

GLOBAL CONVERSATION 2 - CHILE

28th May 2026

A global conversation continues

The second *Every Learner Matters* conversation brought together participants from multiple countries to examine how education systems are responding to increasing diversity, inequality, and political and social complexity. Building on the first conversation that focussed on Australia, this session turned to Chile as a case that was described as both highly successful in some international measures and highly complex in terms of inclusion and equity.

Two Chilean colleagues, Romina Madrid and Carmen Montecinos, grounded the discussion by setting the scene – this was then followed by a Q&A/conversation around the themes that we brought up. As in the previous meeting, four questions guided the conversation:

Is the education system in Chile adequately preparing all learners to thrive in a complex and changing world?

The discussion suggested a cautious and uneven answer. While Chile shows pockets of strong educational practice, the system is marked by deep structural inequality and fragmentation across municipal, subsidised private, and private schools. Socioeconomic segregation remains a defining feature, with public schools increasingly serving vulnerable learners, including low-income students, migrants, and those with disabilities. This is compounded by post-pandemic challenges such as absenteeism and disengagement following extended school closures and limited remote learning. Although inclusive practices exist, they are not yet widespread enough to indicate that the system as a whole is adequately preparing all learners.

- Highly fragmented system across municipal, subsidised, and private sectors
- One of the most socioeconomically segregated systems internationally
- Public schools increasingly concentrated with vulnerable learners
- Post-pandemic issues: absenteeism, disengagement, reduced attendance

How far are existing policies fostering inclusion and equity in education?

Participants described a tension between inclusion reforms and a strong accountability and market framework. Inclusion-oriented policies include restrictions on student selection and co-payment, expanded special education support, and reforms encouraging formative assessment alongside inclusive design approaches. However, these operate alongside high-stakes testing, performance-based accountability, enrolment-driven funding, and the possibility of school closure. As a result, schools face competing pressures between equity goals and performance demands, creating structural contradictions in how inclusion is implemented in practice.

- Inclusion policies: reduced selection, funding for special needs, co-payment limits
- Shift toward formative assessment and inclusive education frameworks
- Strong accountability system: high-stakes testing and school closure risk
- Enrolment-based funding reinforces market competition between schools

Are these policies working for all children and young people?

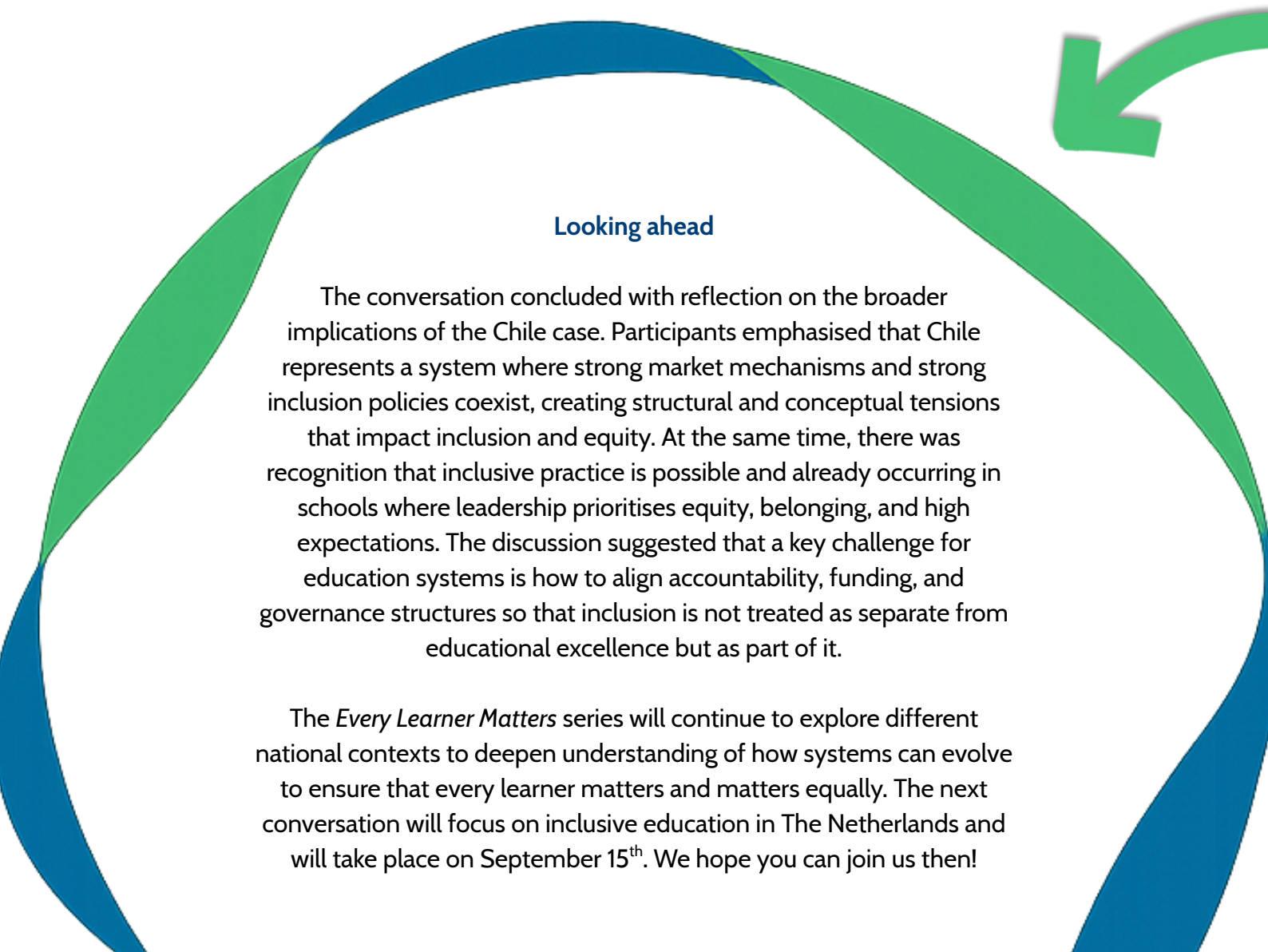
The discussion suggested a mixed effectiveness. Some schools demonstrate strong inclusive practice through leadership, relational work, and personalised learning, but these remain a minority. System-wide inequalities persist, particularly through segregation that concentrates disadvantaged students in municipal schools. Participants also noted that some learners remain formally enrolled but are not meaningfully included in learning processes. Overall, while policies have enabled positive examples, their impact is uneven and constrained by broader structural conditions.

- Strong inclusive practice exists but only in a minority of schools
- Effective schools show strong leadership and personalised support
- Some learners are enrolled but not meaningfully included in many cases

What are the barriers and how might these be addressed?

Key barriers are present across structural, policy, cultural, and implementation levels. The market-based education system reinforces segregation, while frequent political shifts undermine policy continuity and coherence. Accountability systems are seen as narrow, focusing on underperformance rather than system-wide support. Cultural factors, including meritocratic thinking and deficit views of disadvantaged groups, further limit inclusion. Schools also face practical constraints such as limited training, time, and resources for inclusive teaching, although some are developing effective community-based and multilingual approaches.

- Market-based enrolment system reinforces segregation
- Policy instability reduces continuity and long-term reform impact
- Accountability systems focus on control rather than universal support
- Cultural and operational barriers limit inclusive practice (training, time, attitudes)



Looking ahead

The conversation concluded with reflection on the broader implications of the Chile case. Participants emphasised that Chile represents a system where strong market mechanisms and strong inclusion policies coexist, creating structural and conceptual tensions that impact inclusion and equity. At the same time, there was recognition that inclusive practice is possible and already occurring in schools where leadership prioritises equity, belonging, and high expectations. The discussion suggested that a key challenge for education systems is how to align accountability, funding, and governance structures so that inclusion is not treated as separate from educational excellence but as part of it.

The *Every Learner Matters* series will continue to explore different national contexts to deepen understanding of how systems can evolve to ensure that every learner matters and matters equally. The next conversation will focus on inclusive education in The Netherlands and will take place on September 15th. We hope you can join us then!