

Inclusive School Leadership

Exploring Policies Across Europe



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



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INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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Editors: Edda Óskarsdóttir, Verity Donnelly and Marcella Turner-Cmuchal

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School leadership has a crucial influence on inclusive school practice. It works to achieve the vision that ‘all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers’ (European Agency, 2015, p. 1).

The [Supporting Inclusive School Leadership](#) (SISL) project builds on work by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) and wider European and international work. It investigates how to develop and promote inclusive school-level leadership through national and local-level policy frameworks and support mechanisms. Three key questions guide the project activities:

1. What policy frameworks are required to develop and support inclusive leadership across the whole education system?
2. What are the essential competences needed for effective inclusive leadership practice at school level?
3. What support and professional development opportunities are required to develop and sustain effective inclusive school leaders?

The project aims to support national/local-level policy-makers/decision-makers to develop the school leader role to foster inclusive education for all learners in different policy contexts.

In addition to this synthesis report, the SISL project outputs include:

- a [review of international and European policy](#) documents and guidance (European Agency, 2018a);
- a [review of international and European literature](#) (post-2012) to agree operational definitions of key terms and identify key concepts underpinning policy and practice for inclusive leadership (European Agency, 2018b);



- a [country survey](#), informed by the policy and literature reviews. The survey collected information from Agency member countries to analyse how far their policies specifically support inclusive school leadership practice.

The SISL project has two phases. This synthesis report brings together the findings of all phase 1 activities. The following is a summary of key information and findings introduced in the report:

[Section 2](#) provides the core functions of inclusive school leaders: setting direction and human and organisational development. Based on this, the SISL project defines inclusive school leaders as follows:

Inclusive school leaders (or leadership teams) have the vision that ‘all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers’ (European Agency, 2015, p. 1). Such leaders combine elements of instructional, transformative and distributed leadership models. They take responsibility for and value all learners. They work to ensure learners’ full participation and engagement by setting a clear direction, developing staff and other stakeholders and using all available evidence, experience and expertise to collaboratively create and sustain the learning community and support everyone to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Building on this definition:

*Inclusive school leadership goes beyond organisation. It aims to address inequity to build community and full participation. It focuses on developing an inclusive culture where all stakeholders are supported to work together, value diversity and ensure that **all** learners, including those most vulnerable to exclusion, receive a high-quality education.*

[Section 3](#) considers three key policy levers – access, autonomy and accountability – that support the development of effective inclusive school leadership. These levers developed as findings from the literature and policy reviews. They were used to construct the SISL country survey of Agency member countries. The key levers require policy to provide school leaders with:

- [access](#) to status, appropriate pay, necessary resources, and training and professional development for inclusive school leadership supported by national/local policy;
- [autonomy](#) to make evidence-based decisions on the school’s strategic direction, development and organisation, including fulfilling the vision of equitable education for all learners;
- [accountability](#) in line with the degree of access and level of autonomy.

The country survey analysis presents the extent to which the key levers are present or contribute to a supportive policy context for inclusive school leadership in 20 Agency member countries.



[Section 4](#) reports on the policy implications of these three levers and their potential impact on inclusive school leadership across different levels of the education system. The analysis suggests some specific policy measures that should be embedded in the general policy context:

- Improve school leaders' access to resources, support and professional development by:
 - improving co-ordination between governments and agencies, such as universities and inspectorates, to support evidence-based policy-making;
 - increasing stakeholders' engagement in policy-making;
 - introducing policy measures that facilitate inter-disciplinary working at all levels to ensure that inclusive school leaders can effectively use resources, experience and expertise;
 - resourcing professional development opportunities to ensure that inclusive school leaders can meet the required standards, agreed with key stakeholder groups;
 - setting out policy measures that support and facilitate collaboration between ministry level, regional/local-level training providers and schools to develop a continuum of professional development opportunities and agreed framework of competences for aspiring and practising inclusive school leaders;
 - developing systems/structures to provide access to mentoring and on-going support (continuum) for inclusive school leaders to enable them to work effectively within these areas of autonomy.
- Boost school leaders' autonomy to make decisions on the school's strategic direction, development and organisation by:
 - developing specific policy on inclusive school leadership, taking into account the SISL project's model of inclusive school leadership;
 - ensuring that governance and funding arrangements grant inclusive school leaders appropriate levels of autonomy to enable them to make decisions;
 - ensuring that policy measures support the recognition and status of inclusive school leaders in line with their potential role as change managers at national and regional policy level and in schools and their communities;
 - ensuring that policy supports learner-centred education and a culture of listening to learners and involving them and their families in decisions about their learning and progress (particularly at times of transition).
- Ensure that accountability measures are aligned with inclusive education policy and that they enable school leaders to play a lead role in monitoring, self-review and evaluation by:
 - developing quality assurance and accountability in line with inclusive practice to support school leaders to gain recognition for effective inclusive practice in their schools;



-
- ensuring the balance between autonomy and accountability, which will influence how flexible inclusive school leaders can be in ensuring equity and sustaining the inclusive practice for which they are held accountable.

Finally, [section 5](#) summarises the outcomes of phase 1 activities in response to the three key project questions on policy frameworks, competences and support. The SISL findings reveal how greatly the situation varies across and within the countries that responded to the country survey.

Findings show that different leadership models and key policy levers can be combined and built on to develop a policy framework specifically designed to support inclusive school leadership. That is, leadership that aims to address inequality and build community, full participation and valued outcomes for all learners, including those most vulnerable to exclusion.



1. INTRODUCTION

Recent Agency work, particularly the [Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education](#) (OoP) and [Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education](#) projects, has highlighted school leadership as a crucial factor in developing more inclusive education systems. In the context of the increasing complexity of school leadership, the OoP summary report notes that there is growing pressure to develop a leadership system with development opportunities and support for ‘lonely principals’ (European Agency, 2014, p. 11). Furthermore, it highlights leadership as a key issue in providing quality support for learners. This includes a ‘positive school culture’ and, most importantly, ‘flexible responses to diversity’ (ibid.).

In the Agency’s 2015 country survey, its member countries recognised **effective school- and system-level leadership** as a priority. In response to this and the information in the previous paragraph, it was agreed that an Agency project examining inclusive school leadership would start in 2017.

The [Supporting Inclusive School Leadership](#) (SISL) project activities and subsequent outputs focus on inclusive school leadership. They build on existing Agency and wider European and international work. The project aims to investigate how to develop and promote inclusive school-level leadership through national and local-level policy frameworks and support mechanisms. The project activities and outputs are framed within and aim to further inform wider discussions about school leadership. These discussions are required to effectively implement inclusive education as an approach for providing high-quality education for all learners in different policy contexts.

Respecting different policy contexts, the project recognises that inclusive school leadership can be performed by one inclusive school leader or, increasingly, by an inclusive school leadership team.

Phase 1 of the project has involved the following activities:

1. A [review of international and European policy](#) documents and guidance. This included materials from the European Commission, Council of the European Union, European Parliament, Council of Europe, Organisation for Economic Co-operation



and Development (OECD), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), European Trade Union Committee for Education, and European Policy Network on School Leadership (EPNoSL) (European Agency, 2018a).

2. A [review of international and European literature](#) (post-2012) to agree operational definitions of key terms and identify key concepts underpinning policy and practice for inclusive leadership (European Agency, 2018b).
3. A [country survey](#): Building on the policy and literature reviews, the survey served to collect country information. Twenty countries participated in the survey. They provided excerpts from their policy documents and some examples of policy implementation. This made it possible to analyse the extent to which different country policies support inclusive school leadership practice. The information in this synthesis report builds on the countries’ survey responses.

This report provides a synthesis of the findings from the three activities outlined above. While policy-makers are the primary audience, other stakeholders might find the report helpful for considering the roles and responsibilities of school leaders.

The three key project questions that guided these activities from project conception to conclusion of phase 1 are:

- What policy frameworks are required to develop and support inclusive leadership across the whole education system?
- What are the essential competences needed for effective inclusive leadership practice at school level?
- What support and professional development opportunities are required to develop and sustain effective inclusive school leaders?

The research for the literature and policy reviews provided a working definition of inclusive school leadership. It also created a framework for collecting and analysing country information to answer the key project questions.

The survey was sent to all Agency member countries. It asked for specific inputs, with excerpts from policy documents, on different aspects of school leadership and inclusive school leadership. Twenty countries¹ completed the survey. They provided information on:

- legislation and policy relating (directly and indirectly) to school leadership and specifically to inclusive school leadership;
- school leaders’ roles and responsibilities;
- qualifications, experience and competences required by school leaders;
- professional development and on-going support for school leaders.

¹ These countries and jurisdictions are: Austria, Belgium (French Community), Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom – UK (Scotland) and UK (Wales).



In the analysis throughout this report, there is an understanding that policy contexts vary between countries. There is also an awareness that leadership in schools is often a team effort rather than there being a single leader.

All excerpts from the country survey presented in this report were treated as data and are therefore referenced with the country name in the text.

[Section 2](#) of this synthesis report introduces the definition of inclusive school leadership. It presents descriptions of school leadership from the countries' policies. The descriptions are based on the countries' responses to the questions about legislation and policy relating (directly and indirectly) to school leadership and specifically to inclusive school leadership.

[Section 3](#) presents a further analysis of the country responses. It considers how policy addresses three key levers – access, autonomy and accountability – that support effective inclusive school leadership. The information considered from the country survey relates to the questions on school leaders' roles and responsibilities, qualifications, experience, the competences required, and professional development and on-going support.

A further element of analysis, presented in [section 4](#), reflects on how policy – across these three levers – affects inclusive school leadership at different levels in the education system. It also highlights recommended policy measures.

The last [section \(5\)](#) reflects on how the outcomes of phase 1 activities address the three key project questions on policy frameworks, essential competences of inclusive school leadership and professional development opportunities. This provides the outlook for future work.

The sections use bold text to emphasise main ideas, concepts and findings. Section 3 explains the concepts of [access](#) (3.1), [autonomy](#) (3.2) and [accountability](#) (3.3) in framed text boxes for clarity. Each of these sections ([3.1](#), [3.2](#) and [3.3](#)) provides a summary that draws together and discusses the main findings.





2. DEFINING INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The findings of the SISL policy and literature reviews (European Agency, 2018a; 2018b) show gaps relating to an explicit focus on inclusive school leadership and support to ensure school leaders can attend to equity and meet the needs of all learners in their community.

Leadership has been interpreted in different ways. However, it can mainly be defined as a process of providing direction and applying influence (Lumby and Coleman, 2016). It involves managing people's emotions, thoughts and actions decisively to influence others towards a preferred direction (Diamond and Spillane, 2016). In this description, leadership refers to the relationship between leaders and those with whom they work. The relationship is built on both parties' motivation and commitment. It moves people to action by influencing and challenging their thinking and having them reflect on the values and understandings that are the base of their practice (Krüger and Scheerens, 2012).

This report uses the term 'school leader' to refer to all those in key leadership roles in schools and learning communities. These leaders may also be called head teachers, school directors or principals.

Research has identified three core organisational functions that must be performed for inclusive schools to run effectively (Billingsley, DeMatthews, Connally and McLeskey, 2018; Billingsley, McLeskey and Crockett, 2017; McLeskey and Waldron, 2015; Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016). These functions fall into the broad categories of:

- Setting direction
- Human development
- Organisational development.

Fulfilling these functions enables school leaders to create an inclusive school culture with a focus on the learning environment, where every learner is a valuable participant expected to achieve through quality education.

International research has, furthermore, identified three main theories of school leadership linked to successful inclusive practices. They are: transformational leadership, distributed



leadership and instructional leadership (Kershner and McQuillan, 2016; Urick, 2016). All three focus on developing a shared vision and shared ownership and decision-making. Transformational leadership originates from management literature (Burns, 1978). Instructional and distributed leadership come from research on educational administration.

When the three theories of leadership co-exist in integrated practice, there is a major positive impact on learner achievement, on pedagogical quality in schools and on the development of professional learning communities in schools (OECD, 2016). The vision that needs to be set is that of inclusive education systems.

Leading a school involves both leadership and management. It is necessary to acknowledge the need to balance these two processes. Whereas leadership focuses on values, vision and the future, management is concerned with making the present work (West-Burnham and Harris, 2015).

2.1. Building a model and defining inclusive school leadership

Drawing on findings from the SISL policy and literature reviews (European Agency, 2018a; 2018b), the project has developed a model of inclusive school leadership. It is presented in Figure 1 below.

The model combines the three core functions with the foci from three theories of leadership: transformational, distributed and instructional. Transformative leadership is valuable for vision-building and setting an inclusive direction. Distributed leadership is important for sharing leadership to support both human and organisational development. Instructional leadership affects human and organisational development towards inclusive education. The [SISL literature review](#) sets out the theories and core functions in more detail (European Agency, 2018b).

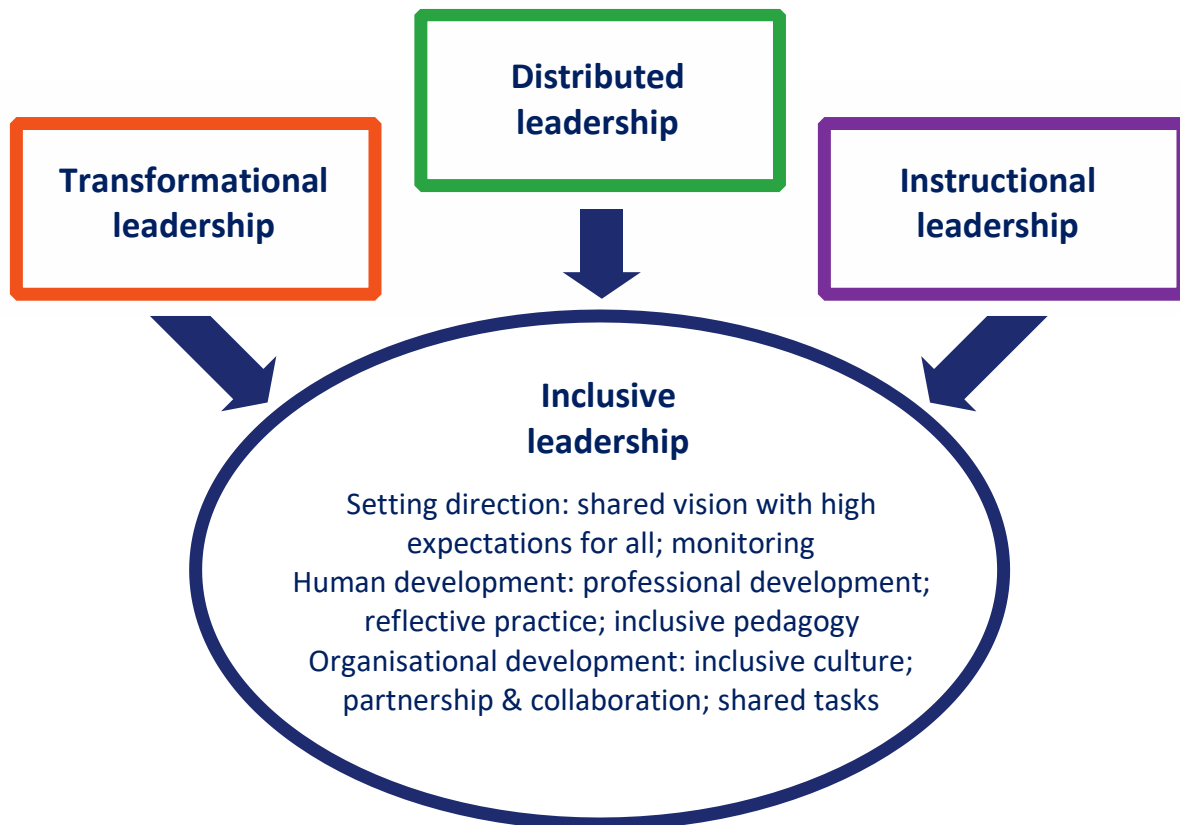


Figure 1. Model of inclusive school leadership (adapted from European Agency, 2018b, p. 15)

The model of inclusive school leadership aims to close the gap in international and European policy. It does so by specifically addressing leadership for inclusive school policy and practice. It brings together both the underpinning vision and the core functions of school leadership. In addition, the model supports international and European recommendations from the [SISL policy review](#). The review highlights the need to:

- ‘adopt instructional and distributed leadership’ through continuous professional development, along with transformational leadership to effect school and system change;
- ‘develop leadership for learning at all levels with interaction/networking between system levels’ (European Agency, 2018a, p. 15).



Based on the model and the vision of inclusive education systems (European Agency, 2015), the SISL project defines inclusive school leaders as follows:

Inclusive school leaders (or leadership teams) have the vision that ‘all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers’ (European Agency, 2015, p. 1). Such leaders combine elements of instructional, transformative and distributed leadership models. They take responsibility for and value all learners. They work to ensure learners’ full participation and engagement by setting a clear direction, developing staff and other stakeholders and using all available evidence, experience and expertise to collaboratively create and sustain the learning community and support everyone to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Building on this definition:

Inclusive school leadership goes beyond organisation. It aims to address inequity to build community and full participation. It focuses on developing an inclusive culture where all stakeholders are supported to work together, value diversity and ensure that **all** learners, including those most vulnerable to exclusion, receive a high-quality education.

2.2. Descriptions of school leadership within country policies

Kikis-Papadakis, Kollias and Hatzopoulos highlight the challenge that the diversity of school systems presents. They note that this is:

... evidenced in the governance structures between school systems (centralisation-decentralisation) and within school education levels, between school learning and leadership traditions (e.g. Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, Latin etc.), between types of school programmes (general, academic, comprehensive etc.), between types of school maintainers/owners or in the size and location of schools (2014, p. 1).

This diversity should be kept in mind, as it influences stakeholders’ expectations of school leaders and school leadership practice in schools.

This section presents responses to the country survey, which provides information about school leadership in participating countries and whether they have specific policy related to leadership.

All 20 countries reported that their general education acts **refer to school leaders**. Less than half have **specific policy** relating to school leaders. Table 1 summarises the countries’ replies.



For ease of use, Table 1 also lists policies **referencing** inclusive school leadership and **specific policies** for leadership in special schools or specialist settings. Both policies are described in the following sections.

Table 1. Policies on school leadership

Country	Policy referencing school leaders	Policy specific to school leaders	Policy referencing inclusive school leaders	Policy specific to school leaders in special settings
Austria	Yes	Yes	No info	No info
Belgium (French Community)	Yes	Yes	No info	No info
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes
Croatia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info
Estonia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Germany	Yes – at Länder level	No info	No info	No info
Greece	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes
Hungary	Yes	No info	No info	No info
Ireland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Latvia	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Lithuania	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Malta	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Serbia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info
Slovenia	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Spain	Yes	No info	No info	No info
Sweden	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes
Switzerland	Yes – at Canton level	Yes	No info	No info
UK (Scotland)	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes
UK (Wales)	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes

Most countries report that the policy relating to school leaders is part of other legislation or policy (for example, education acts). All have regulations, decrees or by-laws relating to school leaders and school management. The Swiss Cantons and the German Länder have



their own legislation on this matter. Nine countries have policies, such as acts, decrees or regulations, that exclusively address school leadership.

2.2.1. Description of school leadership

In all countries, national-level policy describes school leadership and/or school leaders' work. Spain and Bulgaria mention that implementation is at regional level. In UK (Wales), it is at local authority level. Croatia mentions that the Primary and Secondary Act and Law on Institutions describe school leadership and school leaders. However, annual school principal leadership work is described in the annual work plan of principals, which is part of the school institution's annual plan and programme of work (as defined by the Primary and Secondary Act). Other agencies responsible for school leadership are the Swedish National Agency for Education and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate in Sweden and the Scottish College for Educational Leadership in UK (Scotland).

The country survey responses describe school leadership in various levels of detail. Most countries describe school leadership in terms of educational or pedagogical responsibility, administrative/management responsibility and, to different degrees, responsibility for collaborating with learners, parents, other stakeholders, the community and other levels of administration.

In most countries, the school leader is part of a governing body, such as a school board or pedagogical board. Furthermore, some countries mention that school leaders are responsible for financial planning and monitoring budgetary activities (Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden). A few countries mention quality assurance as one of their tasks (Germany, Lithuania, Serbia, Sweden).

2.2.2. Inclusive school leadership

Ten of the twenty countries (listed in Table 1) specifically refer to inclusive school leadership in their legislation or policy. However, none of the policies offers a concrete definition.

In addition to the school leaders' responsibilities mentioned above, countries state some specific tasks/responsibilities, values or competences of the inclusive school leader. These have to do with:

- planning and deploying resources to ensure quality and equality of education (Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Serbia, Sweden);
- attending to educational staff's training on accommodating diversity (Slovenia);
- creating conditions for quality education for every learner (Estonia, Malta, UK – Scotland);
- promoting education innovation (Ireland, Spain);
- ensuring the principles of fairness and equity (UK – Wales).



For many countries, organising support and special provision is an essential role of inclusive school leaders. The responsibilities/tasks, values and competences linked to this are to:

- organise and co-ordinate the process of providing additional support and special needs education (Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania);
- create opportunities for identifying special needs (Estonia, Latvia);
- appoint a co-ordinator to oversee support matters (Bulgaria, Estonia).

Many of the 15 country examples of inclusive school leaders include references to special needs provision and programmes. However, countries also refer to broader values and principles. This is evident, for example, in Serbia's [Rulebook on Standards of Competences for Principals of Educational Institutions](#). It states: 'The principal creates conditions and encourages the process of quality education for every child'.

According to a Ministerial Decision in Greece, the school head directs the school community to set high goals and ensure the conditions for their achievement, creating a democratic school, open to society. The [Good School concept](#) in Lithuania states that leadership and its empowering management are reflected by a clear, unifying and inspiring vision known and acceptable to all, with implementation based on human values.

The [Education Act](#) (5 §) in Sweden states that learners' development shall be designed in accordance with fundamental democratic values and human rights. These include the sanctity of human life, individual freedom and integrity, equal value, equality and solidarity between people.

In UK (Scotland), the school self-evaluation, [How good is our school?](#), expresses the:

... aspiration to be a nation of successful learners, responsible citizens, effective contributors and confident individuals [...] Achieving this requires highly effective leadership at all levels which is grounded in the values of compassion, wisdom, justice and integrity.

2.2.3. School leadership in special settings

Seven countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Serbia, UK – Scotland, UK – Wales) report that they have policies specific to leadership in special schools/specialist provision. Estonia, Ireland, Serbia, Sweden and UK (Scotland) state that the same criteria apply for all heads of schools. Bulgaria describes special school policy, but does not specifically refer to school leaders. In UK (Wales), the policy for children with additional needs states that head teachers are responsible for implementing policy and developing detailed procedures.

2.3. Summary

All the participating countries refer to school leaders in their policies. However, less than half have policies that exclusively address school leaders' roles and responsibilities. Descriptions of school leaders' roles, where they occur, are linked to educational or pedagogical responsibility, administrative/management responsibility, and – to different



degrees – responsibility for collaborating with learners, parents, other stakeholders, the community and other levels of administration.

In the country survey responses, no policy was found that clearly defines inclusive school leadership. However, a few clear examples of policies for inclusive school leadership were found in the survey analysis. These refer to quality education, to equity and fairness and to promoting innovative education. Nevertheless, the countries often also mention ‘specialist’ support/provision. This indicates a narrow understanding of inclusive leadership that focuses on learners with disabilities and/or special needs, rather than leadership to provide high-quality equitable education for all learners in the community. It may also indicate an education policy that is in transition, as countries are attempting to convert special schools into support centres (European Agency, 2019a).

Although awareness of this area appears to be increasing and a few countries are currently developing policy for inclusive school leaders, the SISL country information indicates that a gap in policy remains. A further gap is found in the lack of specific policies for school leadership in special schools or specialist settings. Only a few countries mention that they have such policies.

This section collated the existing policy frameworks and how they describe school leadership in general and inclusive school leadership in particular. The next section focuses on country survey questions about school leaders’ roles and responsibilities; qualifications, experience and competences required; and professional development and on-going support.



3. POLICY LEVERS TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The SISL project draws on previous work on school leadership for equity and learning. For example, the review by EPNoSL emphasises that an enabling school leadership environment requires:

- ‘room for flexibility and autonomy’;
- ‘distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities in the context of autonomy’;
- enhanced ‘accountability mechanisms’ to foster trust between stakeholders and ‘more broadly to promote the legitimacy and transparency of school-based decisions’ (2014, p. 7).

Findings from the SISL policy and research reviews (European Agency, 2018a; 2018b) have been used to develop these ideas. They have helped to identify three levers that can assist countries in establishing policies to support the development of effective school leaders who are able to create and lead inclusive schools. The three levers – access, autonomy and accountability – were considered when constructing the country survey and as the analytical framework for the responses received.

The key levers require that policy provide school leaders with:

Access to:

- appropriate pay and status in the community;
- on-going support that is appropriate to levels of autonomy;
- opportunities to collaborate with a full range of stakeholders at all system levels, including communication with policy-makers to extend their sphere of influence;
- professional development and on-going formal and informal support (e.g. through collaboration with colleagues/other stakeholders at all system levels);



- resources to develop the workforce's capacity for diversity and implement national policy initiatives.

Autonomy to make evidence-informed decisions on the school's strategic direction, development and organisation. These decisions may be about, for example:

- using available flexibility to adapt the curriculum, assessment and accreditation frameworks to ensure they establish high expectations and meet local community and learner needs;
- appointing teachers and staff able to take responsibility for and raise the achievement of all learners through innovative learner-centred pedagogy;
- developing/empowering teachers and staff through shared leadership tasks and collaborative professional development;
- pro-active work with other agencies and the local community to:
 - provide support for all learners without recourse to labelling or bureaucratic processes;
 - provide expertise to support school development and extend learning opportunities and support for staff and learners;
 - secure knowledge of research evidence to further develop the learning community;
- funding and equitable resource allocation.

Regarding **accountability**, policy must allow school leaders to:

- set out the vision, values and outcomes for which they (and other stakeholders) wish to be held to account (e.g. equity, non-discrimination, meeting the requirements of all learners from the local community in terms of personal, social and academic outcomes);
- be held accountable (to learners, families, local community) through mechanisms that are aligned with other policy areas, ensuring support for inclusive education policy and practice;
- play a lead role in monitoring, self-review and evaluation, together with key stakeholders, to provide information on learner outcomes and reflect on data to inform on-going improvement.

The survey questions included in this analysis are related to the three levers discussed above. They focused on:

- how policies support school leaders in setting direction for their school, developing staff and learners and developing the school;
- how policies address initial training and continuous professional development opportunities;
- what level of autonomy school leaders have;
- what mechanisms for school leaders' accountability are in place;
- challenges and strategies for supporting school leaders.



The following three sections are dedicated to access, autonomy and accountability. The analysis of the 20 countries' responses presents the extent to which the key levers are present or contribute to a supportive policy context for inclusive school leadership.

3.1. Access to resources, support and professional development

The SISL literature review shows that for school leaders to fulfil their roles and responsibilities, they need access to a supportive policy context. This is particularly true as the school leader role becomes increasingly complex (European Agency, 2018b).

Here, **access** means being able to benefit from opportunities to learn and develop, and receiving relevant information and contact with a full range of internal and external stakeholders to effectively fulfil the leadership role and, in turn, support others to improve their practice.

National, regional and local-level policies create the environment in which the school leader works. They should, therefore, provide a consistent framework to support the development of inclusive schools. The principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) should be visible in each country's policies to support equity and non-discrimination in education. Policies should also make clear that inclusive education is a shared responsibility of all teachers, leaders and policy-makers (European Agency, 2015), who should work together to achieve this common goal.

The following sections focus on school leaders' access to:

- collaboration with stakeholders;
- initial training;
- professional development and on-going support;
- resources for capacity building and implementing national policy;
- appropriate pay and status in the community.

3.1.1. Access to collaboration with stakeholders, including policy-makers

School leaders should become key actors in building connections between different levels of education, with families, the world of work and the local community to raise the achievement of all learners (Council of the European Union, 2014). The survey findings show that the participating countries primarily emphasise collaboration within the school, with families and with the local community. There is less emphasis on connections across system levels, particularly with policy-makers.



In most of the countries surveyed, **collaboration within school** is a task for school leaders. Malta's [A National Curriculum Framework for All](#) promotes distributed forms of leadership in schools. It states that:

... whilst school leaders play both a visionary and strategic role, they also need to focus on developing a collaborative culture which draws upon the full range of professional skills and expertise to be found among the members of the organisation.

A focus on **communication or collaboration with parents** is evident in all the country policies analysed. This issue is listed as a responsibility or competence of school leaders. Policies state that school leaders should 'promote collaboration with families' (Spain) or 'attend to co-operation between institutions and parents' (Slovenia). [Bulgaria's Pre-school and School Education Act](#) states that:

... cooperation and interaction between parents and kindergartens or schools shall take place through individual consultations, parents meetings, training, as well as every time when a particular situation or the behavior of the child or pupil[s] warrants it (Article 208. (1)).

Many countries mention **collaboration with local communities or other school levels** as a task of the school leader. One example is Switzerland. It states that school leaders should ensure and foster co-operation and communication with 'authorities, lower- and upper-level schools, the professional world and the general public'. Other countries mention work with other services and institutions in the local community. For example, in UK (Scotland), the [How good is our school?](#) self-evaluation framework has a set of quality indicators relating to learning provision with themes that support leaders in the areas of family learning, transitions and partnerships.

Several countries list **collaboration with state administrative bodies and institutions**. Some countries also refer to collaboration with specific agencies, such as health services. Slovenia states that it is the responsibility of the head teacher, school council, council of parents and school expert bodies to 'ensure co-operation between the school and school healthcare services'. In Serbia, the *Rulebook on Standards for the Quality of Work of Educational Institutions* states that: 'The principal develops co-operation with other institutions, organisations and the local community'.

Finally, the [Good School concept](#) in Lithuania states that leadership and management are reflected by:

... a culture of dialogue and agreements (participation of all members of the school community in decision-making); shared leadership (management culture based on trust, commitment and empowerment, promoting initiative and assuming of responsibility).



A further important aspect of collaboration is **contact and communication with policy-makers**. Few participating countries appear to facilitate communication between school leaders and regional/national policy-makers. However, in Croatia, the Primary and Secondary School Education Act states that the school principal shall perform the following particular tasks as a professional manager:

In collaboration with the teacher council, propose the school curriculum; collaborate with learners and parents; collaborate with the founder (school governor), state administration bodies, institutions and other bodies.

Similarly, in Greece, a Ministerial Decision states:

The School Head or the School Supervisor co-operates with school advisors, management executives, teachers, learners and parents for the joint achievement of educational goals.

Without effective communication channels between school leaders and regional/national leaders, valuable feedback from school leaders – which draws on practical experience, knowledge and expertise – may be lost. Policy should support structures and processes that enable school leaders to communicate with policy-makers at national/local levels, thus increasing their ‘sphere of influence’.

3.1.2. Access to initial training

School leaders’ tasks are varied and complex. Therefore, no initial training can equip every participant with the knowledge and skills required for successful school leadership – especially in a rapidly changing social, economic and technological context. What initial preparation programmes for school leaders can do, however, is raise their levels of critical thinking, practical know-how, and creative and innovative practice and give them a solid theoretical grounding for their actions (Schratz, 2013). School leaders’ preparation is critical for developing effective inclusive schools. This is because leaders need to be knowledgeable and well prepared to meet the needs of each learner, tackle inequalities and withstand the resistance they are likely to encounter in their school community (Billingsley et al., 2018; Lumby and Coleman, 2016).

The policies for **initial training and qualifications for school leaders** are most often set at the national level (10 countries) through education acts or laws (Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia), decrees or regulations on school leaders’ qualifications or status (Belgium – French Community, Estonia, Latvia, Switzerland) or strategy documents (Sweden). Serbia includes this area of work in a strategy proposal for education 2020. Spain mentions that the policy is developed and implemented at the level of ministry and regional education authorities through Organic Law 2/2006, article 134, which establishes the requirements for head teacher candidates.

In Bulgaria, the Regional Education Directorate is the legal body responsible for initial training and qualifications. It appoints school principals and trains them to meet their job’s requirements.

In Austria, Ireland, UK (Scotland) and UK (Wales), there are agencies or universities that are responsible for initial training and qualifications for school leaders. In Ireland, the Centre for School Leadership provides formal mentoring support for all newly-appointed primary



and post-primary principals. This includes a new 18-month postgraduate programme with a pathway to a master's degree qualification for aspiring school leaders.

In UK (Scotland), the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL) are responsible for the Standards for Headship. These standards have been designed in consultation with universities, local authorities, Education Scotland, GTCS and SCEL. They focus specifically on headship and head teachers' strategic role. In UK (Wales), regional consortia of local authorities conduct the National Professional Qualification for Headship (an assessment against national standards rather than a training course). In Austria, where 'for several years, a key goal of educational policy has been the continual professionalisation of management staff in the education system', the Pädagogische Hochschulen provides initial training. In Germany, there are also qualification programmes for future school leaders in all the Länder.

In Slovakia, the school founder (i.e. state administration authority in education, municipality/ecclesiastical authority, another legal entity, or a natural person who established a school) is responsible for meeting the requirements in the legislation. The requirements include pedagogical education specified for a principal of a respective school, at least five years of pedagogical practice and education supplemented for the role of principal. Slovakia is preparing a new law on pedagogical and professional staff development.

In other countries, such as Greece and Spain, a minimum number of years' teaching experience in schools at the respective level is required before a candidate can apply to be a principal.

Current initiatives in Malta include courses for senior management teams/school leaders organised by the Institute for Education. Entry requirements and eligibility criteria to apply for the position of head of school include a course on educational leadership. The University of Malta and the Institute for Education currently provide this course.

Both Malta and Switzerland mentioned **lack of training** as a very specific challenge for school leadership. Malta stated that inclusive school leadership may only be addressed through school leaders having the right attitude towards inclusion and diversity in schools. Switzerland has similar concerns, stating a need for school leaders (and teachers) to be better prepared in the field of inclusive education.

3.1.3. Access to professional development and on-going support

Taipale notes that, as principals' work becomes more challenging, there is 'pressure to develop the leadership system and leadership training as a whole' (2012, p. 42). Setting clear standards for school leadership at policy level can provide a framework and reference to the skills and competencies needed for initial training and indicate professional development needs (Pont, 2014).

New school leaders – and more experienced ones – need access to on-going, practice-oriented, reflective development programmes (Schratz, 2013). On-going support through coaching and mentoring can be useful. Providing career development opportunities for school leaders can help to avoid burnout and make school leadership a more attractive career option. Examples include making the profession more flexible and



mobile and allowing school leaders to move between schools and between leadership and teaching and other professions.

The difference between professional development and on-going support for school leaders is that professional development generally involves a planned course and interactions with colleagues to develop practice. On-going support, however, could involve access to colleagues for support with decision-making, problem-solving, dealing with crises or even emotional support.

Some countries mention that school leaders (principals, head teachers) have too much responsibility. Their work is heavily bound with managerial duties, while they lack time for pedagogical leadership or leadership for learning. To overcome this challenge, Slovenia suggests relieving head teachers of 'some managerial tasks or delegating them in legislation, as it is worth considering what kind of changes shall be made to emphasise the head teachers' pedagogical role'.

In seven participating countries, the (national-level) ministry is the legal body responsible for **school leaders' professional development** (Belgium – French Community, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland). In six other countries, the legal body responsible is an agency or university (Austria, Croatia, Greece, Ireland, UK – Scotland, UK – Wales). In Spain, policy in this area is made and implemented at the level of ministry and regional authorities through Organic Law 2/2006. In Slovakia, the school founder is the legal body responsible. In Greece, it is the duty of the Institute of Educational Policy, which is a body supervised by the Ministry of Education and by the Regional Centres for Educational Planning. In Croatia, the Education and Teacher Training Agency is an expert institution that develops and ensures the quality and efficiency of professional development for educational staff, including school principals.

In Austria, professional development for school leaders is optional. It takes the form of individual seminars, workshops and entire courses at university colleges of teacher education. Similar provision is seen in Ireland, UK (Scotland) and UK (Wales). In Ireland, the Centre for School Leadership is developing a continuum of professional learning for school leaders. In UK (Wales), the recently established National Academy for Educational Leadership has endorsed a programme for acting and newly-appointed heads. It is currently reviewing provision for experienced head teachers. Malta is also granting sabbatical opportunities for school leaders and educators to further their studies and carry out research.

School leaders in Hungary, Slovakia and Spain must seek professional development every seven or eight years. Teachers and school leaders can take professional development in the training system every seven years in Hungary. According to an act on professional and pedagogical employees in Slovakia, school leaders' functional training is valid for a maximum of seven years and must then be renewed. In Spain, the contents of management courses must be updated every eight years, according to Royal Decree 894/2014.

Another way to **support school leaders** is to create local-, regional- and national-level networks that, while respecting the autonomy of schools and their leaders, can connect them in focused collaboration. This leads to improved outcomes and strong collective accountability for achieving those outcomes (Munby and Fullan, 2016).



Twelve countries (listed in Table 2) report that they have policies for on-going support for leaders. Six countries indicate that the ministry is responsible for this work.

Table 2. Provision of on-going support

Country	Provision of on-going support through	Legal body responsible
Belgium (French Community)	The networks that organise schools (e.g. city authorities, other institutions such as the church); the Wallonia-Brussels Federation	The school's organising network (e.g. city authorities, other institutions such as the church); the Wallonia-Brussels Federation
Bulgaria	Inspections	No information available
Croatia	Training centres	Ministry of Science and Education
Greece	Institute of Educational Policy, a body supervised by the Ministry of Education and by the Regional Centres for Educational Planning	Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs
Hungary	Centres for educational counselling and other support centres	Ministry of Human Capacities, State Secretary of Education, Educational Authority
Ireland	Training centres	Centre for School Leadership
Latvia	Organised continuing education for teaching staff and pedagogical methodology work	Local government
Serbia	Informal learning communities in every local self-government	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and regional school authorities
Slovakia	Centres for educational counselling and other support centres	Ministry of the Interior; Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport
Slovenia	Centres for educational counselling and other support centres	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
UK (Scotland)	Training centres	Scottish College for Educational Leadership
UK (Wales)	Support networks under the National Academy for Educational Leadership	None given

There are two support programmes for school leaders in Estonia: a programme for future school leaders and a developmental programme for school leaders who are already in the field. The same can be found in Lithuania's 'Time for Leaders' project. It aims to encourage



schools' independence and implement the School Improvement Programme Plus goals. The programme aims to create conditions for potential leaders to become students of the formal educational leadership programme at master's degree level or to take part in the non-formal educational leadership study programme. The latter focuses on improving leadership competences and knowledge of education management. The formal programme is for novice and potential school leaders and the non-formal programme is for those who have experience in the field of education.

In Latvia, in the framework of the European Social Fund project Competence-based Approach to Learning Content, leadership is one of the skills included in the new professional development programmes.

Increasingly, countries are attending to professional development and on-going support for school leaders through formal and informal approaches. Clearly, the complexity and diversity of the head teacher role presents challenges for training and support. However, little evidence is available on the extent to which current training and development programmes equip leaders for their role in inclusive schools.

3.1.4. Access to resources for capacity building and implementing national/regional policy initiatives

A further critical issue in effective leadership is ensuring that leaders can access resources to develop the school workforce's capacity. Access to resources should focus on enabling leaders to develop all staff to support all learners, including those at risk of underachievement. It should also enable them to contribute to implementing national policy initiatives on inclusive education.

A number of countries specify that **staff development** is a key responsibility of school leaders. For example, the [Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany](#) publication describes how the head teacher is responsible for lesson development, staff development, organisational development and planning further training and staff management, as part of ensuring the quality of lessons.

Ireland's [DEIS Plan 2017](#) aims to 'improve the capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan and deploy resources to their best advantage'. It acknowledges that success in education is 'built inter alia on quality of leadership and ingenuity in teaching'. The Plan is designed to 'support those delivering education services'. It includes key actions to achieve this goal, such as:

- developing leadership capacity;
- strengthening teaching and learning;
- promoting innovation;
- delivering quality initial teacher education and continuous professional development.

In Malta, [My journey: Achieving through different paths](#) is a reform that aims to give equal value to academic and vocational learning programmes. This requires a mind shift in teacher preparation, induction and in-service professional development to ensure that leadership and teaching respond to the proposed equitable quality secondary school



system. Standards for school external reviews with indicative success criteria require the head of school to have a clear vision and to provide continuous evaluation and support for teaching and learning. They may do this through an established system of formal observations and a commitment to promoting good practice and continuous professional development, among other ways.

A number of other countries – for example, Sweden, Slovenia and Croatia – see promoting the professional education and training of staff as a key responsibility of school leaders. Similarly, in Latvia, one of the evaluation criteria for the head of an educational institution is ‘competences, such as motivating and developing employees; development orientation and strategic vision’. In Spain, the head teacher’s competences include exercising pedagogical management, promoting educational innovation and planning to meet the objectives of the school’s education plan. In Greece, the head teacher is expected to ‘encourage teachers’ initiatives, inspire and motivate them positively’.

Lithuania’s [Law on Education](#) states that school leaders are responsible for in-service training for educational and non-educational staff and for the working conditions of teachers and other employees (Article 59). Regarding leadership for learning, leaders’ activities mobilise the school community for change and innovation in the field of education. Leaders support professional self-assessment, reflection and improvement. School managers regularly, openly and constructively discuss learners’ successes and problems and help each other.

In Switzerland, federal legislation on the inter-cantonal recognition of the certificate on advanced studies in school leadership describes the profile of the curriculum for school leaders’ training. [Article 2 § 2b](#) states that leaders:

... lead the school staff, ensure the establishment of general conditions conducive to teaching and learning, foster good professional cooperation, provide regular assessment and continuous training of staff and manage resources in anticipation of needs.

The evidence from the SISL country survey demonstrates that, for some countries, staff development is a key responsibility of school leaders. It is important to note that such staff development should include competences relevant to whole-school development and to pedagogy/classroom practice (Humada-Ludeke, 2013; Erbring, 2016).

However, in line with the SISL policy review (European Agency, 2018a), the survey highlights that few countries maximise school leadership’s potential to support the implementation of national education initiatives, particularly those relating to advancing inclusive education. This gap indicates that many countries do not fully recognise the key role that school leaders can play as change managers, developing whole-school practice to include and raise the achievement of all learners.

3.1.5. Access to appropriate pay and status in the community

While the SISL country survey did not focus on access to pay and status, it is an important factor in appointing and retaining high-quality school leaders. Recognising school leaders’ potential to manage change in any system reform, policy should ensure that school leaders have appropriate status, with pay and conditions that attract and retain leaders of the highest quality.



One of the goals of the [Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020](#) is ‘Competent and motivated teachers and school leadership’:

The objective is to make the evaluation and compensation of teachers and school leaders proportional to their professional qualifications and their effectiveness in the performance of their work.

A strategic measure to meet this goal is to adjust the average salaries of teachers and school leaders.

Sweden also mentions that increased salaries could be a strategy to deal with a lack of school leaders. However, other countries state that demands on school leaders are increasing. This is a challenge that can affect the attractiveness and status of the position.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018) point out that school heads’ salaries are defined according to two main models: teacher’s salary plus management allowance or a distinct salary range for school heads. In most countries across Europe, the head teacher’s salary depends on school size. However, some other characteristics may be taken into account – for example, location, number of learners with special educational needs/ disabilities, special programmes, etc.

While most countries require three to five years’ teaching experience, this can be up to ten years. An appropriate differential is needed to reflect school leaders’ additional responsibilities.

Head teachers in Slovenia are appointed every five years. In practice, some tensions exist between stakeholders in the school councils and their representative priorities and/or developmental aims. Additionally, the school council evaluates and (financially) rewards the head teachers’ work performance. This can pose a challenge, as it may be tempting for a head teacher to ‘please’ the council rather than assert their professional expertise and decisions. Also, some of the criteria for evaluating a head teacher’s work performance may be inadequate from a professional point of view, as they are quantitative rather than qualitative (e.g. number of lessons observed by the head teacher, number of extra-curricular activities offered).

3.1.6. Summary

The survey provides some examples of leaders’ access to opportunities to collaborate with a range of stakeholders. Countries note that **school leaders are generally expected to engage with parents, families and the local communities** around their schools and to **collaborate with regional and local education authorities**. There is **less emphasis on access to communication with national policy-makers** and **almost no mention of school leaders being able to influence education policies** at that level.

Further examples provide **evidence of access to training and on-going support, with countries requiring school leaders to undergo professional development**. However, training opportunities vary widely between countries. A continuum of professional development and support for school leaders is lacking. Many countries state that **appropriate training to lead inclusive schools is a challenge that needs to be tackled**.



Linked to this, **very few countries list competences for school leaders**. This is an identified gap in the survey findings. Similarly, the SISL policy review (European Agency, 2018a) highlights the lack of examples to show the most effective ways to develop the necessary competences and effective forms of on-going support to develop inclusive school leaders. **School leaders' access to the resources needed to develop the school workforce also varies widely across countries.**

The evidence from the SISL country survey shows that there are **few specific references to the key role that school leaders can play as change managers**, developing whole-school inclusive practice. This depends, to some extent, on the autonomy granted to school leaders. The following section discusses this issue.

3.2. Autonomy to make decisions on the school's strategic direction, development and organisation

The trend towards decentralised decision-making increasingly affects school leaders' levels of autonomy.

Autonomy refers to self-direction – the capacity to make decisions and follow a course of action in all areas of school policy and practice. Leaders with this capacity also influence stakeholders beyond their own school community.

School leader autonomy is a 'critical policy area not only for shaping the learning environment at the school level', but for attaining 'equity goals' (Hatzopoulos, Kollias and Kikis-Papadakis, 2015, p. 67).

Harris (2016) notes that the pressure to deliver change and improvement has shifted. There is far greater responsibility placed upon principals to deliver school and system improvement. School leaders working in systems where there is strong national prescription have a more limited role (Pont, 2014).

Many education systems have increased school autonomy with the aim of ensuring greater efficiency and better adapting to local needs (OECD, 2018). School autonomy has gained popularity, but with it comes complexity (ibid.). The OECD (2011) identified a clear relationship between school autonomy and performance. Looking at the evidence from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the OECD concludes that 'the greater the number of schools that have the responsibility to define and elaborate their curricula and assessments, the better the performance of the entire school system' (2011, p. 2).



However, in some countries, increased autonomy has placed more pressure on schools and local stakeholders. For school autonomy to succeed, it must be built on the following key components:

... a strong national framework and a clear strategic vision, well-adapted school head and teacher training programmes, solid accountability mechanisms, and the creation of a collaborative environment – between and within schools (OECD, 2018, p. 6).

As school leaders' autonomy (and accountability) increases, there must be a concomitant increase in relevant professional development and on-going support to enable them to meet their increasingly complex responsibilities.

School leaders are influenced by national policy in key areas, but have varying degrees of autonomy to implement initiatives in their schools – or beyond their schools in local communities or larger municipalities. Areas of autonomy that are likely to affect equity and learner outcomes include:

- having a voice in changes and developments in education policy beyond and within the school;
- the ability to set direction (inclusive vision) and secure stakeholders' commitment;
- the ability to appoint or allocate staff;
- the ability to adapt curriculum content, teaching and learning to local needs;
- the ability to manage school budget and resource allocation.

Autonomy in these areas may facilitate or hinder an inclusive school leader's effectiveness as they strive to implement national policy at local/school level, setting a course and a strategic vision for inclusive practice.

It is important to note that, in many countries, school leaders work closely with school boards or similar governing bodies. These have varying levels of influence across countries. School boards can affect the level of autonomy school leaders have, while also being a potential source of on-going support.

The following sections of this report will share the information about autonomy related to the key areas listed above that countries provided in the survey.

As the school laws and regulations are different in each Canton in Switzerland and each Länder in Germany, the school leaders' levels of autonomy might vary across Cantons/Länder.

3.2.1. A voice in changes and developments in education policy beyond their school

Autonomy in influencing key national policy areas – such as curriculum and assessment, monitoring, quality assurance and accountability, governance and funding, and collaboration with other institutions and the local community – affects inclusive school leaders. 'School leaders who feel a sense of ownership of reform are more likely' to implement and sustain change and to support their staff and learners to participate (Stoll and Temperley, 2010, p. 13).



In the SISL country survey, seven countries (listed below) state that school leaders can influence policy beyond school. Table 3 shows which bodies, named by the countries in the survey, give school leaders the opportunity to influence policy.

Table 3. Influencing policy beyond school

Country	Body providing possibility to influence policy
Slovenia	Councils of experts
Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia	Professional/expert associations
Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia	Trade unions
Greece	School boards
Bulgaria, Latvia	Pedagogical council

Other countries state that school leaders cannot influence policies. For instance, in Belgium (French Community), school leaders are directly answerable to an organising authority. They have limited, if any, autonomy to have a say in education policies.

3.2.2. A voice in changes and developments in policy and organisation within their school

School leaders need autonomy to influence the successful transformation of the school structures and processes through distributed and instructional leadership. They must work within a social justice framework to sustain a welcoming, supportive school culture with trusting relationships (White and Jones, 2011). Inclusive practice is about how decisions about support and resources are made and how specialist knowledge is employed (Florian, 2010). Therefore, such practice requires flexibility in, for example, school organisation, resource allocation and the provision of support for all learners and teachers.

Kikis-Papadakis et al. note that to ensure distributed leadership is fair and benefits the learning of all, it should:

... be guided by a broad concept of social justice that encourages schools to ask critical questions about involvement (participative justice), respect (cultural justice), learning (developmental justice) and resources (distributive justice) (2014, p. 3).

Instructional leadership is important to address both equity and excellence in achieving positive outcomes for all – in the spirit of the ‘ethic of everybody’ (Hart, Dixon, Drummond and McIntyre, 2004). Leaders should use available autonomy to adapt the curriculum and assessment frameworks to ensure they are fit for purpose and appropriate for local needs.

Twelve countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden) state that school leaders can influence changes and developments in education policy and organisation within their schools. The vehicles for voicing and effecting changes and developments are:

- a school council, pedagogical council or school board (Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia);



- a steering plan or a development plan drawn up to ensure the school's consistent development (Austria, Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovenia).

Some countries, such as Lithuania, state that school leaders' ability to influence changes and developments in school policy is only partial, as this is mainly set out in the frameworks of higher authorities.

3.2.3. The ability to set strategic direction and secure all stakeholders' commitment

Leadership is important for giving direction, with a focus on the values and discourse that support inclusive practice. Furthermore, it is essential for exploring and sharing meanings about inclusion, aiming to promote learners' best interests both academically and socially, through fairness, justice and equity (Stone-Johnson, 2014).

Hatzopoulos et al. (2015) link distributed leadership to a culture that values participation, with a commitment to core equity and the democratic values of inclusive participation and holistic growth and well-being. They also note that distributed leadership for equity and learning is characterised by structures that facilitate and support:

- leadership from across the organisation;
- a social environment in which people are valued for what they bring to the organisation;
- positive relationships between people to develop change (ibid.).

Thus, school leaders need to maintain a school culture that is collegial, interactive and focused on listening to and supporting teachers and learners throughout the educational process.

Fifteen countries (Belgium – French Community, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, UK – Wales) state that school leaders are able to set direction and secure the commitment of all stakeholders for a joint vision.

The main means mentioned for school leaders to do so is through a school development plan (that some call an annual work plan) (Belgium – French Community, Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia). The school development plan states 'the school's objectives regarding access and participation, and the measures proposed by the school to achieve these objectives' (Ireland).

Another means is through a school board (Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovakia) or a public council (Bulgaria). Three countries (Ireland, Serbia, Slovenia) also mention school self-evaluation as a means to set direction and secure commitment. Finally, Spain mentions that, through collaboration with stakeholders, the school leader:

... can ease the school's relationship with the surrounding environment and promote a school environment that fosters study and the development of any action that favours an integral education in knowledge and values in the learners.

Some countries mention that school principals or head teachers are not trained to be school leaders; they are first and foremost administrative managers. Empowering school leaders through training programmes is a challenge in Latvia, as the term 'school



leadership’ is not widely used. In Latvia, leadership is considered more of an administrative function. Improving school leadership is not currently a priority for the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science.

3.2.4. The ability to appoint teachers

‘Using human and financial resources strategically and aligning them with pedagogical purposes’ can influence the way teaching and learning are improved (Stoll and Temperley, 2010, p. 15). Thus, it is important that school leaders are involved in decisions about teacher recruitment. ‘Being able to select teaching staff is central’ to establish a ‘school culture and capacity’ that benefit learners’ achievement (ibid.).

Eleven countries (Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, UK – Wales) state that school leaders are able to appoint teachers. This is mainly done with the consent of or through collaboration with a school board/school council (Croatia, Ireland, Slovakia). In other countries, the school leader approves the composition of the school workforce in accordance with the procedure established by the school owner (Estonia) or school’s governing body (UK – Wales). Two countries mention that the school leader has limited autonomy and is not able to appoint teachers (Belgium – French Community, Greece). However, new policies are addressing this.

3.2.5. The ability to adapt curriculum content, teaching and learning to local needs

Having the authority to develop school plans and goals that are aligned with curriculum standards, but at the same time responsive to local needs, depends on school leaders’ levels of autonomy and responsibility (Batanaz Palomares, 2006). For inclusive school leaders, this includes ensuring that all learners have access to relevant learning opportunities within a single coherent curriculum framework and assessment that informs learning and recognises academic achievement and wider learning.

This is an important contextual factor, as it determines the degree to which school leaders can influence organisational development. School leaders make important decisions about the curriculum and assessment. This affects the extent to which they can focus on improving learner achievement (Pont, 2014).

Twelve countries state that school leaders can adapt curriculum content to local needs (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, UK – Wales). This means, for example, that additional content could be included in the curriculum relating to the local area’s history, culture, traditions and industry.

The same countries also noted that school leaders can adapt teaching and learning to learners’ needs and conditions. The school leader can exert this responsibility through a school board (Croatia) or school council (Slovakia). It can be linked to school improvement and self-evaluation (Slovenia). In Estonia, based on the national curricula, the school draws up a curriculum that is tailored to its unique characteristics and agreed by the school head. In Ireland, schools have flexibility to design programmes that are suited to their learners’ needs and to the school’s particular context.

A few countries are developing policies to give school leaders greater influence over curriculum, teaching and learning in accordance with local needs. UK (Wales) states that



the new curriculum will enable this. Ireland is investigating how to advance school autonomy for primary and post-primary schools in general. The focus is 'to make changes in relation to schools' autonomy over aspects of staffing, budget, curriculum, governance and ethos' (Ireland).

3.2.6. The ability to manage school budget and resource allocation

According to the Council of the European Union, 'educational leadership can be effective when [...] it is in a position to allocate resources' (2013, p. 3). For inclusive school leadership, this includes ensuring a focus on equity and high-quality support for all learners without categorising or labelling.

Control over budgets can allow school leaders to prioritise resources for certain areas of development (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008). In this way, leaders can secure equitable resource allocation within the school and so influence the way school practices improve teaching and learning.

Fifteen countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK – Wales) state that school leaders are able to manage school budget and allocate resources to various degrees. In some instances, this is done through a school board (Croatia, Greece, Lithuania) or with the school's governing body (UK – Wales). In most countries, education acts/laws or regulations state this as a responsibility or task for the school leader to fulfil. In some countries, the school leader is required to submit a semi-annual and annual budget to the school board for approval (Croatia, Estonia, Greece). In Lithuania, the school leader is required to analyse the state of operational and management resources before taking decisions about the budget.

3.2.7. Summary

The SISL desk research provides various examples of autonomy for school leaders. In sum, the survey findings show that:

- Only a few countries enable school leaders to influence policy beyond school, through councils of experts, professional associations, trade unions, school boards or pedagogical councils.
- Approximately half of the countries state that school leaders are able to appoint teachers.
- Half of the countries state that school leaders can influence changes and developments in education policy and organisation within their schools through councils, school boards or varying development plans.
- A small majority of countries state that school leaders can adapt curriculum content, teaching and learning to local needs (for example, through a school board or school council). In addition, a few countries are developing policies to give school leaders greater influence over the curriculum, teaching and learning in accordance with local needs.



- The majority of the countries report that school leaders can manage school budget and allocate resources – for example, through the school board or school governing body.
- Most countries state that school leaders are able to set direction and secure the commitment of all stakeholders for a joint vision. However, some countries mention that they are not trained to be school leaders, as their main function is administrative management.

The evidence shows that a sharper focus is needed in the area of school leaders' autonomy to influence policy within and beyond their schools. This is in line with the SISL policy review, which highlights that international and European policy recommendations include the need to provide greater autonomy at school level – with appropriate levels of support for school leaders (European Agency, 2018a).

Beyond the existing policy context, the survey findings show that **many countries are planning developments to increase school leaders' autonomy**. This should enable them to:

- bring about change in their schools;
- secure stakeholder commitment and support;
- appoint teachers;
- organise the curriculum, teaching, learning and resources in ways that ensure greater equity and opportunities for all learners.

However, with limited influence on the planning of such developments beyond their schools, it is likely that policy changes **for** school leaders will fail to empower them, reducing the potential impact.

As policies aim to extend school leaders' autonomy, it is important to have appropriate accountability measures to ensure school leaders take responsibility for their decisions (Hatzopoulos et al., 2015). The following section discusses such measures.

3.3. Accountability mechanisms for school leaders

Hatzopoulos et al. (2015) note that wider autonomy in schools creates new policy challenges related to how governments hold school leaders accountable for their decisions.

Accountability requires leaders to take responsibility for their decisions and be able to provide a clear rationale for their actions.

Policies promoting autonomy should be clear about the possible benefits and challenges. They should set out the related accountability mechanisms (for example, frameworks, standards) through which autonomy can be controlled or counter-balanced. However, it is important to ensure accountability systems do not become over-regulated or bureaucratic,



thereby diminishing school leaders' 'room for manoeuvre' in promoting equity and learning (Hatzopoulos et al., 2015, p. 76).

In the project context, leaders involved in monitoring and evaluating school development and quality particularly require national and local accountability mechanisms that focus on inclusive education measures to ensure high-quality provision and outcomes that matter for all learners (Radó et al., 2013).

In the project survey, 14 countries stated that school leaders are held accountable for school outcomes through various accountability mechanisms. Table 4 gives an overview of the information from the countries, including the types of relevant policies underpinning these accountability measures.

Table 4. Accountability mechanisms and relevant policy types

Country	Accountability mechanism	Relevant policies
Austria	Data collection or quality assurance frameworks	No information available
Belgium (French Community)	Documentation, such as a steering plan	Steering plan Decree
Bulgaria	School inspections	Rules on the structures and functions of the regional education authorities
Croatia	School inspections	Education Act
Greece	Annual planning and evaluation by Regional Centres for Educational Planning	Law
Hungary	No information available	Decree
Ireland	School inspections	Education Act
Lithuania	School inspections Annual activity report	Education Act
Slovakia	No information available	Education Act
Slovenia	School inspections	Education Act School inspectorate law
Spain	No information available	Education Act
Sweden	School inspections	Education Act
UK (Wales)	School inspections School development plan	School development plan

Germany states that accountability mechanisms are decided within the Länder framework.



Most of the 14 countries hold school leaders to account for the school's administrative and pedagogical aspects. In Greece, the 'school head or the school supervisor co-operates with school advisors, management executives, teachers, learners and parents for the joint achievement of educational goals'.

3.3.1. Setting vision, values and outcomes

School leaders are not only accountable to policy-/decision-makers. They must also take account of the views of different stakeholder groups at all system levels. Leaders should work with stakeholders (for example, learners, parents or community members) to set out the school's vision and the values and outcomes for which they wish to be held to account. These might include equity, non-discrimination, meeting the requirements of all learners from the local community, and learners' personal, social and academic outcomes.

Where the national policy context supports inclusive practice in schools, the vision and values expressed should be aligned across the education system. However, school leaders should be able to set particular policy and practice within their schools, developed with local stakeholders to fulfil local needs (European Commission, 2017a). School leaders would then be held accountable for fulfilling these jointly set policies at school level.

The country survey did not provide any examples where school leaders were able to express the school vision, values and outcomes as a basis for their accountability. This issue is linked both to school leaders' levels of autonomy and the extent to which they can communicate their ideas beyond their own school and local community (for example, sharing practice more widely and communicating with policy-makers). This remains an important issue for the core functions of school leadership. The absence of evidence from the survey for this core function of school leadership shows a clear gap in policy-making and in involving school leaders in developing accountability measures.

3.3.2. Accountability mechanisms

Due to growing diversity of learners and other factors that call for greater accountability for school leaders, such as increasing school autonomy, the educational leadership landscape has changed drastically (Bauer and Silver, 2018; European Commission, 2017b). A constant variable in these developments is that the school leader is likely to be held solely responsible for their decision-making and for school outcomes. However, they may be judged regardless of contextual factors that they are unable to influence.

To answer calls for accountability, school leaders need skills in monitoring the progress of school development, self-review and evaluation. They must use data to analyse progress towards the desired vision and then plan and design appropriate improvement strategies, with a positive impact on learner outcomes (DELECA, 2015; Álvarez Fernández, 2006).

In particular, school leaders should be able to assess whether any developments affect equity and, if so, act to allocate and prioritise resources to address such issues. All learners should access support as necessary to allow them to enjoy learning within a curriculum that is relevant and engaging and leads to meaningful outcomes. If school leaders are to be judged on 'results', these should include a wider range of learner achievements beyond academic examination results.



In six countries, school inspections are the means of holding school leaders accountable (Bulgaria, Croatia, Ireland, Slovenia, Sweden, UK – Wales). Ireland's school inspection evaluates the quality and effectiveness of the provision of education, including comparison with relevant international practice and standards, and reports to the Minister for Education. The inspection process is then taken together with the standards set out in the [Looking at Our School](#) publication, which states:

... the statements of effective practice and highly effective practice should enable teachers, school leaders, and others involved in internal or external evaluation to arrive at evidence-based evaluative judgements about the quality of aspects of a school's provision. The statements of practice should also enable teachers and school leaders to plan the next stage in the improvement journey for their own teaching or for their school's provision.

In two countries, school leaders are held accountable for school results through both inspection processes and annual work performance evaluation (Lithuania, Slovenia). In Lithuania, the school leader is responsible for the school's results and is required to submit an annual activity report each year. This is sent to the school community and the school council for consideration and is also made public. In Slovenia, the school council is responsible for the work performance evaluation.

School leaders in Austria are held accountable through a broader quality assurance framework. There is regular data collection (indicators, figures and measurements) on learning progress, school climate, educational pathways and transitions, social composition and the result-oriented use of resources through the federal authorities.

In Greece, accountability mechanisms are conducted in collaboration with the Regional Centres for Educational Planning and with the school board, of which the school's teachers' board, the management board of the parents' board and local authority (municipality) representatives are all members.

In UK (Wales), a school's governing body is required to:

... draw up a [school development plan](#) (SDP) to assist the governing body in exercising its responsibility for promoting high standards of educational achievement. Although the governing body holds overall responsibility for the SDP, in practice, the head teacher will work with the staff and governing body in producing the SDP and will be responsible for implementing the necessary actions and strategies to bring about improvement.

The SDP is created with the collaboration of learners, teachers, parents and staff. Each year, the school's progress is evaluated against the SDP.

According to Belgium (French Community), the implementation of a steering plan in 2020 will empower school leaders. They will have to justify the results obtained in relation to the objectives set in the plan.

3.3.3. Evaluating school leaders' work

According to findings from EPNoSL (2014), systems for evaluating school leaders' work should be mainly oriented towards improving their capacity to lead their schools. These evaluation systems should be framed within professional standards to be consistent with



expectations about school leaders' performance. Care must be taken that evaluation systems do not merely serve as instruments for enacting external bureaucratic accountability mechanisms or as mechanisms of coercion and punishment (ibid.).

Six countries indicate that their policies contain standards for school leadership (Bulgaria, Ireland, Malta, Serbia, Slovenia, UK – Scotland). Two more (Austria, Croatia) have plans to develop such standards. The quality of school leaders' performance is evaluated through strategies such as setting goals and standards and through accountability and evaluation of the work of school leaders and of schools as a whole.

This evaluation is carried out by inspection services or external specialised agencies. In some cases, there are:

... detailed frameworks stating conditions for recruitment, duties and responsibilities, supported by standards setting performance requirements for those aspiring to become Head Teachers (EPNoSL, 2012, p. 14).

Eleven countries have inspection policies that list school leaders' relevant responsibilities and competences (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, UK – Scotland, UK – Wales).

Four countries (Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Spain) shared specific examples of how school leaders' work is evaluated. In Spain, head teachers are evaluated at the end of their contract. If the evaluation is positive, they will continue as head teacher for the time agreed by the local education administration. In Latvia, regulations state that school leaders should be evaluated every six years. In Croatia, the school board may dismiss the school principal on the recommendation of the education inspector. In Greece, school principals are evaluated by the Educational Matters Co-ordinator, who has pedagogical responsibility for the school unit, and by the Director of Education. Principals are evaluated on the basis of their human resources/staff management, awareness and implementation of principles of school administration and pedagogical guidance, and the efficiency and quality of the service provided.

The Ministry of Education and Research in Estonia plans to implement competence requirements for head teachers. These competences will serve as the basis for recruiting head teachers, for providing feedback on their performance and for offering additional training, which, among other things, also emphasises the implementation of a new approach to learning.

In Lithuania, heads of public (state) or municipal schools are appointed through open competition. To ensure the management quality of the schools, a five-year term of office was introduced in 2018. After the five years, the school head can participate in the open recruitment process once again, applying for the same position in the same school, because the number of terms of office is not limited.

Serbia identifies a specific challenge related to evaluating school leaders. The country aims to take steps to de-politicise the election and function of principals. This will include:

- excluding political criteria in selecting members of management bodies;
- eliminating political pressure on their decisions;



- securing the agreement of political players to implement the adopted decisions.

According to the [Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020](#), the steps for further developing management bodies include:

- developing the legal regulation of the function of the principal (de-politicised);
- training principals for their role;
- strengthening the role of school management in establishing a two-way relationship with the local community and with parents;
- creating a system for evaluating principals' work.

Across countries, the main challenges related to accountability are that criteria or standards for selecting and evaluating school leaders are largely missing. Some of the evaluation criteria for school leader performance might be inadequate from a professional point of view, as they rely on quantitative rather than qualitative measures (e.g. number of lessons observed by the school leader, number of extra-curricular activities offered in school). Even when standards exist, they do not seem to include or refer to inclusive education as part of the processes for which school leaders can be held accountable.

The country survey raised one particular challenge: where accountability measures are lacking, school leaders can misuse their authority. Further difficulties may arise when accountability measures are not objective or impartial. In such cases, school leaders who need to be re-elected to their position might try to 'please' the council in charge of evaluating their performance, rather than relying on their professional expertise and decisions.

3.3.4. Summary

The survey findings indicate that, in many countries, **school leaders are held accountable for school results through inspections, standards and quality assurance mechanisms**. However, the results also indicate that **countries are seeking accountability measures that go beyond academic attainment and reflect the wider achievements of all learners**.

Overall, the survey highlights the **need for a clear view of leadership competences that might form the basis of school leader review and evaluation**. This process could be enacted with and for school leaders. It could provide information on the professional development needed to ensure on-going improvement.

Regarding policy frameworks for ensuring accountability, international and European recommendations include the **need to clarify school leaders' role in quality assurance and ensure alignment between governance and accountability**.

School leaders need to be empowered to make decisions and set a course. They **need appropriate forms of accountability that support inclusive measures**. These factors can determine a school leader's effectiveness in creating and leading an inclusive school. The survey findings indicate that **it is important to further investigate the balance between autonomy and accountability, which influences how flexible school leaders can be in ensuring equity and sustaining inclusive practice for which they are held accountable**.





4. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

School leadership has a crucial influence on inclusive school practice and work to achieve the vision that ‘all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers’ (European Agency, 2015, p. 1).

This section summarises the SISL project findings. The findings aim to inform further development of policy in this important area. They build on:

- the outcomes of the policy and literature reviews (European Agency, 2018a; 2018b) that determined the collection and analysis of country information;
- the outcomes of the analysis of the country information presented in the previous sections.

This section will begin with a summary of some of the main gaps identified at international, European and national/regional levels, through the policy and literature reviews and the analysis of country information. It will include an examination of the role of school leadership in the context of the Ecosystem of Inclusive Education Model. Finally, this section will present some priorities and suggestions for developing country policy to support the development of inclusive school leadership.

4.1. Summary of findings

The policy and literature reviews (European Agency, 2018a; 2018b) and the analysis of the country information from the project survey have helped to identify ‘gaps’ related to inclusive school leadership.



At the international and European level, these gaps include:

- few specific references to address inclusive school leadership;
- a lack of concrete recommendations to help countries move forward in the important area of school leadership.

At national/regional level:

- Only a few clear examples of a specific policy for inclusive school leadership were found. Existing references to inclusive school leadership often relate to ‘specialist’ support/provision. However, awareness of the need for a specific policy for inclusive school leadership appears to be increasing and a few countries are currently developing such policies.
- Staff development is a key responsibility of school leaders. However, policies do not always guarantee access to resources to develop the workforce. They lack specific references to the key role that school leaders can play as change managers and in developing whole-school practice to include and raise the achievement of all learners.
- Only a few examples of frameworks of competences for school leaders were found. The competences mentioned are often stated as responsibilities to be fulfilled by school leaders.
- Only a few detailed examples of effective ways to develop the necessary competences and forms of on-going support to foster inclusive school leaders are available.
- Training is not always for active pedagogical leadership, but is focused on management and administrative tasks.
- No examples were provided of school leaders being able to express the school vision, values and outcomes as a basis for their accountability.

Inclusive leaders are responsible for leading schools that build on the principles of equity to raise the achievement of all learners and their families in the local community. For the whole school team to fully embrace inclusion, school leaders need to set a strategic vision and attend to both human and organisational development. To achieve this effectively, the project findings suggest that school leaders need:

- access to the necessary resources, training and professional development for inclusive school leadership supported by national/local policy;
- autonomy to make decisions fulfilling the vision of equitable education for all learners;
- accountability in line with the degree of access and level of autonomy.

However, regarding the third lever – accountability – it is not always clear from the country information if the focus of accountability measures is in line with the level of access to resources, support and professional development and the degree of autonomy school leaders have on different levels of the Ecosystem of Inclusive Education.



4.2. Implication for school leaders' roles in the wider system for inclusive education

This section builds on the Agency's model of an ecosystem of inclusive education systems. The Ecosystem Model builds on Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's model (1994). It was adapted and developed as part of the Agency project on [Inclusive Early Childhood Education](#) (European Agency, 2017a). The original model (Figure 2) was designed to provide a holistic overview of the complex networks in the environment that affect every learner. In the model, all the levels interact with and influence each other.

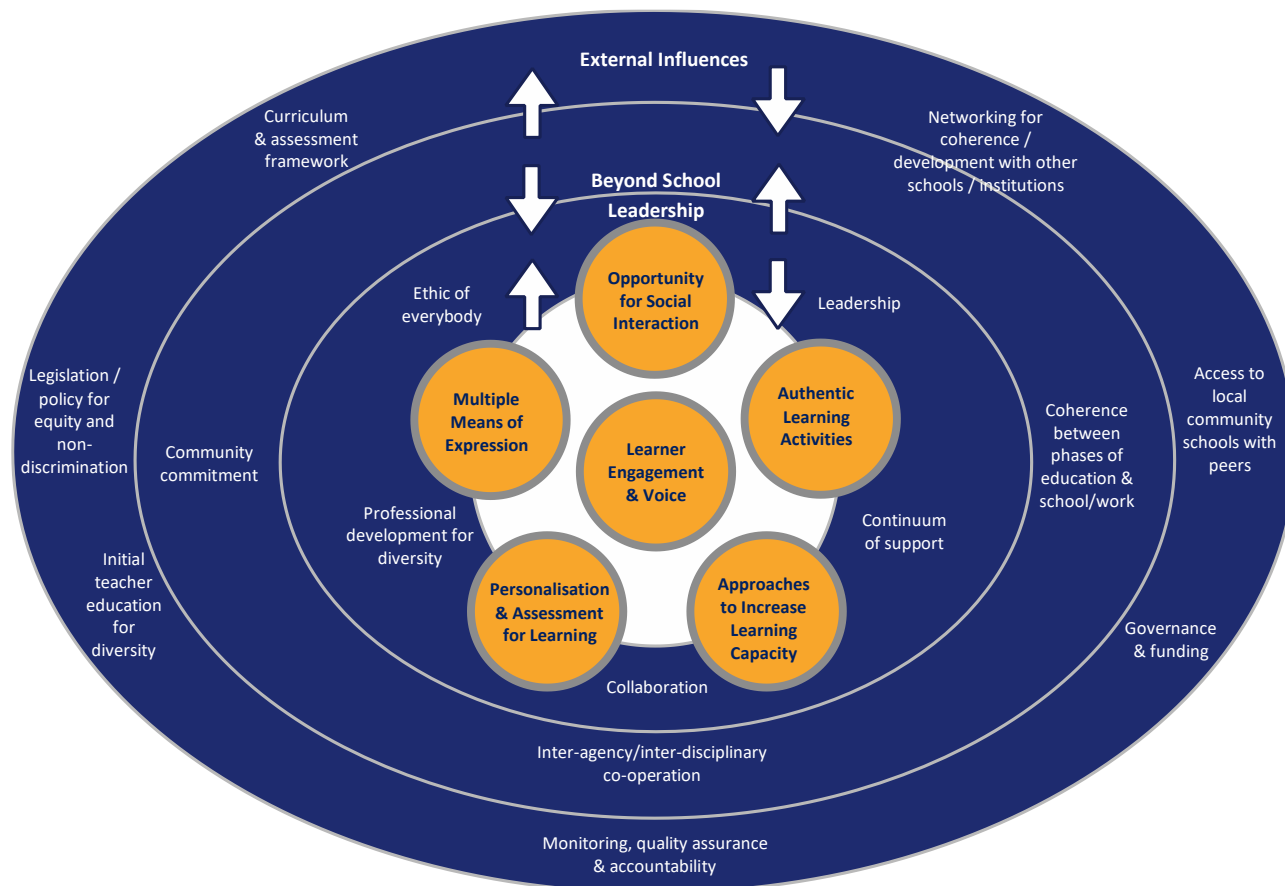


Figure 2. Ecosystem of Inclusive Education Model (adapted from European Agency, 2017b, p. 11)

Within the SISL project, this model has been adapted to focus exclusively on four levels of policy and the small 'slice' of the holistic model that is relevant for school leadership. The aim is to consider the different roles school leaders play to fulfil the core functions of setting direction and human and organisational development set out in the project model of inclusive school leadership. Here, the key focus is school leaders' roles within the national/regional, community, school, and learner levels of the Ecosystem.

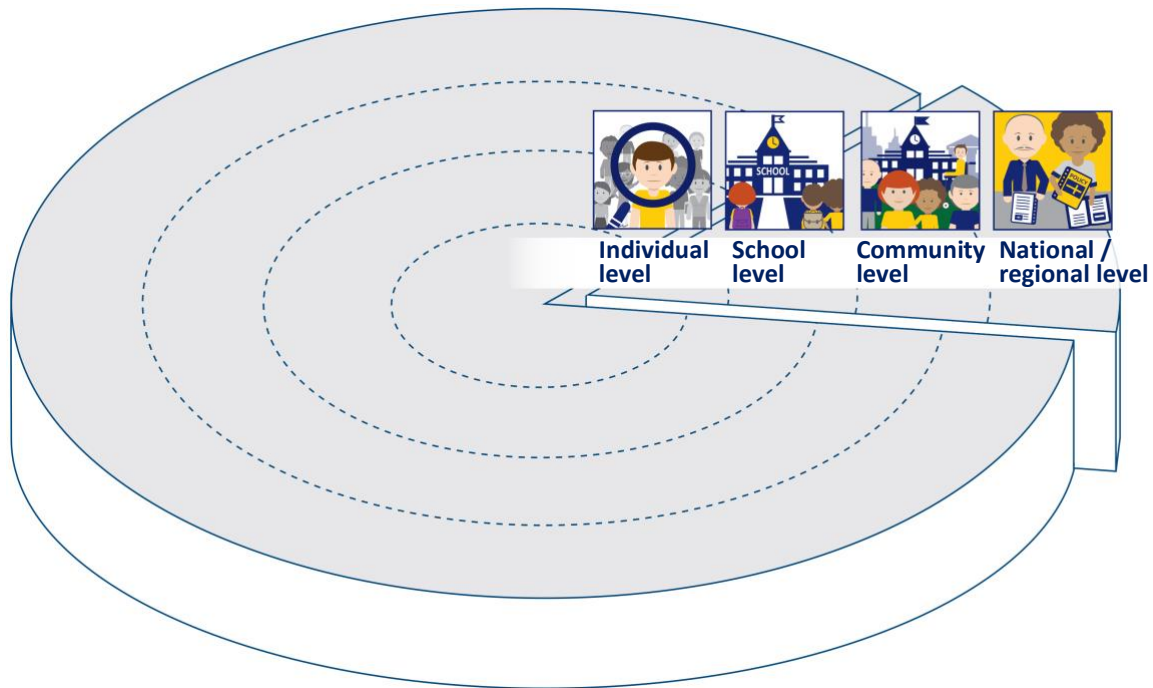


Figure 3. The slice of the Ecosystem Model that contains the roles and responsibilities of inclusive school leaders

The Ecosystem Model is used to consider the roles and responsibilities of school leaders that lie at the interface between education policies and their implementation in schools. It highlights the potential for school leaders to extend their sphere of influence well beyond their own school and to play a key role in supporting wider system transformation.

The model recognises that, depending on the country context, the application of the levels described below may vary. Where this is the case, it is specified in the level description.



The national/regional level shows key areas of national/state/regional policy that, together, provide the context for school leaders' work (legislation that takes a rights-based approach, policy that provides access to a local school for all learners, teacher education for diversity, governance and funding that support inclusion and equity, curriculum and assessment framework with flexibility, and quality assurance and accountability systems that support inclusive practice). At this level, as well as supporting the implementation of national

policies, school leaders should be enabled to feed back on the implementation strategies and offer suggestions to improve impact.

While in some countries the national/regional level applies to national policy, in decentralised systems it may apply to regional or state policy on education.



The **community-level** system represents the community context. Here, inclusive school leaders play a key role in building relationships with others beyond the school – for example, families, employers, support agencies, other schools, colleges and universities in the community. Leaders influence and structure collaboration with these different stakeholders for the benefit of learners, their families and staff within the school. They fulfil the core functions of both human and organisational development. Working jointly (e.g. with the health and social sectors), they can efficiently use resources and bring about a more coherent approach. This reduces unnecessary duplication of provision or procedures in the longer term (Byrne, Maguire and Lundy, 2015). To facilitate these roles and functions, leaders need access to human and financial resources within and beyond the school.

Similar to the national/regional level, policy for the community level may be developed at national, regional, state or municipality level, depending on the education system's degree of centralisation.



The **school level** represents the school or learning community as the space where processes from the national/regional and community levels interact with the learner level. These interactions influence school structures, processes and practices. This level focuses on the traditions, culture, ethos, values, ideology, patterns of authority and collaboration within the school. It includes organising time to build professional learning communities and to engage with parents and the local community – a process that 'sits' in both community and school levels.

School leaders need autonomy to influence the successful transformation of the structures and processes through distributed leadership. Working with other stakeholders within a social justice framework, they can sustain a welcoming, supportive school culture with trusting relationships (White and Jones, 2011).

Inclusive leaders influence and provide direction by paying attention to both equity and excellence. Inclusive practice is about how decisions about support and resources are made and how specialist knowledge is employed (Florian, 2010). Therefore, it requires flexibility in, for example, school organisation, resource allocation and providing a continuum of support for all learners and teachers.

School leaders can inadvertently sustain arrangements leading to inequity – for example, by allocating inexperienced staff to groups of learners who need additional support. Additional support for learners who experience barriers to learning should focus on creating quality learning opportunities, rather than on provision and placement (Ekins, 2013). Instructional leadership is, therefore, important to ensure equal access to the full range of learning opportunities and meaningful outcomes for all – in the spirit of the 'ethic of everybody' (Hart et al., 2004).

At the school level, leaders are accountable for outcomes set out within the national framework. However, at the same time, they are accountable to learners and their families. To respond to this responsibility, leaders must recognise the importance of contextual



analysis and the need to engage in self-review and use qualitative and quantitative data. This includes information and feedback from all key stakeholders for on-going improvement.



The **individual level** involves classroom practice that directly affects the learner's development and outcomes. Here, the school leader demonstrates a positive attitude and a commitment to raising the achievement of all learners. Leaders and leadership teams should use available autonomy to adapt the curriculum and assessment frameworks to ensure they serve as a basis for authentic learning activities. Frameworks should be fit for purpose and appropriate for learner diversity and local needs.

The inclusive school leader is responsible for supporting the development of inclusive pedagogy that attends to individual differences and increases the capacity of all learners. However, such pedagogy should avoid the marginalisation that can occur when pedagogical responses are designed only with individual needs in mind (Florian and Beaton, 2017). It should also ensure all learners have opportunities for social interaction with their peers.

Inclusive pedagogy should be learner-centred. It should involve learners in a personalised process, not expecting them to learn the same content, at the same speed, or employ the same approach (Wolfe, Steinberg and Hoffman, 2013). Learners should also be provided with multiple ways to receive, process and respond to information. School leaders should use instructional leadership to build teachers' confidence in their pedagogical skills and the belief that they can teach all learners (Óskarsdóttir, 2017).

Finally, learners should have a voice in matters that concern them in their education. School leaders can create a platform or a space for democratic discussions with learners, both individually and in groups (Bragg, 2007; Portela, 2013).

In summary, Figure 4 outlines school leaders' key roles and responsibilities at each level of the education system. At every level, school leaders draw on all three types of leadership to fulfil the core functions and, in particular, the roles and responsibilities that support inclusive practice.

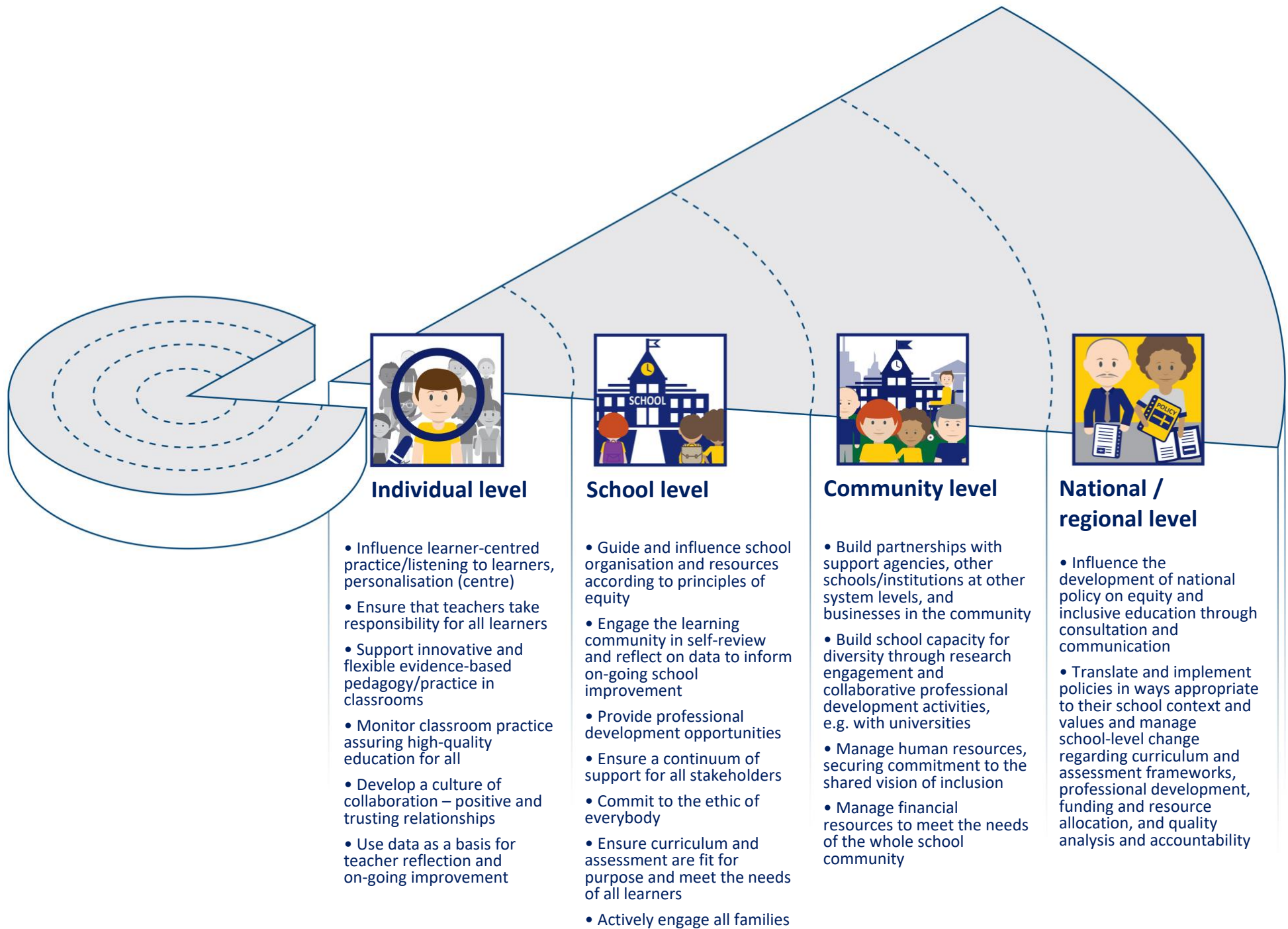


Figure 4. Ecosystem Model for school leaders' roles and responsibilities



Policy-makers at national, regional and local levels can potentially use the Ecosystem Model to:

- consider areas of competence that would support leaders to fulfil their roles and responsibilities and could form the basis for a continuum of professional development;
- review if there is a balance between school leaders' levels of autonomy to make decisions and the existing accountability framework;
- check for consistency with school leaders' access to training, support, resources and interactions with stakeholders;
- devise professional development opportunities along the continuum from aspiring leaders through to those with long experience. This could draw on the expertise of colleagues within the learning community (e.g. university partners, researchers, wider professionals, 'peer' leaders, local employers, etc.) and wider perspectives from parents and learners.

The model also offers the possibility to attempt a more holistic view to support inclusive school leaders, which considers the implications of all the above-mentioned issues.

4.3. Implications for policy affecting school leadership

Schools do not function in isolation from the communities and the wider national, global and historical contexts within which they operate. These external factors, along with internal school and classroom factors, determine the success (or failure) of inclusive education (Anderson, Boyle and Deppeler, 2014).

When considering policy measures to support school leadership practice as outlined above, it is necessary to pay attention to the overarching policy context and the many inter-related structures and processes that operate at different levels of any education system and – most importantly – operate differently in different country contexts.

The analysis of country information across the three key policy levers – access, autonomy and accountability – in this report has highlighted some important gaps in policy for inclusive school leadership across countries. The following paragraphs draw on this analysis to make recommendations about policy measures that specifically reference **inclusive** school leaders and that should be applied to **all** school leaders.

As a starting point, countries should develop clear, coherent general policy frameworks on education, taking a rights-based approach to support equity, inclusion and non-discrimination. The policy frameworks should enable all learners to attend their local community school, with their peers, and ensure effective equal access to common curriculum and assessment frameworks that provide a high-quality education for **all** learners (Council of the European Union, 2018). The following recommended specific policy measures should be embedded in the above-mentioned general policy context.



These policy frameworks should **support inclusive school leaders by improving their access to resources, support and professional development** through:

- Improving co-ordination between governments and agencies, such as universities, inspectorates, etc., to support evidence-based policy-making. Inclusive school leaders can share research evidence in their schools/communities to increase understanding and ensure support for on-going work and school development towards more inclusive practice.
- Increasing stakeholders' engagement in policy-making. Inclusive school leaders can play a key role in bridging the policy-practice gap and implementing initiatives in the school/local community. If they have access to regular communication with policy-makers/local leaders, they can raise awareness, secure the commitment of families and the wider community, and feed back to leaders and policy-makers about the effectiveness of policy and future priorities.
- Introducing policy measures that facilitate inter-disciplinary working at all levels to ensure inclusive school leaders can effectively use resources, experience and expertise. These are important to increase the capacity of schools and teachers to develop inclusive pedagogy to raise the achievement of learners with a wide range of different support requirements.
- Resourcing professional development opportunities to ensure inclusive school leaders can meet the required standards, as agreed with key stakeholder groups. This should include access to mentoring, peer learning and wider opportunities (e.g. secondments or sabbaticals) to enable school leaders to increase their capability through reflective, practical and collaborative professional programmes, exchanges, research and study. Furthermore, it is important to ensure they are equipped to fulfil the responsibilities associated with this complex role.
- Setting out policy measures that support and facilitate collaboration between ministry level, regional-/local-level training providers and schools to develop a continuum of professional development opportunities and an agreed framework of competences for aspiring and practising inclusive school leaders.
- Developing systems/structures to provide access to mentoring and on-going support (continuum) for inclusive school leaders to enable them to work effectively within these areas of autonomy.

These policies should **support inclusive school leaders by boosting their autonomy to make decisions on the school's strategic direction, development and organisation** through:

- Developing specific policy on inclusive school leadership, taking into account the project model of inclusive school leadership. This model combines transformational, distributed and instructional leadership to ensure school leaders are equipped to lead a community of diverse learners. They should fulfil the key functions of setting direction for the school and developing both the school as an organisation and the attitudes, values and areas of competence of all staff and support personnel.



- Ensuring that governance and funding arrangements give inclusive school leaders appropriate levels of autonomy to enable them to make decisions (for example, regarding staff appointments, funding and resource allocation, curriculum content, assessment and accreditation, school organisation, staff professional development) and ensure equity and inclusive practice within their schools.
- Ensuring that policy measures support the recognition and status of inclusive school leaders in line with their potential role as change managers at national and regional policy level and in schools and their communities.
- Ensuring that policy supports learner-centred education and a culture of listening to learners and involving them and families in decisions about their learning and progress (particularly at times of transition).

These policies should **support inclusive school leaders by ensuring accountability measures are aligned with inclusive education policy and enabling them to play a lead role in monitoring, self-review and evaluation** through:

- Developing quality assurance and accountability in line with inclusive practice to support school leaders to gain recognition for effective inclusive practice in their schools. This should include self-review and effective use of data (including a wide range of learner outcomes) to inform on-going improvement.
- Ensuring the balance between autonomy and accountability that influences how flexible inclusive school leaders can be in ensuring equity and sustaining the inclusive practice for which they are held accountable.

The analysis of country policy using the three key levers – access, autonomy and accountability – reveals gaps across countries. It shows how greatly the situation varies across and within the countries that responded to the survey. However, this approach offers a promising framework through which school leaders' roles and responsibilities in a specific country context can be viewed across the Ecosystem of Inclusive Education.



5. CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK ON FUTURE WORK

Agency member countries have recognised that effective school-level leadership is a priority issue. Recent Agency work has also highlighted school leadership as a crucial factor for developing inclusive education systems and as a key issue for providing quality support for all learners (European Agency, 2014; 2017b; 2019b). The SISL project therefore aimed to draw on policy and literature reviews and an analysis of member country information to examine the concept of inclusive school leadership and identify policy measures that support its development.

This SISL project work has been guided by three overarching questions. In conclusion, the key points in response to these are summarised below.

1. What policy frameworks are required to develop and support inclusive leadership across the whole education system?

The policy frameworks required to develop and support inclusive school leaders need to set a supportive and enabling context (at macro level) that allows them to fulfil their core functions and meet the increasingly complex range of responsibilities. This also means providing school leaders with access to professional development and support, autonomy to set a strategic vision and follow it through, and accountability measures that support them to manage change to develop high-quality, inclusive schools. In addition, accountability measures must be balanced with the level of resources available to school leaders and their levels of autonomy and influence.

2. What are the essential competences needed for effective inclusive leadership practice at school level?

There is still a lack of clarity about the essential competences for effective inclusive leadership practice across all levels of the Ecosystem Model. However, competence frameworks are recognised as being important for school leaders to ensure a focus on equity and to determine their pedagogical and managerial roles through this lens. Competence requirements for the school leader role can provide essential frameworks for initial training and continuous professional development. These frameworks can also serve to inform accountability.



3. What support and professional development opportunities are required to develop and sustain effective inclusive school leaders?

The support and professional development opportunities required to develop and sustain effective inclusive school leaders may need a clearer focus on active pedagogical leadership and learner outcomes, with a reduction in administrative tasks. Initial training, professional development and support should include collaborative networks with peers and be linked to the competence frameworks discussed above. They should aim to maximise school leaders' influence within and beyond the school.

The project findings indicate that the demands on school leaders are many and diverse. The expertise required to successfully lead a school can hardly be found within one person. This means that, in the current complex education environment, school leaders increasingly need competences to allow them to work collaboratively with colleagues and personal characteristics that enable them to lead others within and around an inclusive school.

The training, support and on-going development of people likely to be successful in this demanding role is an important task for country policy-makers aspiring to improve their schools to provide a high-quality education for all learners.

This analysis of literature and international, European and national policy affecting inclusive school leadership provides different leadership models and key policy levers. These can be combined and built on to develop a policy framework specifically designed to support inclusive school leadership. This leadership aims to address inequality and build community and full participation and valued outcomes for all learners, including those most vulnerable to exclusion.

These models and key levers include:

- The core functions of inclusive school leaders – setting direction, human and organisational development.
- The Ecosystem Model, which considers the roles and responsibilities undertaken by inclusive school leaders to fulfil the core functions, across all levels of the education system. This crucial role lies at the interface between education policies and their implementation in schools.
- Key policy levers of access, autonomy and accountability that, when enacted, enable and support inclusive school leaders to fulfil the above-mentioned roles and core functions.

Building on these models and key levers, the next phase of project activities can further develop a policy framework that addresses the recommended policy measures and supports school leaders' roles and responsibilities in the Ecosystem of Inclusive Education.

Previous Agency projects have repeatedly shown the importance of leadership for developing inclusive school systems (European Agency, 2014; 2017b; 2019b). This report highlights the diverse roles and responsibilities of inclusive school leaders and the need to enable policy at all levels to empower them to support and raise the achievement of all learners.



Echoing this, Harris and Jones write:

The policy context in which students, teachers and school leaders find themselves, is a critical determinant of success or failure. If there is a clear political will and commitment to actively deal with inequity, then those leading classrooms and schools have, at least, a fighting chance (2018, p. 240).





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