



European Education Area Strategic Framework **Working Group on Equality and Values**

Report from the PLA: Towards quality, inclusive and accessible education
– effectively meeting all learners' needs

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REPORT ON THE PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY “TOWARDS QUALITY, INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION” IN BRUSSELS ON 19-20 MARCH, 2024

INTRODUCTION

The fourth Peer Learning Activity (PLA) of the Working Group on Equality and Values, a collaborative endeavour of the European Commission, DG EAC and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE), took place in Brussels (Belgium) on 19-20 March 2024 at EASNIE premises. The PLA brought together members of both Working Group on Equality and Values and Pathways to School Success from 15 participating countries (Austria, Albania, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia), several stakeholder and international organisations (COFACE Families Europe, EAEA, EDF, EFEE, European Schoolnet, Eurochild, IGLYO, EASNIE, ETUCE, LLLP, OECD, OSG of the European Schools, and UNICEF) among which four were invited to present their work (COFACE, European Schoolnet, Eurochild, EASNIE, and the OSG of the European Schools). Speakers from two countries (IS and UK) were invited to give presentations as well as a Professor for the University of Leeds. Policy officers from the European Commission (DG EAC and EACEA) and four consultants (ICF and PPMI) attended the PLA. The PLA focused on the theme: “Towards quality, inclusive and accessible education - effectively meeting all learners’ needs”.

This report presents the major insights, findings, discussions, and inspirational practices pertaining to the themes of the PLA. Through policy examples and exposure to various practices in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Poland and Sweden, as well as in the European Schools, the PLA sought to identify key learning points on policy implementation relating to inclusive education.

1. SETTING THE SCENE

The PLA scene was set by representatives from EASNIE, DG EAC and the University of Leeds. EASNIE and DG EAC stressed how the ultimate scope of inclusive education is to look at all of those who are at risk of exclusion. The inclusive dimension of education is being intensively promoted at the EU level, particularly in the context of the European Education Area (EEA), which is founded upon the values of equity and inclusion. The ongoing evaluations of EEA and the Erasmus+ programme both look into the important efforts made to fostering inclusion. At the EU level there is an overall need for cohesive action, with a call to unify various stakeholders and establish clear political objectives when it comes to inclusion. At the same time, there are clear challenges of creating genuinely inclusive environments, rather than superficial solutions or segregated settings.

The keynote speech by a professor of disability and inclusion from the University of Leeds highlighted how inclusive education hinges on several preconditions, including curriculum, culture and organisation, assessment, and pedagogy. These elements collectively shape the educational landscape, ensuring representation, participation, and stakeholder engagement. Rethinking traditional educational paradigms away from competitive individualism is essential for fostering inclusive practices, where students are not mere bearers of results but active participants in their learning journey.

To illustrate these points the speaker described the manifold challenges the Australian educational system is facing.

BOX 1: CHALLENGES TO A TRULY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION – THE CASE OF AUSTRALIA

Australian schools do not consistently deliver an inclusive education that protects students with disability from violence, abuse, and neglect. Students with disability face multiple barriers to inclusive education, underpinned by negative attitudes and low expectations. Schools systematically exclude students with disability by not providing appropriate adjustments and supports to enable their participation in classrooms and in the broader school community.

In many cases, through gatekeeping, students with disability are channelled into special/segregated schools and classes. Schools also fail to engage students with disability and their parents in decision making. They use and misuse exclusionary discipline on students and often fail to plan and support students' transition to further learning and work.

It has now been increasingly acknowledged that a safe, quality and inclusive education can only be delivered through significant transformation of the entire school system. A Review of Disability Standards for Education was launched in 2005 and a large number of reviews and inquiries across Australia have looked into the experiences of students with disabilities in schools. In parallel, legislative efforts towards inclusive education were also made (e.g., DSE¹ Review in 2015), in order to deal with the manifold real-world challenges to reaching a fully inclusive education system in Australia.

Key discussion points and observations related to the keynote speech

- Education requires radical inclusion as a shared social commitment. Inclusive education as a human right must encompass also gender equality and needs to build upon evidence-based approaches, recognising existing disparities and the need to overcome barriers to achieve true inclusivity. Gender biases within educational practices contribute to these issues of exclusion.
- Regarding financial aspects, the significant costs of exclusion must be acknowledged. The recurring exclusion of individuals/students comes with considerable expenses. Over the long term, students integrated into mainstream education rather than segregated settings incur lower costs, resulting in reduced burden on social welfare systems and greater economic independence.
- It needs to be acknowledged that smaller schools typically do not have so much resources, but they are resourceful.
- Parents of children with special needs often opt for segregated settings because they are not provided with real choices as in the mainstream settings their children's needs are not properly met. It is important to ask as well what children want and not only what world we want for our children (learner-centered approach).

¹ DSE stands for Disability Standards for Education.

2. THEMATIC SESSION 1: POLICY DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES FOR FLEXIBLE SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

The next plenary session included examples of how some countries (Ireland, Iceland, and Poland) are dealing with the integration of learners with special education needs (SEN) in schools.

BOX 2: Responding to the reasons and effects of the increasing number of special classes in mainstream schools in Ireland

Special education in Ireland is a pressing issue as there has been a notable surge in students with special needs (particularly autism), that also prompted a quest to understand the underlying causes of this increase. Increased demand from parents seeking support for their children has led to a prevalent narrative favoring extra segregation measures, driven by the belief that such responses are necessary due to the perceived difficulty of integrating these students into mainstream classrooms. However, there is a desire to shift away from this narrative towards a more inclusive approach, also in line with international standards (e.g., UNCRDP). Recently, a Minister for Special Education was appointed for the first time. However, despite significant funding allocations, questions arise regarding the effectiveness of this investment and the outcomes, which often take years to materialise.

Currently, the system in the country operates with three tracks: mainstream, special classes, and special schools. Stakeholder consultations are expected to play a crucial role in transitioning to a one-track approach. A special class is established when there are at least six students requiring specialised assistance. Students in special classes typically still interact, to varying degrees, with mainstream classmates based on their individualized learning plans. However, transitioning from a special class to a mainstream one is rare, for a number of reasons including a reported over-reliance on the outcomes of cognitive assessment reports. In January 2024 the National Council For Special Education (NCSE) published "**An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society**", Policy Advice Paper². In addition, Ireland (paired with Finland) is currently benefitting from the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) programme³ to support the development of a more inclusive education system. Technical support is provided by EASNIE. The TSI support, which will be available to Ireland over 2024 and 2025, is intended to develop a roadmap for a more inclusive education system, which takes account of the Irish context.

There are different interpretations in Ireland as to what constitutes an inclusive education system. For some, it means the provision of additional special schools and special classes, while for others, it means all students being educated together. Closure of special schools is not currently under consideration, with campus schools seen as an interim solution. In the interim, campus schools will be established, where mainstream and special needs institutions collaborate, promoting social interaction between mainstream and special needs students.

BOX 3: Developing more flexible funding models to ensure effective provision in mainstream schools in Iceland

In Iceland, an audit on inclusive education in 2016/17 by EASNIE signaled the need for reform towards inclusion, leading to the development of Flexible Policies for Inclusive Education Systems (FPIES). Namely, a need was identified for redirecting the funding mechanisms away from compensatory support approaches towards those underpinned by intervention and prevention approaches in order to increase the system's capacity to be equitable, efficient and cost-effective. The first lever consisted of initiating the debate among the stakeholders (40 meetings all over Iceland with 2400 participants) to agree on a shared conception of inclusive education. The second

² <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Inclusive-Education-for-an-Inclusive-Society.pdf>

³ https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument/technical-support-instrument-tsi_en

lever (ongoing) is the Education Policy to 2030⁴ which should lead to the adoption of a Law on inclusive education, granting access to appropriate services without barriers to children, parents and the whole school community. The third lever foresees the preparation of the **FPIES project** – Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems⁵, which aims to systematically examine different approaches to educational financing and identify an effective funding policy framework/tools that works towards reducing disparities in education. During this phase, the project was translated and adapted to the Icelandic context. Indeed, the original FPIES project (2016-2018) was based on direct co-operation between eight partners: the Ministries of Education in Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Slovenia, EASNIE and Universitat Ramon Llull. The pilot study in Iceland was launched in 13 municipalities. Currently, Iceland is implementing the project in 50 municipalities where the self-assessment tool was introduced as the beginning of strategic planning for the allocation of funds to support quality education for all.

BOX 4: Capacity building in mainstream schools in Poland

In Poland, with a population of 37 million, and a significant influx of Ukrainian students due to the war, the number of students with special needs has doubled since 2006. Parents have the autonomy to decide whether their child should attend mainstream or special schools, with 70% opting for mainstream education. Recognising the need for support in schools, the Ministry of Education engaged in a process facilitated by the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Program (currently TSI) and received assistance from EASNIE. This process involved transitioning from legislation to stakeholder involvement, culminating in the formulation of 16 recommendations and four priority actions, with assumptions for future legislation based on the biopsychosocial model made in 2021. Efforts are ongoing to ensure the implementation of these recommendations within the education system. Key elements of this endeavor include raising awareness through a significant social campaign and fostering collaboration with stakeholders. Social campaigns like "**Education at hand**"⁶, conferences, workshops, and pilot projects have been undertaken to promote awareness and practical solutions. This also included nationwide training and consultations for 30,000 staff of inclusive education as well as postgraduate studies for teachers free of charge and introduction of a new position (special pedagogue) in mainstream settings, as well as adapting IT systems. The overarching goal is to instigate a shift in mindsets, monitoring and evaluation processes, specialist provision, and cross-sectoral cooperation, leading to a systematic change in the whole education system. Specialist centers for inclusive education have been established, with 23 centers created to date and 285 more centres planned to be established within the European Funds for Social Development Program (2024-2027). Another important milestone is the implementation of the "**Accessible School for All**"⁷ project (2023-2025) in cooperation with the Educational Research Institute, UNICEF, Ministry of National Education, 12 universities and NGOs. The project is based on the "learning by doing" approach. This initiative seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

⁴ <https://atrico.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Iceland-Education-Policy-2030-and-its-implementation.pdf>

⁵ [fpies-summary-en.pdf \(european-agency.org\)](https://european-agency.org/fpies-summary-en.pdf)

⁶ [Edukacja w zasięgu ręki. Nowoczesna edukacja w Twojej szkole \(edukacja.wzasięgu.reki.pl\)](https://edukacja.wzasięgu.reki.pl)

⁷ [Accessible School for All - IBE](https://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/accessible-school-for-all)

Key challenges and new developments discussed during the session

There is a need for capacity building and supporting teachers

- Several countries stressed the need to train and support teachers with continuous professional development to strengthen capacities to reply to the needs of learners with SEN. For example, in Czechia, there is a training available for sign language teachers to equip them with the necessary skills to effectively communicate with deaf students. The necessity of equipping teachers with continuous professional development was also mentioned in the context of effectively supporting students with learning difficulties or disabilities like dyslexia. Similarly to Poland, in Portugal seminars with school leaders and coordinators focus on professional development. School Association Training Centers are tasked with the design and implementation of training for school clusters in cooperation with schools. This is carried out by jointly drawing up an annual/multiannual training plan for a school cluster, based on the priorities put forward by the associated schools. Each School Association Training Centre is affiliated to a school cluster and located in the same geographical area. This approach ensures that the Centres tailor professional learning to meet the needs of the school clusters.
- produce educational materials for everyone, not only for SEN students.
- Beside providing trainings, to support teachers effectively, it is also essential to reduce their administrative burdens.
- Building on shared responsibility within the educational community, it was also suggested that students can also support teachers in creating an inclusive environment.
- While parents of students with special needs value Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), such assistants are not involved in teaching. Evidence suggests that students with access to SNAs may have poorer long-term outcomes due to receiving less instructional support and potentially becoming overly reliant on this assistance.
- Overall, the biggest challenge remains teacher shortages which calls for further actions also in the context of developing more inclusive education systems.

The importance of engaging stakeholders and considering research findings

- It was stressed how in Poland understanding the root cause of learning challenges is paramount. They collaborate closely with accessibility advisors to implement inclusive measures and engage multiple stakeholders. The partnership with UNICEF is pivotal, focusing on the practical implementation of the learning by doing approach, including detection and intervention strategies. Polish universities operate with significant autonomy, and they actively involve NGOs and learners to ensure their voices are heard.
- **Research** plays a vital role, with efforts underway to make data accessible to teachers while adhering to privacy regulations like GDPR.

Access to mainstream schools for pupils with special educational needs

- A question about admission of children with disabilities in mainstream schools was raised, asking about actual practices on accepting children with disabilities in mainstream schools. Even though countries' legislative frameworks as well as their commitments under the UNCRPD (article 24)⁸ should guarantee the right of children with disabilities to be educated in the schools and communities where they live (UNCRPD article 24, General comment 4 of the committee), in practice the preparedness of mainstream schools to do so vary between countries and within countries and there are still gaps between legislation and practice.

⁸ [Article 24 - Education | Division for Inclusive Social Development \(DISD\) \(un.org\)](#)

- While representatives of several countries referred to their educational laws explicitly stipulating that schools should admit all pupils, others explained that in practice this is not always happening, and more efforts are needed to ensure fully equal access of students with disabilities.

3. VISITS TO THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

PLA participants visited two European Schools: the European Schools Ixelles (III) and Evere (II) to understand the challenges they are facing and see inspiring practices.

The European Schools are actively striving for quality education for all students, including those with special needs, through various measures such as addressing physical barriers and empowering educators. They align with EU initiatives like the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities⁹ and apply diverse strategies for inclusive education. These strategies require organisational, attitudinal, and policy changes, as well as stakeholder consultation and staff training. In 2019, following a comprehensive assessment¹⁰ of the provision of Educational Support and Inclusive Education, the European Schools system set up an Action Plan on Educational Support and Inclusive Education¹¹ and revised its Policy on Educational Support and Inclusive Education¹² accordingly. Last year, over 1500 professionals across all the European Schools underwent comprehensive training sessions to learn about inclusive practices. Prioritising professional development and acknowledging diverse perspectives aim to create an inclusive environment conducive to all learners' success. However, challenges persist, including curriculum inflexibility, high student numbers, and limited collaboration time among professionals, maintaining the need for additional efforts towards equitable access and success for all learners.

- **European School Brussels III (Ixelles)** has several initiatives in place to support students' inclusion. For example, the school developed internal guidelines to foster well-being, implemented a buddy programme and developed policies on bullying prevention and intervention. Every student and parent associated with the school has the guidelines for good behaviour at their disposal. The rules are also outlined in the daily book/agenda of the student. The School has a buddy programme in place which helps students from primary education to transition to secondary school. After receiving a training themselves, buddies support younger students to handle conflicts and to properly use social media. The school follows the anti-bullying strategy¹³ based on the **KiVA program**¹⁴ summarised in box 5 below, which is implemented in several European Schools.
- The diversity of backgrounds of the children in the European Schools system requires particular attention to children with special needs, for whom there are no other alternatives for schooling in their native language (L1) in the country of residence. Differentiation is the foundation of any education targeting the needs of student; it is essential for all students, not just those who need support.
- Altogether 25% of the students receives some sort of educational support in the school classified in three categories : general, moderate and intensive.¹⁵ Different types and levels of support have been set up in order to provide appropriate support to students with specific learning needs and difficulties in order to enable them to develop and progress according

⁹ [Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities | EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32008%2F06%2F01)

¹⁰ <https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/studies/educational-support>

¹¹ <https://www.eursc.eu/Documents/2018-12-D-34-en-5.pdf>

¹² <https://www.eursc.eu/Documents/2018-12-D-34-en-5.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.eeb3.eu/app/uploads/2022/03/B3-Anti-bullying-Policy-EN.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.eeb3.eu/en/kiva-2/>

¹⁵ <https://www.eeb3.eu/en/learning-support-2/>

to their potential and integrate successfully, while accessing the standard curriculum as much as possible.

- Currently around 170 pupils receive intensive individualised support. The procedure to request the support depends on education level: in primary education the parents can make a request to the teacher, while in secondary education it is more the teacher's duty to make a request. The school pays special attention to early detection of needs at pre-primary and primary levels.
- Three of the main challenges to inclusive education in the School identified are (1) the availability of specialised staff with the required language skills (considering the variety of language sections available), (2) the increased demand for support in the last years of secondary education, (3) the European Baccalaureat being the only exit path.

BOX 5: the KiVa program¹⁶

KiVa is a research- and evidence-based antibullying program that has been developed in the University of Turku, Finland, with funding from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The effectiveness of KiVa has been proven scientifically through a large national randomized and controlled trial as well as in several different studies. KiVa is being used around the world and it is the world's most studied anti-bullying program. The goal of KiVa is to prevent bullying and to tackle the cases of bullying effectively. The program is based on decades of extensive research of bullying and its mechanisms. KiVa is based on three main elements: prevention (e.g., through student lessons and online games), intervention and monitoring (annual online surveys for both students and staff).

- In the **European School Brussels II (Evere)** the "**Vivre ensemble**"¹⁷ programme, summarised in box 6 below, serves as a cornerstone for fostering inclusivity and addressing conflicts among students.
- Transition support emerges as another critical aspect, particularly during periods of significant change such as the transition from primary to secondary education. Here, detailed plans involving parents and students help alleviate anxieties and facilitate a smooth adjustment process.
- Multilingualism, while enriching the educational experience, also presents challenges, especially for students with SEN. The schools recognise the need for tailored support to address language barriers effectively and ensure equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. Recruitment and support for specialised staff are paramount to the success of inclusive education initiatives. With a focus on qualifications and language proficiency, schools strive to provide adequate resources and expertise to meet diverse student needs effectively. As policymakers contemplate strategies to enhance inclusive practices, key priorities emerge. These include advocating for smaller class sizes, facilitating the recruitment of specialised staff, and empowering schools with greater autonomy to implement tailored solutions. By addressing these foundational aspects, policymakers can play a pivotal role in fostering inclusive environments where every student thrives.

BOX 6: Vivre Ensemble programme

Through this initiative, the schools aim to provide emotional and social support, along with guidance for managing challenging behaviors. This proactive approach emphasises prevention, recognising the importance of creating a supportive environment where all students feel valued

¹⁶ [KiVa is an anti-bullying programme | KiVa Antibullying Program | Just another KiVa Koulu site \(kivaprogram.net\)](#)

¹⁷ [Vivre-ensemble-at-EEBII-EN-April-2021.pdf \(ceb2.be\)](#)

and included. To further bolster inclusion efforts, various strategies are employed, tailored to the unique needs and contexts of each school site. For instance, quiet rooms in Woluwe offer a space for meditation, promoting a calm environment and aiding students who may struggle with sensory overload. In Evere, sensory rooms instead cater for students with special needs, ensuring that they receive the support necessary for their optimal development. Playground organisation plays a pivotal role in fostering positive interactions and minimizing instances of bullying. By designating specific zones and appointing playground coordinators, both Woluwe and Evere schools have seen a reduction in incidents, demonstrating the effectiveness of proactive measures.

4. THEMATIC SESSION 2: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES TO SUPPORT LEARNERS' DIVERSE NEEDS

The PLA included examples of how some countries (Cyprus, Greece, Portugal and Sweden) are dealing with the monitoring, identification and support of learners with special education needs (SEN) in schools.

BOX 7: Monitoring and evaluation of policies/strategic plans in Portugal

Portugal has designed a system to monitor the implementation of the law on inclusive education (**Educação Inclusiva**). The action plan is based on monitoring, production of resources for training the staff, trainings for trainers, National programme for training teachers and technicians, research in the field of inclusive educational practice as well as dissemination and communication. Since 2018, the Decree-Law on Inclusive Education (DL 54/2018, 6th July) has been in place. Two years after implementation, an evaluation of the decree implementation was carried out and every five years a new monitoring will take place. The action plan is being implemented with the support of the Structural Reform Support Service (DG REFORM) and of EASNIE. The process involved several steps, including desk review, interviews with key decision makers (government bodies, parents...), online survey, visits to school clusters. Results were disseminated/presented to several stakeholders (Ministries of Education in Portugal, Norway and Estonia, EASNIE, European Commission, school clusters). A guide has been drawn up to support the application of the monitoring system of the implementation of the legal framework for inclusive education.

BOX 8: Monitoring and evaluation of policies/strategic plans in Sweden

Responding to long-term requests by the authorities, civil society, and the international community, Sweden **conducted a public inquiry in 2022** to assess conditions for children with impairments in schools, with results published in 2023. The inquiry identified several challenges. Importantly, it established how difficult it is to monitor how the conditions for children and pupils with impairments develop over time and how the interventions are working. In fact, it is a challenge even to define the term impairment itself and to measure its prevalence as information about individuals' impairments is considered to be highly sensitive data. However, this can never be sufficient grounds for not attending to the conditions for these children and pupils in the school system. Better knowledge is a prerequisite for these children and pupils to be able to have the same prospects and conditions, as far as possible, as other children in the school system. The inquiry resulted in a proposal to build upon- and strengthen existing surveys and to create a coherent monitoring model that better serves the needs. Four specific areas of action were identified: development of detailed activity statistics, detailed questionnaire/survey studies, the development of a standardised metric, and support for research.

BOX 9: Early identification and support measures for learners with identified needs in Cyprus

In Cyprus, District Committees of Special Education (DCSE) are tasked with assessing children who may have special needs. All stakeholders, including parents and staff, are encouraged to provide information if they suspect a student may have special needs. Once the assessment is done, the results are referred to the DCSE, which determines placement of the concerned students and the necessary measures to support their individual needs. Notably, there's an early intervention programme for children with hearing impairment (ages 0-3), a collaborative effort among the health, education, and social welfare ministries. This is considered as a good practice. The country is transitioning towards a more inclusive education system, focusing on dialogue, timely evaluation, intervention, and support, along with reasonable accommodation, ultimately leading to legislative changes. As part of these efforts, the ministry is implementing actions to transform schools into more human-centered environments, highlighting the importance of having inspiring leaders who engage with all stakeholders.

BOX 10: C. Effective support during learners' transitions in Greece

In Greece, the need for inclusive education is underscored by sobering statistics: 32% of children remain at risk of poverty, and there are approximately 44,500 children with migration backgrounds. Moreover, there has been a notable increase in the number of students with SEN over the past year. Despite the progress made through recent comprehensive reforms, significant challenges persist. To address these, efforts have been directed towards establishing well-organised and systematic transition phases, including programs implemented by schools to facilitate smooth transitions for students. This involves creating flexible learning pathways, facilitating transitions from special to mainstream education settings, and preparing students for the transition to adulthood and the labor market through vocational education and training (VET) policies. Specifically for students with special needs, there are initiatives aimed at facilitating transitions to autonomous living and from secondary to tertiary education, including accommodations such as oral exams and accessing university without an entrance exam. Notably, the country is engaged in the implementation of the European Child Guarantee through the TSI project.

Key challenges and new developments discussed during the session

Challenges with monitoring inclusive education policies

- In Sweden, the choice of relying on surveys rather than admin data is due to the strict **data protections regulations** that only allow collection of sensitive data in case of a high level of public interest. Data can only be analysed at a highly aggregated level which is in tension with parents' requests for understanding what specific schools can achieve. Similarly, Ireland also struggles with lack of data especially for measuring results and outcomes and provide sufficient feedback to funding bodies.
- Poland faces difficulties due to a limited (not specific enough) set of disabilities registered in the system that makes meaningful analysis difficult.
- Belgium (French community) is transitioning towards integrated/inclusive education. The plan is to have a file ("DAcCe", *Dossier d'Accompagnement de l'Élève*) for each student to ensure continuity in the support throughout their transitions across the educational levels / institutions. The objective of the DAcCe is to enable persistent difficulties to be identified, the support put in place to be monitored, evaluated and adjusted. The DAcCe is therefore

designed to enable educational teams to monitor the child's progress and ensure continuity of learning.

- In Belgium (Flemish community), data collection primarily serves the funding system to identify needs. There is no specific monitoring strategy for inclusive education or analysis conducted within the Ministry, but there are research projects and studies commissioned.

Inspiring practices and alternative solutions to monitor inclusive education policies

- Croatia has developed a fully centralised online tracking system that delivers longitudinal data on pupils' progress, making it possible not only to link needs to input but also to look at some outputs – e.g. in terms of progress to the next level(s) of education. Only certain staff at the Ministry can have access to this data. Pupils with special needs are also receiving additional points in the application process when entering secondary/tertiary education, and this is also registered in the system, and promotes better tracking. Czechia currently has a good amount of administrative data available for the Ministry to be analysed, but it is moving towards a system similar to the Croatian one.
- In Portugal, data on inclusion is publicly accessible via the Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics¹⁸ website, which includes information on organisational resources supporting learning and inclusion, the measures that are being implemented, the resources and others. In addition, tools are provided to schools for self-assessment and monitoring. (A guide has been drawn up to support the application of the monitoring system of the implementation of the legal framework for inclusive education¹⁹. The Guide for Schools is based on the work of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, with the Portuguese Ministry of Education, and aims to contribute to the practical application of the monitoring system in the context of each school cluster, promoting internal reflection on what school cluster does.
- These are however not obligatory to apply. A national evaluation of the ongoing reform will take place soon.
- In the lack of systematic data available for monitoring, Ireland is relying on educational inspectors for feedback, some of them specialising in SEM and delivering reports on inclusion. In Belgium (Flemish system), researchers are called upon to examine the limited administrative data and conduct additional data collections as needed.

Challenges related to identification of needs and integration in mainstream education

- There is often a concern about maintaining children's autonomy while ensuring inclusivity, especially as disabilities are detected at earlier stages. Malta's approach involves encouraging students to attempt mainstream education and closely monitoring provisions to prevent abuse and avoid labeling children prematurely. Croatia faces similar issues with supplementary schools, where additional support measures, such as social allowances and curriculum adjustments contribute to higher enrollment.
- There are concerns about class disruption and declining parental involvement as well as about the role of artificial intelligence (AI). AI is emerging as a valuable tool in personalised learning and feedback, offering various assessment methods and aiding blind students for example. However, it is important to integrate competence-based curricula with AI.

¹⁸ <https://www.dgeec.medu.pt/art/educacao-pre-escolar-basico-e-secundario/undefined/undefined/66014e960c7bc47914575931>

¹⁹ https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/EInclusiva/dge_educ_incl_reg_juridico_net.pdf

Empowering stakeholders

- It is crucial to train the teachers to support them in teaching in inclusive classrooms rather than relying solely on specialised staffs either outside or within schools.
- Educating the general public on their responsibilities and rights in inclusive education is also deemed crucial to increase community involvement.

5. INSPIRING PRACTICES AND INSIGHTS FROM STAKEHOLDER ORGANISATIONS

The PLA also showcased the position that stakeholder organisations are taking and the practices they follow in relation to inclusive education and learners' well-being.

Eurochild

The organisation's mission is to advance the well-being of children through advocacy, member collaboration, and research, supporting both grassroots and institutional approaches. Eurochild's advocacy efforts and member outreach strategies include publishing thematic reports²⁰ featuring insights from 38 members and engaging directly with students. Main findings from their work on enhancing inclusivity and equity encompass the need for a comprehensive approach involving various factors such as resource allocation, cultural shifts, inclusive curriculum development, and the implementation of school well-being policies. Additionally, mechanisms for monitoring progress and community engagement, including neighborhood support initiatives, were highlighted. Eurochild's Children Manifesto²¹ for the European elections reflects the concerns of students surveyed, emphasising education, bullying, and online safety as key priorities.

COFACE – FAMILIES EUROPE

COFACE emphasises the importance of promoting inclusive education across all stages, particularly from a family perspective, and advocates for a learner-centered approach as well as the development of socio-emotional skills. Implementation of mental health measures in schools, involving both parents and teachers, was highlighted as crucial. There is a call to utilise supportive systems more effectively and expedite progress towards inclusive education, with a need for closer monitoring and better evaluation. Education is viewed as a family project, where discrimination or exclusion of a child affects the entire family. Collaboration with various family types and networks, particularly for children with disabilities, is essential, although a significant shift towards learner-centered approaches that respect children's individuality, interests, and learning styles is deemed necessary. From a family perspective, the key points of action are the following:

- Shift to learner learner-centred approach
- Individualised approach
- Health programme in school

European Disability Forum

The right to education extends beyond mere adherence to curricula; it encompasses learning from diverse peers and understanding societal diversity. Segregation impedes this understanding, hindering both students with disabilities and students in mainstream programmes from appreciating societal diversity. Involving students with disabilities benefits the entire school community. Efforts are made to foster inclusivity through training, aiming to bridge the gap caused by misunderstandings rather than malice. Shared childhood experiences and equal rights for students with disabilities are deemed essential, yet, according to Eurostat, over 21% of learners with disabilities drop out of school early, compared to 8% of learners without disabilities. Advocacy at the EU level focuses on training and employment opportunities, particularly for teachers, and emphasises the need for personalised support. Accessible materials, such as sign language and screen-reader-compatible digital resources, and building accessibility are identified as critical areas needing improvement, with EU regional funds allocated for this purpose.

²⁰ [Resources – Eurochild](#)

²¹ https://eurochild.org/uploads/2020/12/Child_Rights_Manifesto.pdf

European SchoolNet

Digital well-being is an emerging concern in schools today as the incidence of cyberbullying is growing, while digital technology is increasingly used in teaching and learning, raising also concerns about privacy and data protection. It is necessary to acknowledge that promoting digital well-being is an essential part of ensuring safe learning environments for all.

To boost digital well-being effectively, both teachers' and learners' knowledge and skills need to be improved.

Teachers need to:

- Learn to balance digital-based with physical and social activities where technology is used as a support to pedagogy;
- Understand how to apply technological measures including self-regulation and parent/teacher control tools, applications to monitor students' work and mood and alternatives to banning devices.

Learners need to:

- Develop social and emotional skills that support their development and interactions;
- Learn digital literacy and skills and online safety practices;
- Develop a sense of agency, responsibility and accountability to be prepared for a (digital) future

Available tools to promote this learning process include the OECD Learning Compass 2030, that defines the knowledge, skills, attitudes that learners need to fulfill their potential and contribute to the well-being of their communities and the planet²².

Support from the European Commission to implement inclusive education policies: the Technical Support Instrument TSI

The presentation by EASNIE gave details about the TSI (Technical Support Instrument) that was created as a part of the European Union's efforts to assist Member States in implementing structural reforms to boost growth and jobs, as well as to enhance their competitiveness. It was established in 2015 within the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM). TSI offers expertise and technical assistance across various sectors including education and healthcare and supports the implementation of structural reforms helping to align national policies, institutions, and practices with EU norms, standards, and best practices. It provides targeted support through direct grants and follows a specific application process emphasising budget and methodologies. In 2021, several multicountry projects addressing issues relevant to multiple MS with potential cross-border implications were initiated. Each year around 60 projects are underway in the education sector, with examples including enhancing inclusive education apps and promoting inclusive education (>10%). Since 2018, as technical provider, EASNIE has designed and implemented key reforms in the Member States. EASNIE's involvement adds value in terms of content, policy, and practical deliverables, as seen in projects in Poland, Czech Republic and Cyprus, among others. Current ongoing TSI projects implemented with EASNIE include:

- France: Enhance the French App for inclusive education
- Greece II: Promoting inclusive education
- Italy, Portugal & Spain: Combatting disparities in access to inclusive education
- Finland & Ireland: Fostering inclusive quality education

²² [Learning - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(oecd.org\)](https://www.oecd.org/learning-organisation-for-economic-co-operation-and-development/)

6. APPENDIX: AGENDA

Tuesday, 19 March 2024	
08:45 – 09:15	Registration
09:15 – 09:45	<p>Welcome address</p> <p>Cor Meijer, Director, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE)</p> <p>Gyula Cserey, Head of Unit, Strategy & Investment, DG EAC, European Commission</p> <p>Tour de table</p>
Thematic session 1: Policy development approaches for flexible systems of support	
09:45 – 10:30	<p>Setting the scene</p> <p>Intro & moderation. Cor Meijer, Director, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.</p> <p>Keynote speech. Professor Roger Slee, University of Leeds. Q&A</p>
10:30 – 11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:00 – 12:15	<p>Country examples</p> <p><i>Responding to the reasons and effects of the increasing number of special classes in mainstream schools.</i> Brendan Doody, Department of Education and Skills, Ireland.</p> <p><i>Developing more flexible funding models to ensure effective provision in mainstream schools.</i> Ragnheiður Bóasdóttir, Ministry of Education and Children, Iceland.</p> <p><i>Capacity building in mainstream schools.</i> Elżbieta Neroj, Ministry of National Education, Poland.</p> <p>Group discussions</p>

12:15 - 12:30	Plenary: reporting back from group discussions
12:30 - 13:00	Intro to the study visits , Károly Pála and Anabela Grácio, Office of the Secretary-General of the European schools
13:00 - 13:50	<i>Lunch</i>
13 :55 - 14 :20	<i>Travel to the schools</i>
14:30 - 17:30	Study visits to two European Schools
18:00 - 20:00	<i>Social dinner (optional)</i> Cook&Book Woluwé

Day 2

Wednesday, 20 March 2024	
09:00 - 09:30	Plenary: debrief from the study visit
Thematic Session 2: Policy implementation measures to support learners' diverse needs	
09:30 - 11:15	<p>Country examples</p> <p><i>Monitoring and evaluation of policies/strategic plans.</i> Maria José Saragoça, Directorate-General for Education, Portugal; and Henrik Dahl, Ministry of Education and Research, Sweden.</p> <p><i>Early identification and support measures for learners with identified needs.</i> Andreas Tsiakkiros, Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, Cyprus.</p> <p><i>Effective support during learners' transitions.</i> Athina Christopoulou, Ministry of Education, Research & Religious Affairs, Greece.</p> <p>Group discussions</p>
11:15 - 11:30	Plenary: reporting back from group discussions
11:30 - 12:00	<i>Coffee break</i>

12:00 – 13:00	<p>Moderated panel - ensuring learner well-being</p> <p>Setting the scene & moderation. Margarita Bilgeri, EASNIE.</p> <p>Stakeholders' organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zuzana Konradova, Eurochild - Elisabeth Gosme, COFACE Families Europe - Haydn Hammersley, European Disability Forum - Eugenia Casariego, European Schoolnet
13:00 – 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00 – 14:30	<p>Supported opportunities for peer learning around critical policy issues: the Technical Support Instrument (TSI)</p> <p>Eloy Rebollo and Gareth Hughes, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.</p>
14.30 - 14.45	Closing remarks