
Annual Report 2020



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

FACT SHEET FOR 2020

THE AGENCY

Full legal name	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
Head Office	Østre Stationsvej 33 5000 Odense C, Denmark Tel.: +45 64 41 00 20 secretariat@european-agency.org
Brussels Office (Centre of activities)	21 Rue Montoyer 1000 Brussels, Belgium Tel.: +32 2 213 62 80 brussels.office@european-agency.org
Website	www.european-agency.org
Chair	Mr Don Mahon
Director	Mr Cor J.W. Meijer
Established	1996
Member countries	The Agency currently has 31 full member countries: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).
Main sources of finance	Member country contributions European Union Institutions



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Preface

2020 was a notable year for the Agency and for the whole world.

Naturally, COVID-19 impacted Agency activities from early spring and throughout the year. As in-person meetings were not possible, we found new ways of carrying out our activities, as this report demonstrates.

We held over 1,200 online meetings, ranging in size from two to more than 65 participants. These included the autumn bi-annual meeting with member countries, numerous project-related meetings and workshops involving country representatives and other stakeholders engaged in our activities, as well as Agency staff meetings.

We took forward four thematic activities and began a new project focusing on COVID-19's impact on inclusive education. In the European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE) activity, we moved from biennial to annual data collection. We finalised the first cycle of Country Policy Review and Analysis (CPRA) activities; now 23 member countries and jurisdictions have taken the opportunity to review their education policies with us. We also took forward Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) activities in five member countries.

2020 was also notable in the sense that it was the last year of the Multi-Annual Work Programme (MAWP) 2014–2020.

Therefore, we continued to prepare for the next MAWP. It will run from 2021 to 2027 and provide the structure and focus for future Agency activities. We agreed with our country representatives the parameters for the new programme. It will comprise a range of activities and processes that will further support

member countries in their efforts to develop their inclusive education systems.

Another notable event was that Ms Ana Magraner, the Agency Chair since May 2017, decided to step down and in November Mr Don Mahon took on the role. We thank Ana for her dedication and hard work over the last three years.

In this report, you will find information about our work in 2020. We hope you will find it useful. We would like to extend our warmest thanks to all country representatives, experts and staff for their efforts and contributions to our work in the areas of policy, practice and research during 2020.

There is no doubt that the coronavirus crisis will also affect our plans for 2021. We will continue to demonstrate the highest possible degree of flexibility and do everything in our power to show consideration for everybody involved in our activities.

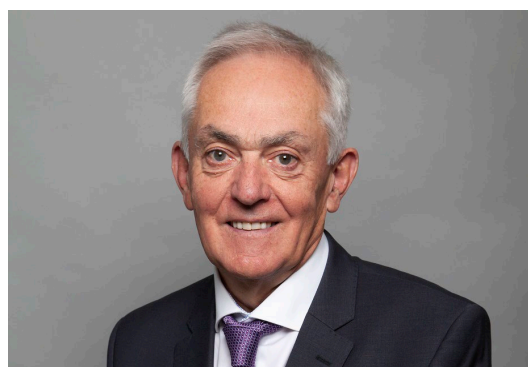


Image 1. Don Mahon, Chair



Image 2. Cor J.W. Meijer, Director

Board meetings

Due to COVID-19, the Management Board (MB) met only once during the year to discuss key issues and prepare for the Representative Board meeting linked to the autumn bi-annual meeting. The MB meeting was held online.

Also due to COVID-19, the Agency and the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development decided to cancel the spring bi-annual meeting that was due to take place in Serbia in May. This was the first time in Agency history that a bi-annual meeting was cancelled. Due to the cancellation, the Agency came up with alternative ways of sharing information with its country representatives. At the end of May, the Agency shared a series of videos and other online materials with the Representative Board members (RBs) and National Co-ordinators (NCs). There were videos and written updates from the Agency Chair, the Director and project staff.

Due to the continued COVID-19 challenges, the autumn bi-annual meeting – planned to take place in Slovakia in November – was also cancelled, in agreement with the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. Instead, the RBs and NCs met online in November to review activities and discuss and decide on plans for future work.

Country Policy Review and Analysis (CPRA)

The Agency's CPRA work provides countries with a reflection on their current policy frameworks for inclusive education. It offers each country specific recommendations on priorities to be addressed.

In this work, the Agency uses a peer-learning methodology to help country policy-makers learn directly from each other, share information and facilitate policy change.

Main 2020 activities

In 2020, the work with the phase 4 countries and jurisdictions was completed. It ended with a virtual meeting in June. This means that the first cycle of the CPRA activities has been completed. It involved work with 23 countries and jurisdictions across four phases. The country grids from all phases are available on the [CPRA web area](#).

Based on a cross-country analysis covering 23 countries and jurisdictions, the Agency started developing a findings report identifying key messages from the overall CPRA work.

These key messages will serve as the basis for developing the CPRA activities within the new MAWP. This will involve revisiting the analysis work undertaken with countries and developing the activities to broaden and deepen the policy work with and for individual countries.

European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE)

The [EASIE data collection](#) is a long-term Agency activity. It focuses on longer-term data collection in line with learners' rights and education system quality and effectiveness issues, as outlined in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the European Union (EU) strategic objectives for Education and Training (ET 2020).



Image 3. EASIE logo

Main 2020 activities

In 2020, all 2018 data collection outputs (data tables, country background information, [Cross-Country Report](#)) were published on the [EASIE web area](#).

Individual country reports were produced for each participating country.

The outputs of the desk research on [out-of-school children/learners](#) were also made available. These inform developments related to the important issue of learners who are out of any form of education.

In line with the RBs' earlier decision to make the data collection an annual activity from 2020, an online data collection tool was developed. After piloting with a group of Agency member countries, it was launched in early 2021.

EASIE work stakeholders have been granted access to the Agency's internal communication platform, [MyAgency](#).

Thematic activities

All Agency projects directly or indirectly support the agreed EU priorities for education and training.

Below are short descriptions of the main project activities that took place in 2020.

COVID-19 Impact on Inclusive Education

In late 2020, work on a literature review focusing on COVID-19's impact on education began. It aims to map evidence

and identify acknowledged forms of COVID-19's impact on education in general – and inclusive education in particular – at national and European levels. The review is intended to collect information on the current situation, with a view to providing a comprehensive overview for member countries and informing future Agency work.

Main 2020 activities

In late 2020, work on the literature review began.

Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education (CROSP)

The [CROSP project](#) focuses on the re-organisation of specialist provision to support all learners' right to inclusive education.

Phase 1 covered a detailed mapping exercise on past and current trends and situations in countries. It identified four main issues related to funding policies, governance, capacity-building and quality assurance mechanisms, that are considered vital to improve specialist provision's role as a resource for supporting mainstream education.

Phase 2 focuses on these four issues and on identifying critical factors and key drivers, using a peer-learning approach. It aims to enable member countries to develop more effective strategies for improving the role of specialist provision for inclusive education.

Main 2020 activities

Based on feedback from the Project Advisory Group and countries, the Agency finalised the methodological and analytical framework for phase 2 in early 2020.

Two online thematic workshops with RBs were held. The aim was to identify

effective policies and strategies for the changing role of specialist provision that are related to the four main issues. These will be embedded in the tool that will be developed for policy-makers as a main project output. During the workshops, the participants engaged in a collaborative review and self-reflection process, supporting each other in improving their policies.

It was decided to transfer the second round of thematic workshops from 2020 to 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of the project's communication and dissemination activities, the Agency developed a [CROSP video](#) and [infographic](#). These help to communicate key concepts related to specialist provision and its changing role in supporting inclusive education.



Image 4. CROSP animation video

Supporting Inclusive School Leadership (SISL)

The [SISL project](#) investigates how to effectively develop and promote inclusive school-level leadership through national-, regional- and local-level policy frameworks and support mechanisms. The main target group for the project outcomes is policy-makers responsible for implementing inclusive education in schools.

Phase 1 included reviews of European and international policy and recent research

and a country survey drawing on the two reviews. This work led to the publication of the [SISL synthesis report](#) in 2019.

Main 2020 activities

Phase 2 work began in early 2020. It involves a cluster of four Agency member countries. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all country cluster meetings were held online.

The main focus in 2020 was to develop the two main project outputs.

One was the [SISL Policy Framework](#), which was finalised in late 2020. Its target users are policy- and decision-makers at all education system levels.



Image 5. SISL Policy Framework cover

The other was the self-review tool of inclusive leadership for school leaders and policy-makers. This was developed and translated into the four country cluster languages. The country cluster members will pilot the tool in their countries in 2021.

Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion (TPL4I)

Phase 1 of the [TPL4I project](#) activities ran from 2018 to 2020. The main outcomes point to gaps in a vision for teacher professional learning and to challenges in relation to competences, continuity and professional collaboration for inclusive learning. As a result, continuation activities for the TPL4I project will focus on competence development for inclusion and using the [Profile of Inclusive Teachers](#) across the professional continuum.

Main 2020 activities

Activities focused on developing some of the main project outputs. These include the [TPL4I Methodology Report](#), the [TPL4I Synthesis Report](#), based on analysis of the [TPL4I policy mapping grids](#), and the [TPL4I Phase 1 Final Summary Report](#). These were all published in late 2020.



Image 6. Annet De Vroey, Agency Project Manager, speaking at the [European Trade Union Committee for Education's Standing Committee for Equality](#) in February

Preventing School Failure: Examining the Potential of Inclusive Education Policies at System and Individual Levels (PSF)

The [PSF project](#) started in 2018 and project activities continued into early 2020. The project examined the evidence to suggest that inclusive education policies have the potential to prevent

school failure – both in relation to individuals and the overall system.

Main 2020 activities

The [PSF Final Summary Report](#), which was the final project output, was published in all Agency languages in early 2020. [Open-source translations](#) for country representatives are available on MyAgency.

The [PSF Country Information Thematic Analysis](#) was also completed and published.

Additionally funded activities

The Agency conducts a number of activities funded via additional grants from the EU and other sources to complement the work included in the main work programme. These additional activities enable the Agency to undertake work that reinforces the activities agreed by member countries within the framework of its long-term work programmes.

Below are short descriptions of the main additionally funded activities that took place in 2020.

Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP)

The Agency is currently providing technical support for five activities funded under the European Commission (EC) [Structural Reform Support Programme](#). The Ministries of Education in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Poland and Portugal have requested these activities, which are fully funded by the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM).

The Agency acts as a technical provider to help the Ministries of Education to plan, design or implement reforms that make

their education policy and provision more equitable and inclusive.

The work with Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece and Poland will run into 2021. The Portuguese action will end in 2022.

Cyprus

In Cyprus, the main task is to contribute to the completion of the Special Education Reform by assisting the Ministry of Education to prepare regulations accompanying the new bill on inclusive education. The new bill was drafted with the Agency's support during the first phase of the action.

Main 2020 activities

The Agency completed an analysis of resources allocated to special needs and inclusive education in Cyprus. The Agency will use the report's main outcomes, and the analysis of working group discussions with several Cypriot stakeholder groups, to formulate the recommendations and regulations accompanying the new legislation.

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the focus is on regional disparities in the education system. The Agency is supporting the implementation of measures to promote more inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all learners in two regions that have high disparities in educational outcomes for learners compared to the rest of the country.

Main 2020 activities

In early 2020, the Agency completed a background documentary analysis. Due to COVID-19, fieldwork activities were replaced by and implemented as online stakeholder data collection in late 2020.

The data collection activity runs into early 2021 with the implementation of focus groups.

Greece

In Greece, the main objective is to help implement a new law introduced in 2018. The law centres on the role of the support structures and their co-operation with mainstream schools.

Main 2020 activities

The Agency finalised syntheses for each of five priority areas identified at the beginning of the action. The syntheses summarise the content work exchanged and provided by the researchers, country experts and Greek participants.

Poland

In Poland, the main objective is to work with the Ministry of Education and its stakeholders to develop the conceptual framework for a new legislative framework for inclusive education.

Main 2020 activities

In 2020, regional stakeholder consultation meetings were held. These focused on collecting feedback from a wide range of local stakeholders on the draft assumptions that will underpin the proposal for new legislation.

A web-based consultation on the possible social impact of the assumptions and a learners' meeting also took place.



Image 7. Verity Jane Donnelly, Agency Senior Project Officer, presenting at the regional consultation meeting in Kraków

Photo by Marcin Kaproń, © Regional Educational Authority in Kraków

Portugal

During summer 2020, a new SRSP action started in Portugal. The aim is to assist the Portuguese Ministry of Education to design a system to monitor the implementation of the 2018 law on inclusive education. The action involves all relevant educational services involved in implementing the new law.

Main 2020 activities

The focus was on identifying the standards to be considered for analysing the implementation of the new law on inclusive education. A desk analysis, supporting the preparation and adoption of the new law, was carried out, as well as initial partial evaluation conducted by different educational services.

Global Education Monitoring Report

The Agency was contracted to work on one of the regional reports accompanying the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) 2020 Report](#), focusing on inclusion and education. The global report was published in June 2020.

The Agency worked on the regional report in partnership with the GEM Report team and the [Network of Education Policy Centers](#). It covers the UNESCO region of Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

Main 2020 activities

The Agency's activities involved preparing detailed country reports, as well as 'vignettes' presenting exemplar policy initiatives in 12 countries (11 Agency member countries and Romania). These were used as the basis for analysis and for drafting five report chapters on key topics for inclusive education for all 31 countries and jurisdictions covered in the regional report. The report was published in early 2021 and officially launched during an online event.

Information provision

Publications

The Agency published the following publications in 2020:

- [EASIE 2018 Dataset Cross-Country Report](#)
- [Out-of-School and Out-of-Data? Out-of-School Learners in EASIE – Conceptual Working Paper, Background Information Report and Country Survey Results](#)
- Agency [About us](#) presentation flyer
- [CPRA phase 4 grids](#): Belgium (Flemish community), Germany (Hessen) and Netherlands
- [TPL4I policy mapping grids](#) for 26 countries
- [TPL4I: An Analysis of Country Policies in Europe](#)

- [TPL4I Methodology Report](#)
- [TPL4I Phase 1 Final Summary Report](#)
- *Inclusive School Leadership: [A practical guide to developing and reviewing policy frameworks](#)*
- [PSF Country Information Thematic Analysis](#)
- [PSF Final Summary Report](#) ([open-source translations](#) for country representatives are available on MyAgency)

News and social media

The [News section](#) is the most frequently updated area of the Agency website. It serves to promote Agency work in general and share specific updates about developments in member countries, events, publications and projects. In 2020, the Agency published 46 news items.

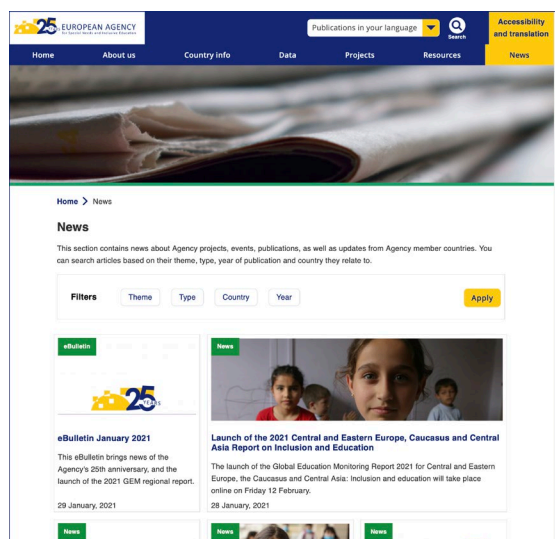


Image 8. The News section on the Agency website

As an extension of the News section, the [eBulletin](#) delivers Agency and country updates to subscribers. Four issues of the eBulletin were sent during 2020 to over 1,900 recipients. Over 80 new people subscribed to it during the year.

The Agency has approved an organisation-wide hashtag for key events and general social media posts: **#EASNIE**. As users associate Agency content with this hashtag, it will improve the Agency's ability to track social media sharing and effectiveness.

In late 2020, the Agency developed a new [animated video](#) and an [infographic](#), conveying key messages from the CROSP project.

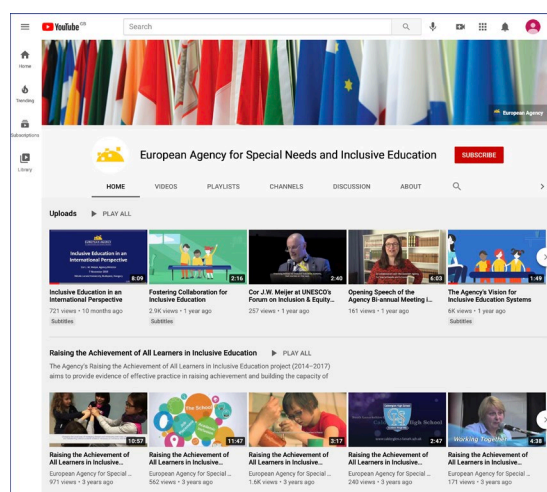


Image 9. The Agency YouTube channel

Open-access resources

In the autumn, the Agency introduced a new open-access licence for its publications. **Open access** refers to content that is universally and freely accessible online, at no cost to the reader. The aim is to increase distribution and use of Agency materials, while expressing the Agency's commitment to sharing information openly and broadly. An overarching [Open Access Policy](#) establishes how Agency materials can be used.

MyAgency and online meetings

The Agency has regularly used [MyAgency](#), its platform for internal communication and activity management, to share news, resources and information about projects, publications and meetings.

MyAgency has been an essential tool during the COVID-19 pandemic, making it possible to hold meetings online, including board and project meetings. More than 1,200 online meetings were held, with over 300 different participants.

In the autumn, assistive technology users participated in virtual tests to evaluate the accessibility of the Agency's online meetings. The Agency is using the recommendations from these tests to ensure its online meetings are accessible, from invitation through to post-meeting follow-up.

Co-operative relationships and participation in key events

Throughout 2020, the Agency maintained co-operative relationships with the EU institutions, particularly with the EC, with members of the committees of the European Parliament and with Agency member countries' permanent representations in Brussels. These relationships are important to ensure visibility of and support for the Agency's work for member countries in relation to the European stated priorities for education and training.

The Agency has been actively involved in the [ET 2020 Working Group](#) on Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education. The main purpose was to analyse and exchange different policy options. The [Working Group's final meeting](#) was held online in November.



Image 10. Participants in the [Europe Begins in Lampedusa](#) event at the European Parliament, in which the Agency participated

Furthermore, the Agency has continued sharing information and knowledge with the EC's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion in relation to work on examining inclusive education issues in the European Schools (based in six countries).

Following this, the European Schools' Board of Governors (composed of the EU Ministries of Education and the EC) commissioned the Agency to conduct an external evaluation of the implementation of the European Schools' Action Plan on Educational Support and Inclusive Education.

The evaluation will focus on what has been successful in the actions already implemented and on identifying remaining challenges and making recommendations on how to overcome the identified gaps.

The European Schools' Action Plan is still in its implementation phase. Therefore, the evaluation will be a formative one. As such, it can potentially be used to prepare for a future summative evaluation.

The formative evaluation will be conducted throughout 2021, within the framework of a Service-Level Agreement between the European Schools and the Agency.

The Agency also maintained close ties with other organisations and bodies in the field of education, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UNESCO. The Agency's work on the GEM 2020 Report and the regional report covering the UNESCO region of Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia is one example of its close co-operation with UNESCO.

Co-operation with these organisations adds important facets to the Agency's work. It ensures that activities are mutually supportive and beneficial for member countries. This is also economically sound for countries which, for the most part, financially support all these organisations in one way or another. The co-operative relationships provide opportunities for sharing information about work in Agency member countries with a wider audience, and for gaining relevant information that can be shared in member countries.

Furthermore, the Agency Director and staff participated in a range of national, European and international events to share the outcomes of the Agency's work.

Preparations for Multi-Annual Work Programme 2021–2027

During 2020, the Agency prepared detailed proposals on the parameters for its next seven-year MAWP, running from 2021 to 2027.

The proposals were based on on-going discussions with RBs during 2018–2020 about the [Agency's future role and work](#), as well as a staff analysis exercise covering Agency work since 2011. The analysis identified recurring messages and 'gaps' in recent work in relation to overall coverage of inclusive education systems.

Recurring messages will help to identify new key principles for the Agency's work. The identification of possible gaps has highlighted potential content areas for new activities in the MAWP 2021–2027.

The analysis work was on-going throughout 2020. The findings and outline proposals for the new MAWP were presented to country representatives at the autumn 2020 bi-annual meeting. The Key Principles summary report will be published in 2021.

The MAWP framework will be further developed in co-operation with country representatives via activities planned for 2021. The final framework will be presented for approval at the autumn 2021 RB meeting.

Financial review

In 2020, the Agency's basic operations were funded by the countries' membership fees and by an operating grant under the EU Erasmus+ education programme.

The Agency received additional funding from the EC's DG REFORM for five SRSP activities – in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Poland and Portugal. Furthermore, the Agency conducted a supplementary assignment for UNESCO. Each organisation financed its respective assignment in full.

The Annual Accounts contain financial details for 2020.

Outlook

During 2021, the Agency will:

- Develop a new overarching activity, Country Policy Development Support (CPDS), that all areas of Agency work will lead

out of and all work and findings will feed into. It will build on the existing [CPRA](#) activities to establish a comprehensive framework and mechanism for examining and monitoring developments in and the implementation of inclusive education policies in countries.

- Finalise the annual data collection initiated in autumn 2020, produce all annual data collection outputs, start the next round of annual data collection and undertake a desk research activity examining the CPRA outcomes alongside the [EASIE](#) datasets and, potentially, findings from other areas of Agency work.
- Undertake [TPL4I](#) continuation activities focusing on the use of the [Profile of Inclusive Teachers](#) across the professional continuum.
- Build on the [SISL Policy Framework](#) for inclusive school leadership developed in 2020 and undertake piloting of a self-review tool of inclusive leadership for school leaders and policy-makers.
- Take forward the [CROSP](#) thematic workshops with policy-makers from Agency member countries.
- Take forward the new activity exploring COVID-19's impact on inclusive education on the basis of the desk research initiated in 2020.
- Start a new activity focusing on how to involve the voices of learners and their families in future Agency work.
- Provide technical support to the Ministries of Education in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Poland and Portugal within the framework of the EC's [SRSP](#).
- Join and contribute to dissemination and publicity events associated with the launch of the UNESCO GEM Regional Report on inclusion and education in Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.
- Systematically prepare the overall MAWP that will run until the end of 2027, present potential gaps identified in the Agency work mapping analysis and conduct a focused survey on country representatives' perceived priorities. The final framework will build on the findings and be presented for approval at the autumn 2021 RB meeting.
- Implement a series of self-review and assessment processes with a view to improving working procedures and developing new quality assurance tools.
- Mark its 25th anniversary with an event linked to the autumn bi-annual meeting and an anniversary publication focusing on developments in inclusive education over the past 25 years.



Image 11. Agency 25th anniversary logo

