidad compuestos por trabajadores de la educación que se ofrecen como voluntarios para promover la educación de todos los estudiantes con discapacidad, mientras que el IFMT designa a profesionales para gestionar el tema mediante un cargo remunerado, a través de la oferta de servicios de coordinación de asistencia estudiantil e inclusión. La UNER refleja el contexto argentino donde la integración es el paradigma vigente.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Superior; Persona con Discapacidad; Inclusión; Brasil; Argentina.