

Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education

Policy Self-Review Tool



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

CHANGING ROLE OF SPECIALIST PROVISION IN SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Policy Self-Review Tool



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INTRODUCTION

The [Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education](#) (CROSP) project, carried out by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency), focused on the re-organisation of specialist provision to support the right to inclusive education for all learners. The project aimed to identify and analyse challenges and opportunities within country policy and practice that influence the re-organisation and reform of specialist provision towards inclusive education for all learners.

Using a peer-learning approach, 18 Agency member countries engaged in thematic workshops and exchanged experiences and views on the topic. The thematic workshops' findings revealed six mutually complementary guiding principles that underpin the re-orientation of the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education.

Each guiding principle is connected to several policy priorities and strategies that countries identified as effective during the workshops. In turn, each policy priority and strategy is broken down into key actions, as examples of effective implementation of the associated policies and strategies.

This analysis process was the basis for developing a **roadmap for changing the role of specialist provision**. Overall, this roadmap connects the 6 guiding principles with 17 policy priorities and strategies, along with some examples of steps or milestones for effective implementation (European Agency, 2022).

This CROSP self-review tool includes all guiding principles, policy priorities/strategies and indicative key actions in the form of self-reflective questions.

THE TOOL'S AIM

The CROSP tool's overall purpose is to improve the development of inclusive education systems through the re-organisation of specialist provision. It aims to enable countries to reflect and develop a continuum of support for inclusive education by:

- supporting them to map where they are in their journey towards changing the role of specialist provision, through in-depth self-reflective questions;
- identifying next steps for changing the role of specialist provision.

The tool is mainly addressed to policy-makers at national/regional/local level, as well as decision-makers and professionals at school level.

HOW TO USE THE TOOL

The tool is made up of a set of questions that could be answered by a multi-disciplinary team. This team may comprise decision-makers from all education levels and/or other stakeholders, including professionals from mainstream and specialist provision.



The tool is an **open-source** document. It will be available in all Agency languages. Countries are encouraged to use and build upon the tool, after validating it and adapting its concepts and terminology to their national contexts (for more details, see [Annex 3](#)).

Based on their national priorities, countries may decide to use the whole tool for self-review, or parts of it (i.e. focusing on specific guiding principles and/or specific questions).

The tool could be disseminated to various stakeholders for use and exchange of views. Please note that some areas might be more relevant to policy-makers, while others may be more useful to practitioners in the field. Therefore, the most relevant questions can be answered by the respective stakeholders, focusing on selected topics each time they meet. Users can meet more than once, as an opportunity to liaise.

Preparations

Before responding to the tool's questions, users must decide on the following:

- Who will be involved in completing the tool?
- What additional information is needed?

Completing the tool

The tool invites users to respond to a set of reflective questions that are based on specific policy priorities/strategies, as well as key actions needed to support the changing role of specialist provision.

Each question can be mapped into a four-level scale of implementation:

0. **Not yet** – Key policies and actions are not being considered yet
1. **Planned** – There is a plan/idea, but implementation has not started yet
2. **Partially in place** – Implementation has started, but needs greater coverage and higher quality
3. **In place** – Implementation is of high quality, widespread and consistent.

The **Comments** column is for any evaluative comment that refers to the quality of implementation of the key policies and actions or any other evidence available (including any information around monitoring and evaluation, evidence-based data, etc.).

Reflecting upon the responses

After collectively answering the set of questions, users engage in a discussion with the aim of identifying necessary policy priorities/strategies/key actions that are in place, might be missing and/or need improvement and further development.

Specifically, users can reflect on the following questions for each guiding principle:

1. Where are we in the journey towards ensuring each guiding principle?
2. What are our strengths in that regard?



-
3. What areas do we need to improve/further develop?
 4. What would be our three priorities/next steps to consider?
 5. With whom do we need to discuss these priorities?

By reflecting on these questions, users can identify possible gaps and agree upon specific key actions needed to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education. This process can set the course for future developments at national, regional and local levels.



CROSP POLICY SELF-REVIEW TOOL

Guiding principle 1: Developing a shared commitment to inclusive education

Policy priority/strategy 1.1: There is a shared commitment to inclusive education supported by a political will to encourage *long-term change*

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
1.1.1: Are there any cross-ministerial bodies supporting long-term change towards inclusive education?					
1.1.2: Are there any governance and/or funding measures that encourage professionals from mainstream and specialist provision to commit to long-term change?					
1.1.3: Do the support structures allow professionals from specialist provision to take responsibility for all learners?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					

Policy priority/strategy 1.2: National policies include a shared commitment to inclusive education supported by a *human rights-based approach*

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
1.2.1: Is there a clear, long-term political commitment supporting the human-rights approach in legislation and policy?					



Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
1.2.2: In line with the human-rights approach, is there a clear shift from a medical to a socio-pedagogical approach?					
1.2.3: Are there any indicators that show evidence of implementation of the socio-pedagogical approach?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					

Policy priority/strategy 1.3: There are policies and strategies in place promoting a *common understanding* of inclusive education between the mainstream and specialist sectors

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
1.3.1: Are there collaborative dialogue arenas established for stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision?					
1.3.2: Is there a set of measures that allows development of a common language between the mainstream and specialist sectors?					
1.3.3: Are there any indicators to assess the level of understanding of the concept of inclusive education among professionals from mainstream and specialist provision?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					



Guiding principle 2: Promoting knowledge exchange and acquiring inclusive competences through co-operation and networking

Policy priority/strategy 2.1: Policies and strategies support knowledge-sharing through the development of *professional learning communities*

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
2.1.1: Are there any collaborative platforms promoting co-operation among professionals from mainstream and specialist provision?					
2.1.2: Is there knowledge-sharing supporting schools in creating inclusive, high-quality learning environments?					
2.1.3: Are all stakeholders' tasks and roles clearly defined?					
Other (please specify)					

Policy priority/strategy 2.2: The transformation of special schools into resource centres ensures *knowledge exchange* between professionals in the specialist and mainstream sectors

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
2.2.1: Are there any measures that encourage professionals from specialist provision to share their knowledge and competences in mainstream settings?					
2.2.2: Are there any indicators to assess the extent of this transfer of knowledge and competences?					



Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
3.2.3: Are there any measures to ensure in-service learning opportunities for all professionals from both the mainstream and specialist sectors?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					

Policy priority/strategy 3.3: *Linking* professional learning opportunities for teachers from the mainstream and specialist sectors

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
3.3.1: Are there any structures for professionals to collaborate?					
3.3.2: Do specialist provision staff provide advice and support to mainstream teachers on how to work with diverse groups?					
3.3.3: Are there any programmes to build bridges between specialist provision and mainstream education?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					



Guiding principle 4: Supporting inclusive school leadership and management

Policy priority/strategy 4.1: School leaders promote an *inclusive vision*, including mutual values, a common language and understanding, and a holistic approach

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
4.1.1: Is there a clear definition of inclusion in legislation to be adopted by school leaders?					
4.1.2: Is leaders' training based on a whole-school approach?					
4.1.3: Are leaders from the mainstream sector responsible for managing diversity (acting as 'enablers')?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					

Policy priority/strategy 4.2: Ensuring *capabilities and confidence* of school leadership from both the mainstream and specialist sectors to support inclusive education

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
4.2.1: Are there any structures to develop leadership strategies on inclusive education?					
4.2.2: Are there any support structures so that leadership teams feel confident to implement inclusive education?					



Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
4.2.3: Do leadership teams have the necessary level of autonomy to implement inclusive education?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					

Policy priority/strategy 4.3: School leadership and management support inclusive education through *collaboration*

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
4.3.1: Do school leadership and management ensure effective collaboration between multi-professional teams?					
4.3.2: Do school leadership and management promote the transfer of know-how from specialist to mainstream provision?					
4.3.3: Do school leadership and management promote continuous collaboration and communication between schools, community services, training providers, etc.?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					



Guiding principle 5: Encouraging stakeholders' active involvement

Policy priority/strategy 5.1: There are comprehensive national policies and strategies in place that have been developed following a *broad consultation* with all stakeholders, with clear political vision and will

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
5.1.1: Does the national legislation include measures/processes that encourage stakeholders' participation?					
5.1.2: Are there processes in place to ensure the same level of stakeholder involvement in early childhood, primary and secondary education?					
5.1.3: Is stakeholders' involvement consistent across regions/municipalities?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					

Policy priority/strategy 5.2: Policy ensures that learners and families are the main actors and are considered *a key resource* in the learning and teaching process

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
5.2.1: Are there equitable participation opportunities for all families/learners from different backgrounds in both the mainstream and specialist sectors (e.g. families and learners participating in designing individual education plans)?					



Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
5.2.2: Are there any participatory channels, structures and/or bodies (e.g. learner and school councils, family/disability associations) established and involved in the school operations?					
5.2.3: Can families and learners influence decisions related to the teaching and learning process?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					

Guiding principle 6: Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation

Policy priority/strategy 6.1: There are *national indicators* of quality inclusive education that consider local variation, the diversity of learners' needs and the role of specialist provision

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
6.1.1: Do the indicators reflect a shared understanding of quality inclusive practice in both the mainstream and specialist sectors?					
6.1.2: Is there a systematic means of data collection for inclusive education purposes?					
6.1.3: Are decisions based on a valid data collection system covering both the mainstream and specialist sectors?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					



Policy priority/strategy 6.2: There are *co-operative structures/processes* in place for monitoring and evaluation

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
6.2.1: Are monitoring and self-assessment indicators created collaboratively between mainstream and specialist professionals to ensure shared understanding and avoid resistance?					
6.2.2: Are there any initiatives/programmes to increase the knowledge and skills of key stakeholders from both the mainstream and specialist sectors in data analysis and use?					
6.2.3: Is there effective co-operation between the school and the education authorities and universities for data monitoring and use?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					

Policy priority/strategy 6.3: There is a *comprehensive system for monitoring* how specialist provision supports the mainstream sector in implementing inclusive education (covering the sub-systems of internal and external evaluation)

Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
6.3.1: Does the data collection system monitor how specialist provision supports the mainstream sector in implementing inclusive education?					
6.3.2: Do monitoring and evaluation mechanisms reflect a whole-school approach focusing on barriers to and facilitators of teaching and learning?					



Key action	0 – Not yet	1 – Planned	2 – Partially in place	3 – In place	Comments
6.3.3: Are issues of privacy, ethics and risk mitigation addressed while monitoring the co-operation of both the mainstream and specialist sectors?					
Other (<i>please specify</i>)					



ANNEX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This Annex provides definitions and clarifications of the key terms in the tool. It contains terms from the Agency's online [Glossary](#), as well as terms related specifically to the CROSP project.

Barriers (to learning): A barrier is 'a problem, rule or situation that prevents somebody from doing something, or that makes something impossible' ([Oxford Learner's Dictionaries](#)).

Disability is often considered to be due to 'disabling barriers'. These can be addressed by designing enabling, accessible environments.

In education – and during the learning process – there may be many barriers or circumstances that restrict the full participation of learners. Many learners will have different requirements (short and longer term) that may require consideration to enable them to take part in all activities and gain full benefit from the opportunities on offer.

Full and active participation may be affected by negative attitudes and deficit thinking, physical barriers, poor access to communication aids and appropriate information in accessible formats or a lack of confidence and/or training in the skills necessary to take part ([European Agency, no date](#)).

Capacity building: The processes for developing and strengthening professionals' attitudes, skills and abilities. It also considers the support and resources that educational organisations and communities require to develop the necessary working procedures for inclusive education.

Continuum of support: A continuum of support and services matches the full range of additional needs encountered in every school. This ranges from minimal help in mainstream classrooms, to additional learning support programmes within the school. It also extends, where necessary, to assistance from specialist teachers and external support staff. A continuum of support ensures coherent transition within education systems, and from education systems to work. It also ensures co-operation among the different stakeholders involved.

Diversity: A multi-faceted concept that can contain many elements and levels of distinction, e.g. age, ethnicity, class, gender, physical abilities, race, sexual orientation, religious status, educational background, geographical location, income, marital status, family status and work experiences.

Funding: The resource allocation mechanisms (financial, human, technical, etc.) that promote inclusion.

Governance: The structures and processes that are designed to ensure the education system's accountability, transparency and responsiveness. These can include, for example, building networks within and outside schools, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, assessment approaches (pedagogical versus diagnostic model of assessment), etc.



Inclusive education supposes a real change at both policy and practice levels regarding education. Learners are placed at the centre of a system that needs to be able to recognise, accept and respond to learner diversity. Inclusive education aims to respond to the principles of efficiency, equality and equity, where diversity is perceived as an asset. Learners also need to be prepared to engage in society, to access meaningful citizenship and to acknowledge the values of human rights, freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination.

Indicators: Evidence-based measures (qualitative and quantitative) that enable monitoring of the quality and implementation of inclusive education.

Individual education plan/programme (IEP): ‘Written plan setting out a student’s present performance level along with goals and objectives, as well as services and timelines to meet those goals and objectives’ ([UNESCO, 2020](#), p. 420).

Parents, learners and other professionals/specialists may be involved in developing individual education plans.

Professional learning refers to any activity undertaken by education professionals that aims to stimulate their thinking and professional knowledge and to improve their practice, ensuring that it is evidence-informed and up-to-date. Professional learning includes activities that take place throughout an individual’s professional career.

Professional learning community (PLC): A professional learning community refers to collaborations of education stakeholders ‘around clusters of schools involving ... school and community personnel, together with researchers, local area leaders and policy-makers’ ([European Agency, 2015](#), p. 7).

Professional learning communities may serve two broad purposes:

(1) improving the skills and knowledge of educators through collaborative study, expertise exchange, and professional dialogue, and (2) improving the educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment of students through stronger leadership and teaching. Professional learning communities often function as a form of [action research](#)—i.e., as a way to continually question, reevaluate, refine, and improve teaching strategies and knowledge ([Great Schools Partnership, 2014](#)).

Quality assurance: ‘The practice of managing the way goods are produced or services are provided to make sure they are kept at a high standard’ ([Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries](#)).

Quality assurance refers to the ‘policies, procedures and practices designed to achieve, maintain and enhance quality in inclusive education’. It also involves ‘how educational organisations account for their activities, accept responsibility for them and share information on their results openly and transparently’ ([European Agency, 2018](#), p. 17).

Resource centre: Resource centres are core educational centres and/or institutions dedicated to providing support and consultancy to promote inclusion. A resource centre is a transformed special school, which redefines itself as a dynamic, multi-functional space that brings together both human and material resources. The transformation requires stakeholders from special settings to act as consultants for mainstream settings, providing



schools with their knowledge and accumulated experience. It mobilises the knowledge and skills of the school for inclusion, valuing the knowledge and experiences of all.

Specialist professionals: Specially-trained personnel who work for the identification/assessment, education and effective care of learners with additional support needs. These may include: special education co-ordinators, special educators (special education teachers), learning support assistants (teaching assistants), educational psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists (speech pathologists), school assistants (care assistants/school escorts), social workers, etc.

Specialist provision: The term ‘provision’ includes all forms of support that may help the process of participation in education for learners with additional support needs: curriculum, assessment procedures, forms of pedagogy, organisation and management and resources. The term ‘specialist provision’ covers different types of specialist services, specifically:

- in-school provision, which ensures assistance to learners who are in mainstream classrooms, or partially out of mainstream classrooms (special classes, units, programmes, inclusion classes and parallel support, i.e. one-to-one provision by specialised staff);
- external provision to schools aiming to empower them to act inclusively (resource centres, networks of special schools, networks of mainstream and special schools);
- external provision to schools through individualised support to learners enrolled in mainstream settings (physiotherapists, speech therapists) with the support of education, health or welfare authorities;
- external provision to learners, such as special schools dedicated to learners requiring intensive support, under the responsibility of education, health or welfare authorities.

Stakeholder: This refers to policy-makers, education professionals, school leaders, learners/peers, families and the members of the community.

Universal design approach: Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach that addresses the diversity of learner needs by suggesting flexible goals, methods, materials and assessment processes that support educators to meet varied needs. Curricula created using UDL are designed from the outset to meet the needs of all learners. A UDL framework incorporates flexible design of learning situations with customisable options, which allow all learners to progress from their own, individual starting points (refer to [Centre for Applied Special Technology, no date](#)).

Whole-school approach: This involves all members of a school community (i.e. learners, staff, families and carers, community members) and seeks to include all areas of school life. It recognises that real learning occurs both through the ‘formal’ curriculum and through the ‘hidden’ curriculum and learners’ experience of life in school and the community.



ANNEX 2: THE TOOL'S FRAMEWORK

Based on information from the CROSP work, the tool includes guiding principles, policy priorities and strategies, as well as key actions supporting the shift of the role of specialist provision. The tool builds on earlier research, as well as previous Agency activities showing important factors and mechanisms behind the transformation of education systems.

Guiding principles

Guiding principles are overarching principles that underpin the implementation of policies and strategies and stakeholders' ability to implement inclusive education on a daily basis.

They can be seen as **umbrella themes** closely linked to the changing role of specialist provision. They provide stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision with a shared vision of the role of specialist provision, thus supporting co-operation. They align with and provide additional evidence to the Agency's recent [Key Principles](#) (European Agency, 2021) that support the implementation of inclusive policy development and practice.

Six mutually complementary guiding principles were identified during the thematic workshops:

Guiding principle 1: Developing a shared commitment to inclusive education

All stakeholders should develop common values and a shared commitment to providing all learners with high-quality learning opportunities in mainstream settings. Specialist provision for learners who need support should build upon a socio-pedagogical approach, not a medical one.

Guiding principle 2: Promoting knowledge exchange and acquiring inclusive competences through co-operation and networking

Decision-makers and education professionals from both the mainstream and specialist sectors should exchange knowledge through collaboration at all educational levels, as well as local/regional/national levels.

Guiding principle 3: Providing continuous professional learning on inclusion

Continuous learning opportunities should be provided to all staff from specialist and mainstream provision, including those with leadership roles (i.e. aiming to instil inclusive skills and competences).

Guiding principle 4: Supporting inclusive school leadership and management

A universal design approach to teaching and learning should act as a resource and underpin the work of professionals with leadership roles from both the mainstream and specialist sectors.



Guiding principle 5: Encouraging stakeholders' active involvement

Families, learners and other community stakeholders should be supported to participate actively in the learning and teaching process.

Guiding principle 6: Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation

All staff from specialist and mainstream provision should work towards a whole-school approach focusing on barriers to and facilitators of teaching and learning.

Policy priorities and strategies

Each guiding principle is connected to policy priorities and strategies that countries identified as effective practices during the workshops and in written documents.

Policy priorities and strategies refer to the long-term aims for policies to pursue regarding the changing role of specialist provision, and the connection to the means of achieving these aims.

Each guiding principle comprises some main policy priorities and strategies that support the changing role of specialist provision and also complement each other. Countries see these policy priorities and strategies as fundamental for meeting the values expressed in the guiding principles.

The tool's framework comprises 17 policy priorities and strategies.

Key actions

Each policy priority and strategy is broken down into key actions, as examples of effective implementation of the associated policies and strategies. These cover issues of funding, governance, capacity building and quality assurance that enable stakeholders to implement the policies and strategies they refer to.

Each policy priority and strategy consists of a few key actions that complement each other by considering:

- What should be done
- How it should be done
- How to check effectiveness.

The tool's current framework comprises:

- 6 guiding principles
- 17 policy priorities and strategies
- 51 key actions.



As Figure 1 shows, each guiding principle is linked to several policy priorities and strategies as well as to several key actions, to be considered holistically.

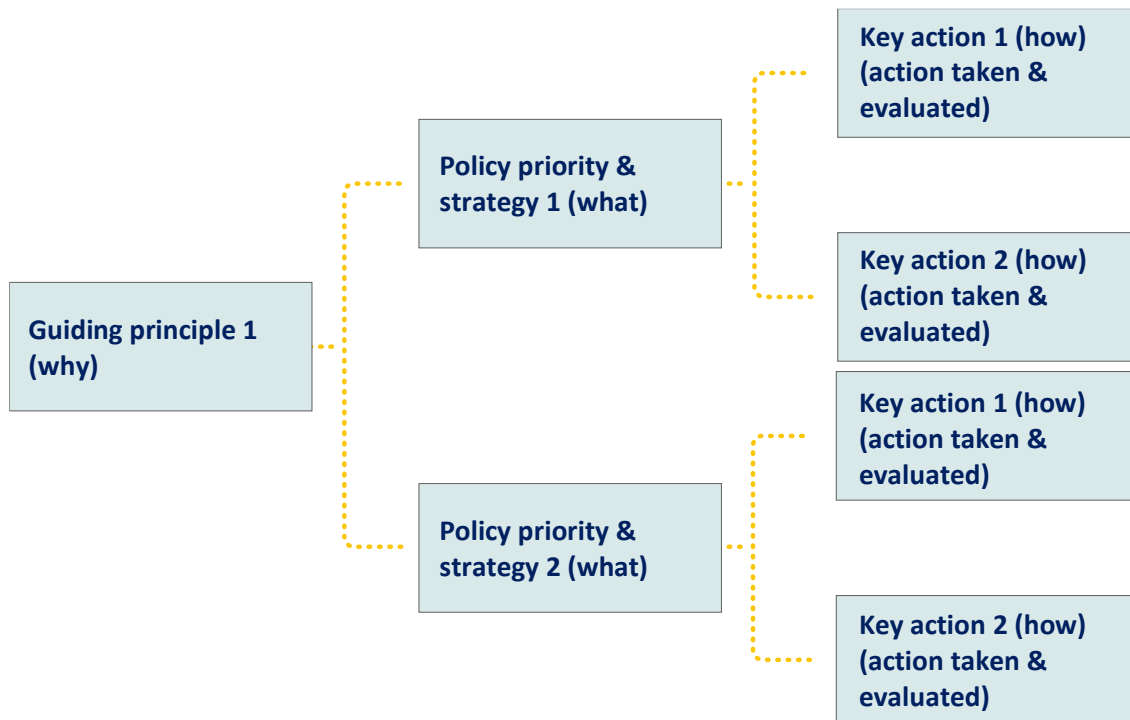


Figure 1. Connections between guiding principles, policy priorities/strategies and key actions



ANNEX 3: VALIDATING THE SELF-REVIEW TOOL AT NATIONAL LEVEL

The self-review tool is an open-source document. Users may translate it and adapt it to their national context.

The **first step** in adapting the tool is to go through a validation process. This entails identifying relevant key actors from different stakeholder groups that represent diverse perspectives.

The key actors selected can consist of:

- decision-makers at national, regional and local levels, from the education sector or related sectors (i.e. health and welfare);
- school leaders and leadership teams, as well as practitioners from the mainstream and specialist sectors (including support staff and specialist staff);
- representatives from family, youth and community organisations, administrators, as well as elected officials, such as school board members, city councillors and state representatives.

The list above is **indicative**, as the stakeholder groups may differ between countries.

The **second step** is to invite the selected stakeholders to validate the tool. This may be through workshops, focus groups and/or individual/group interviews to explore its cultural appropriateness and usefulness.

During the validation process, participants may be asked to respond to the following questions:

- Are the tool's purpose and concepts clear?
- To what extent is the tool easy to use?
- To what extent is it meaningful/relevant to you?
- To what extent could it support discussions around inclusive education?

Answers to these questions aim to determine the adaptations needed to make the tool relevant to the country context. This could involve:

- deciding whether to use the whole tool or parts of it (i.e. focusing on specific guiding principles and/or specific questions), according to the national priorities;
- providing specific feedback on the tool's items (i.e. reviewing and adapting language and concepts to the country context, rephrasing, adding/deleting questions, etc.);
- deciding on the process of using the self-review tool in the country.



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