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# European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

About us



**EUROPEAN AGENCY**  
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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## ABOUT US

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is an independent organisation that acts as a platform for collaboration for the ministries of education in our member countries.

Our work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This enhances learners' life chances and possibilities for actively participating in society.

The Agency member countries' shared ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers. Therefore, this vision is the focal point of all Agency work.

Our main aim is to help member countries improve their educational policy and practice. We do this by combining the perspectives of policy, practice and research to provide member countries and stakeholders at the European level with evidence-based information and guidance on implementing inclusive education.

## WHO WE ARE

We are the only European body maintained by our member countries with the specific mission of helping them improve the quality and effectiveness of their inclusive provision for all learners.

Our permanent network of ministerial representatives decides on the specific priorities for our annual and multi-annual work programmes. This ensures that our work aligns with the priorities of the ministries of education in our member countries.

All our work is in line with and directly supports all international and European Union (EU) policy initiatives on education. We aim to ensure equity, equal opportunities and rights for all learners, particularly those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion, such as learners with disabilities and/or special educational needs.

The Agency has the vision of becoming a role model of accessibility and inclusive practice. The main goal of the Agency's **Accessibility Policy** is to provide a fully accessible experience of the Agency and all its activities. This responsibility is accepted and shared by management and by every staff member. It is ensured with the help and support of experts within the Agency.





The Agency is co-funded by the ministries of education in its member countries and by the European Commission via an operating grant within the EU Erasmus+ education programme (2014–2020).

The Agency also conducts specific activities funded via additional grants from the European Commission or other sources, such as international organisations or individual member countries. These additional activities enable the Agency to undertake work that complements and reinforces the activities agreed by member countries within the framework of the Agency's multi-annual work programmes.

Our **Articles of Association** describe the Agency's overall aims, objectives and board procedures.

## Agency position on inclusive education systems

All European countries are committed to working towards ensuring more inclusive education systems. They do so in different ways, depending on their past and current contexts and histories. Inclusive education systems are seen as a vital component within the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies that all countries align themselves with, both ethically and politically.

The ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational

opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers.

For this vision to be enacted, the legislation directing inclusive education systems must be underpinned by the fundamental commitment to ensuring every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities.

The policy governing inclusive education systems must provide a clear vision for and conceptualisation of inclusive education as an approach for improving the educational opportunities of all learners. Policy must also clearly outline that the effective implementation of inclusive education systems is the shared responsibility of all educators, leaders and decision-makers.

The operational principles guiding the implementation of structures and procedures within inclusive education systems must be those of equity, effectiveness, efficiency and raising achievements for all stakeholders – learners, their parents and families, educational professionals, community representatives and decision-makers – through high-quality, accessible educational opportunities.

With this vision in mind, in its work with member countries the Agency will endeavour to provide







guidance on the development of inclusive education systems that aim to:

- Raise the achievements of learners by recognising and building upon their talents and effectively meeting their individual learning needs and interests. The Agency understanding of raised achievement for learners encompasses all forms of personal, social and academic attainments that will be relevant for the individual learner in the short term, while enhancing their life chances in the long term.
- Ensure that all stakeholders value diversity. This principle should be enacted by actively engaging stakeholders in dialogue and providing support to enable them to make individual and collective contributions to widening access to education and improving equity to enable all learners to realise their full potential.
- Ensure the availability of flexible continua of provision and resources that support the learning of all stakeholders at both individual and organisational levels.
- Ensure that effective continua of support in inclusive education systems encompass personalised approaches to learning that engage all learners and support their active participation in the learning process. This involves the development of learner-centred curriculum and assessment frameworks; flexible training and continuous professional development opportunities for all educators, school leaders and decision-makers; and coherent governance processes at all system levels.
- Raise the achievements, outcomes and outputs of the system overall by effectively enabling all stakeholders to develop their attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, understanding, skills and behaviours in line with the goals and principles of an inclusive education system.
- Operate as learning systems that work towards the continuous improvement and alignment of

structures and processes by building all stakeholders' capacity to systematically reflect upon their achievements and then use these reflections to improve and develop their collective work towards their shared goals.

The essential features of inclusive education systems outlined here are based on a wider European and international policy and practice context.

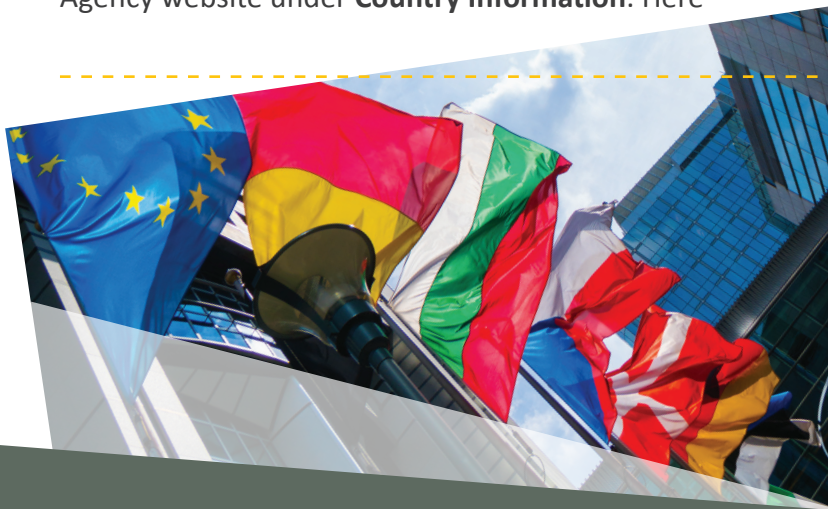
The Agency shares its position on inclusive education systems with everybody who is working for the Agency. It expects all staff members to work within and towards this position.

The **Agency's position on inclusive education systems** is available as a flyer in all Agency languages.

## Member countries

At present, the Agency is made up of the following 31 member countries: Austria, Belgium (Flemish community and French community), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

Country-specific information is available on the Agency website under **Country Information**. Here





you will find information on national contacts, legislation and policy on special needs and inclusive education, as well as country-specific news.

Information on our member countries' involvement in Agency projects is available on the respective **project web areas**.

## History

The Agency was established in 1996 as an initiative of the Danish Government, endorsed by the member countries' Education Ministers.

The Agency was established at the end of the European Commission's Helios II programme. Its establishment reflected the need for a permanent and systematic structure for European collaboration in the field of special needs and inclusive education.

In 1999, following a three-year trial period funded by the Danish education authorities, the Agency was transferred to the member countries. This formally established the Agency as a European organisation with the mandate to act as its member countries' platform for collaboration in the field of special needs and inclusive education.

The Agency's original name was European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. The current name – European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education – formally came into effect on 1 January 2014 to better reflect the Agency's current and future activities.



## WHAT WE DO

The Agency's main aim is to help member countries improve their inclusive policy and practice in the field of education.

Our work focuses on supporting the development of inclusive education systems to ensure every learner's right to inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This enhances learners' life chances and possibilities for actively participating in society.

We provide member countries and stakeholders at the European level with evidence-based information and guidance on implementing inclusive education systems.

While recognising that there are differences in countries' policies, practices and educational contexts, the Agency has the following strategic objectives:

- to promote quality in the field of special needs and inclusive education by maintaining a long-term framework for extended European collaboration;
- to facilitate effective exchange of knowledge and experience among, as well as within, member countries;
- to identify key factors that hinder or support progress and provide countries with information and guidance;
- to analyse and review policy developments in countries in order to support the development of sustainable and effective inclusive education systems.



## Work programmes

The **annual work programmes** set out the Agency's short-term priorities. The **Work Programme 2020** is available for download. The **Work Programme in Brief** gives a quick overview of the priorities set out in the annual work programme.

The seven-year multi-annual work programme presents the Agency's long-term priorities. It describes the activities that will be implemented to meet the Agency member countries' agreed requests while directly supporting EU-level policy goals and initiatives.

## Annual reports

The annual reports contain summaries of the Agency's activities during the previous year.

The most recent **Annual Report** is available on the Agency website.

## International and European key documents and statements

We have a mandate from our member countries to facilitate collaboration regarding country priorities that are in line with the Council of the European Union's priorities for education and training, as identified in the **Education & Training 2020 strategy**.

Our activities take into consideration key international statements on inclusive education, such as the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4**, the **Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4**, the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (1989), the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (2006), the **Salamanca Statement** (1994) and the **Cali commitment to equity and inclusion in education** (2019).

## HOW WE WORK

Through our country networks and expert participation in projects, we uniquely combine the perspectives of policy, practice and research. This enables us to assess, monitor and identify links between these three perspectives and develop comprehensive recommendations for policy and practice.

We give countries guidance on how to implement inclusive education, in line with the EU policies set out in the **Education & Training 2020 programme** and with the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (2006), from a rights and quality perspective.

We provide information to support evidence-based policy-making aimed at improving the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of inclusive education systems.

Our work centres on the following key activities:

- **Country policy review and analysis** to provide information for member countries on their progress and developments in key areas relating to inclusive education
- **Thematic projects** focusing on priority topics identified by member countries and involving national experts from all member countries
- **Data collection** and provision of statistics and indicators informing inclusive education
- External consultancy work, such as technical support to countries in the framework of the **European Commission Structural Reform Support Programme**



- **Conferences, thematic seminars, workshops and political events** to raise awareness, share information on priority areas and facilitate networking for participants
- **Disseminating information** through a broad range of activities.

Information on our activities is available on the **Agency website** and in printed form in various formats, such as reports, literature reviews and policy briefs. Main project outcomes and findings are available in up to 25 languages. All our materials are free to download from the **Publications section** of the website.

## CO-OPERATION WITH KEY ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

We co-operate with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, as well as with key international bodies and organisations. These include: Cedefop, Eurostat, Eurydice, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).



## ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Representative Board is our governing body. It is responsible for strategic decision-making relating to our operations, including approving multi-annual and annual work programmes and budgets, thematic work areas and projects. The member countries' ministries of education appoint the Representative Board members.

The Representative Board elects the Management Board from its members on a rotating basis. The Management Board ensures that plans and decisions are implemented efficiently and effectively.

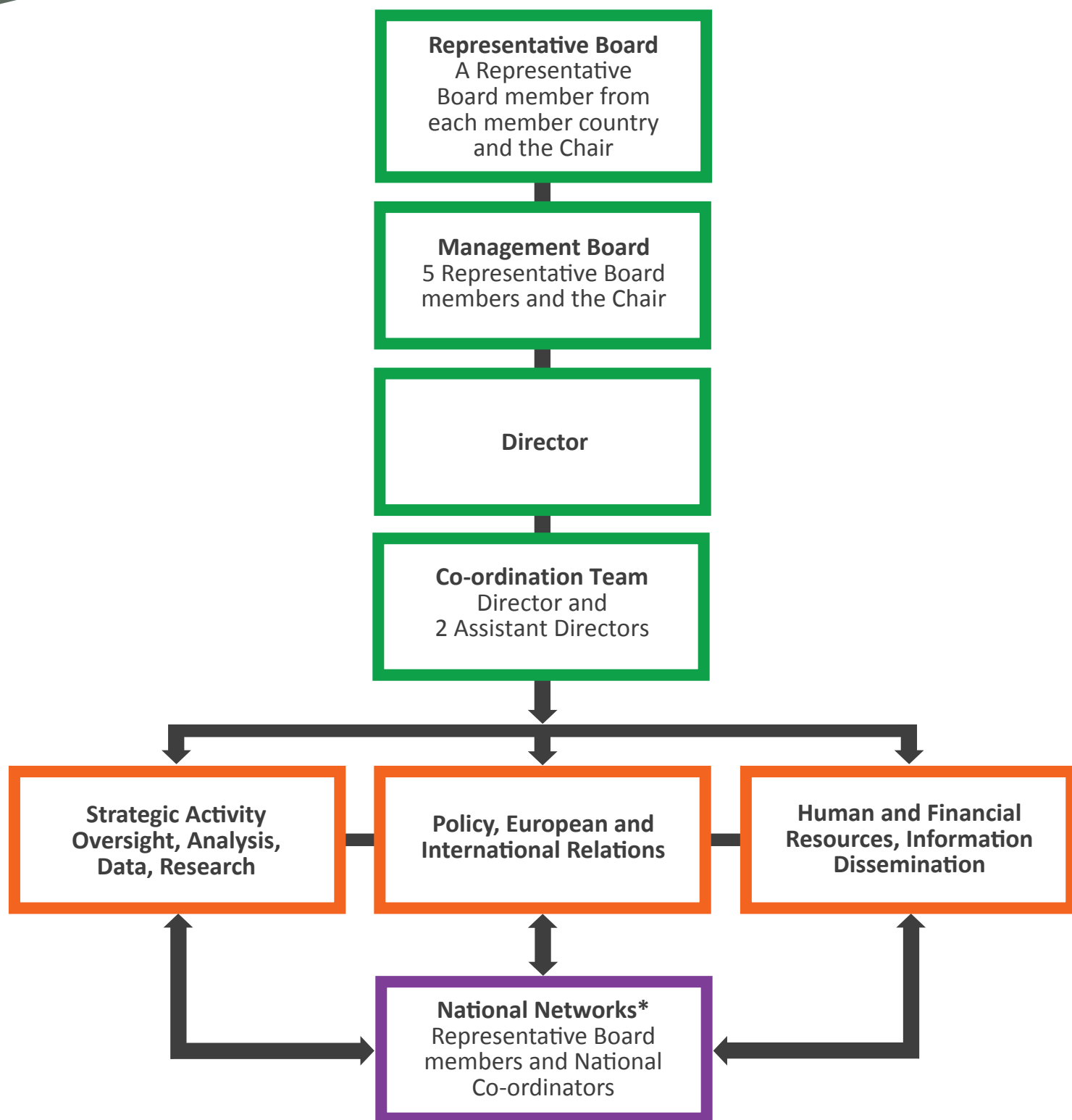
The Agency Chair is the head of both the Representative Board and the Management Board.

The Management Board appoints the Director. The Director is responsible for the Agency's overall management and day-to-day operations, in accordance with the directives laid down by the Management Board and Representative Board.

At the operational level, the Director and the two Assistant Directors (with input from three angles: political; financial, human and other resources; content/methodology) comprise the Agency Co-ordination Team (CT). The CT is responsible for strategic planning, organisational developments and overall activity co-ordination and implementation.

At the national level, the country ministry representatives – Representative Board members and National Co-ordinators – develop and maintain national networks. The Representative Board members are the political-level representatives to the Agency. The National Co-ordinators assist them and help co-ordinate the flow of information to and from member countries. Most countries nominate individual National Co-ordinators, but some choose to organise this work in other ways.





\* Representative Board members and National Co-ordinators develop and maintain national networks and co-ordinate the flow of information to and from the Agency's member countries



## AGENCY STAFF

The Agency's employees work in the Agency Secretariat (Denmark) and its Brussels Office (Belgium).

In addition to employees, the Agency has a number of self-employed consultants who work from home-based offices throughout Europe. These are mainly involved in project and/or information dissemination activities.

Agency 'staff' comprises all its employees and external consultants.

Below is a brief description of the main roles and responsibilities of the Agency's Co-ordination Team/Extended Co-ordination Team, Secretariat, Information Dissemination Team and Brussels Office.

### Co-ordination Team/ Extended Co-ordination Team

The Director and the two Assistant Directors comprise the Agency Co-ordination Team (CT). It is responsible for strategic planning, organisational developments and overall activity co-ordination and implementation. The CT meets regularly to monitor the agreed work programme, budget and human resources.

The Agency Extended Co-ordination Team (ECT) consists of the CT and project managers. About three times a year, it meets to discuss current and future Agency projects and activities. This facilitates co-operation and synergy between the various projects and activities. When relevant, other staff members are invited to join ECT meetings (e.g. financial staff).

The CT/ECT has a central role in the Agency's functioning by facilitating effective decision-making, information flows and knowledge-sharing within the organisation as a whole.

### Secretariat

The Secretariat is located in Odense, Denmark. It is mainly responsible for tasks related to the overall co-ordination, planning and monitoring of the Agency's activities. These include the preparation of work programmes, budgets and accounts, and the co-ordination of support to new and existing member countries and their national networks.

The Secretariat is responsible for internal communications and for co-ordinating the induction of new Representative Board members, National Co-ordinators and staff members.

The Secretariat organises the meetings of the Agency's various bodies in close co-operation with the meetings' host countries. It provides administrative and financial assistance when the Agency organises thematic project meetings, seminars and conferences.

Furthermore, the Secretariat is responsible for the Agency's travel activities (e.g. booking flights, travel reimbursement, etc.) and for all financial, human resources and IT-related issues.

Working in close co-operation with the Secretariat, the Information Dissemination (ID) Team is a group of home-based consultants who are responsible for the Agency's external communications. This includes maintaining the Agency's organisational profile, managing the publication of Agency materials, and co-ordinating the translation and printing of publications.



The ID Team is also responsible for maintaining and developing the Agency website, producing and sharing digital media content, and disseminating Agency news. The Team ensures the accessibility of all Agency materials and provides accessibility training and support to other staff members. The ID Team works across all Agency activities and projects.

#### *Secretariat contact details*

Østre Stationsvej 33, 5000 Odense C, Denmark  
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20

Email: [secretariat@european-agency.org](mailto:secretariat@european-agency.org)

Business hours: Monday to Thursday 09.00–17.00  
and Friday 09.00–15.00 CET

## **Brussels Office**

The Brussels Office's main task is to act as the practical 'facilitator' in the Agency's contact with the European institutions and other European and international organisations. At a practical level, it

means that, in close collaboration with the CT, the Brussels Office:

- facilitates and establishes all necessary contacts with different European services, agencies and the member countries' permanent representations to the EU to be pursued later on by the Agency at the decision-making level;
- maintains close co-operation with these services to promote the Agency's work.

In addition, the Brussels Office participates in preparing and implementing Agency projects, meetings and events.

#### *Brussels Office contact details*

Rue Montoyer 21, 1000 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 213 62 80

Email: [brussels.office@european-agency.org](mailto:brussels.office@european-agency.org)

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