

Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education

Mapping Specialist Provision Approaches in European Countries



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full version
Agency:	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
CROSP:	Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education
EACEA:	Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency
EASIE:	European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education
SEN:	Special educational needs
UK:	United Kingdom
UN:	United Nations
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCRPD:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rights-based approach to inclusive education, advocated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (UN, 2006), promotes high-quality education for all. Working towards this rights-based goal, countries increasingly recognise the need to change the role of specialist provision. Instead of placing learners who need support in special settings, education systems are moving towards expecting mainstream education professionals to meet diverse needs (UN, 2006; European Agency, 2010; 2015; Council of the European Union, 2018).

The Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education (CROSP) project aims to support and inform Education and Training 2020 strategic objectives 2 and 3:

- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship (Council of the European Union, 2009).

The CROSP project identifies and analyses factors within country policy and practice that support the changing role of specialist provision towards inclusive education for all learners. Two key questions serve to examine this changing role:

- What type of cross-sectoral policy framework is needed to effectively support the changing role of specialist provision in supporting mainstream schools to be inclusive?
- What types of developments and reforms to different forms of separate specialist provision are required to ensure that all learners' rights to inclusive education are effectively met?



This report describes the situation and trends in member countries of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) in relation to specialist provision. It forms a clear overview of the development of specialist provision for meeting learners' rights to high-quality inclusive education. It does so by exploring:

- the current role and main characteristics of specialist provision ([Chapter 1](#));
- the main policy reforms underpinning existing specialist services ([Chapter 2](#));
- further policy developments to transform the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education ([Chapter 3](#)).

Twenty-six Agency member countries participated in the mapping exercise for Phase 1 of the project: Austria, Belgium (French Community), Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and UK (England and Scotland).

According to the participating countries, their specialist provision services consist of:

- 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.

These services involve various groups of specialists covering special education, social and welfare, rehabilitation, health, early intervention, personal development and transition pathways within the education system.

Agency member countries are actively developing policy to reconceptualise and re-organise specialist provision towards inclusive education. The main policy reforms related to specialist provision involve:

- promoting a rights-based approach;
- reshaping the relationship between mainstream and specialist provision;
- developing new support systems.

In many countries, the transformation of specialist provision towards inclusive education results in more learners being educated in mainstream settings. It also leads to positive changes in school-level attitudes towards inclusive education. Additionally, it increases schools' awareness of the need to develop inclusive and flexible learning environments.



Data analysis reveals the need to **further enable specialist provision to act as a resource for mainstream provision and to equip stakeholders to implement inclusive education**. The transformation of specialist provision into a resource involves four main factors that policy-makers consider relevant. These factors are:

1. Governance mechanisms to support co-operation between specialist and mainstream provision at all levels
2. Funding policies and strategies that support specialist provision to act as a resource for inclusive education
3. Capacity building mechanisms that enable specialist provision professionals to effectively support stakeholders in mainstream education
4. Quality assurance mechanisms for specialist provision that promote transparent and accountable systems for inclusive education.





INTRODUCTION

Background

This report focuses on Phase 1 of the Agency's project on the Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education (CROSP). The rights-based approach put forth by the UNCRC (UN, 1989) and UNCRPD (UN, 2006) recognises all learners' rights to an inclusive education (European Agency, 2010; Council of the European Union, 2018; Human Rights Council, 2019; UNESCO 2009; 2017). Both conventions emphasise that every learner has a right to equal opportunities for education without discrimination. Policy frameworks in many countries increasingly focus on education systems that aim to meet all learners' rights to an inclusive education with their peers in their local communities (European Agency, 2015).

Many countries have developed special schools to support and meet the needs and rights of specific learners. This may include groups of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from educational opportunities (for example, Roma children, children with a migrant background, children with behavioural issues, etc.). For these groups, separate specialist provision aims to ensure their right to an education.

However, it is important to clarify the role of specialist provision in supporting the rights of all learners to inclusive education. Instead of providing special classes or special schools, the rights-based approach requires mainstream professionals to promote educational change to effectively meet all learners' needs within mainstream classes (Ainscow, 2005; Florian, 2005; European Agency, 2013; 2016a; 2017a). European countries have implemented reforms to support this shift in expectations by:

- transforming special settings into resources for mainstream provision;
- creating special units or classes aimed at supporting both learners and stakeholders from mainstream settings;
- requiring specialist provision professionals to work in mainstream schools;



- developing assessment mechanisms that jointly involve professionals from mainstream and specialist provision (European Agency, 2013; 2016a).

Perceptions of the role of specialist provision may differ among countries, depending on their progress towards inclusive education (European Agency, 2016a; 2016b; 2017a; 2017b). In this project, ‘specialist provision’ refers to special schools, special units and special classes, as well as professionals providing educational or other support, advice and guidance to learners, parents and schools.

These forms of specialist provision may not always support the development of inclusive education systems, however. Learners who need support are often enrolled in special schools and special classes, where they may have fewer learning and participation opportunities than their peers. School staff also face difficulties in addressing learners’ needs without labelling the learners.

Despite the progress achieved, it is evident that serious challenges persist. As the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities notes:

Many millions of persons with disabilities continue to be denied the right to education and for many more education is available only in settings where persons with disabilities are isolated from their peers and where the education they receive is of an inferior quality (2016, p. 1).

Consequently, there is a need for more systematic information collection and examination of the changing role of specialist provision to support learners’ rights to inclusive education.

Project aims

The CROSP project aims to address this gap by identifying challenges and opportunities within country policy and practice that support the changing role of specialist provision towards inclusive education. Two key questions serve to examine this changing role:

- What type of cross-sectoral policy framework is needed to effectively support the changing role of specialist provision in supporting mainstream schools to be inclusive?
- What types of developments and reforms to different forms of separate specialist provision are required to ensure that all learners’ rights to inclusive education are effectively met?

This project has two phases:

- **Phase 1** describes past, current and future trends in relation to specialist provision in countries. It aims to form a clear overview of the development of specialist provision in meeting learners’ rights to education generally, and inclusive education more recently.
- **Phase 2** aims to support member countries to develop more effective strategies for improving the role of specialist provision for inclusive education. It considers



appropriate funding policies and strategies, as well as governance and capacity building mechanisms of specialist provision.

This report is the outcome of Phase 1 of the CROSP project. It builds on recent Agency project outcomes and information from individual country reports.

Country reports

Agency member country representatives were asked to prepare reports with inputs from their national networks of experts. The template for the CROSP country reports was framed by four issues relating to specialist provision's changing role in supporting inclusive education, namely:

- Historical policy trends
- Current policy situation
- Specialist provision's current role in supporting inclusive education
- Future trends.

Countries were invited to cover all types of specialist provision that support mainstream provision at compulsory education level. This includes support to learners with special educational needs (SEN) through special schools, units and classes. It also includes professionals providing support, advice and guidance to learners and stakeholders from mainstream provision.

The questionnaire requested numerical data, such as the number of special schools, classes and professionals in each country. It also requested descriptions of structures and processes, such as policies, systems of support and transformation processes. The questionnaire will be available on the CROSP project web area (www.european-agency.org/projects/CROSP) in early 2020.

Information analysis

The CROSP project builds on reports from the following 26 countries that responded to the questionnaire: Austria, Belgium (French Community), Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and UK (England and Scotland).

At the first stage of analysis, an external consultant developed a working document. This aimed to identify the main themes arising from the countries' answers to the questionnaire. It identified qualitative trends surrounding transformation processes in specialist provision policies and practices, as reported by the countries.



The working document was the basis of the current report, which describes the specialist provision framework in participating countries. This report comprises three chapters:

- [Chapter 1](#) presents the current role and main characteristics of specialist provision.
- [Chapter 2](#) presents countries' main policy reforms in relation to specialist provision.
- [Chapter 3](#) discusses further policy developments to transform the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education.

More detailed information about the project is available on the dedicated [CROSP project web area](#).



1. MAPPING OF SPECIALIST PROVISION

Participating Agency member countries have developed specialist provision services to promote inclusive education systems. This chapter describes the types of services provided and profiles of professionals who are involved in specialist provision.

1.1. Types of services provided by specialist provision

As mentioned, specialist provision should support the right to education for all learners. The analysis of the country reports regarding the different types of support shows that almost all countries have some form of separate special schooling, as well as support in mainstream classrooms. However, the types of special units, classes or part-time special teaching groups within mainstream schools vary. The organisation and arrangements of provision also differ greatly within each national context.

Figure 1 summarises the different types of services provided by specialist provision to support the right to education for all learners.



Figure 1. Types of specialist provision supporting the right to education

As Figure 1 illustrates, specialist provision does not only provide educational facilities or support to learners with SEN. Services also include advice and guidance to other education stakeholders. Nearly half of the country replies indicate advice and guidance services for teachers, while one third emphasise guidance and advice services for schools. Specialist provision in some countries also includes advice and guidance services to local stakeholders.

Table 1 provides more detailed country information on the different types of specialist provision services.



Table 1. Types of specialist provision services by country

Country	Educational services to learners in special schools	Educational services to learners in special classes/units	Advice and guidance to teachers	Advice and guidance to schools	Support services to individual learners	Advice and guidance to local stakeholders
Austria	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Belgium (Fr)	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Croatia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Cyprus	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Denmark	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	No info
Estonia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Greece	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hungary	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Iceland	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Ireland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info
Italy	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Latvia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info
Luxembourg	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info



Country	Educational services to learners in special schools	Educational services to learners in special classes/units	Advice and guidance to teachers	Advice and guidance to schools	Support services to individual learners	Advice and guidance to local stakeholders
Malta	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Poland	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Portugal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info
Serbia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Spain	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
UK (England)	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
UK (Scotland)	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info

No info: information not available



The analysis of the country information identifies two main types of specialist provision: **in-school provision** and **external provision**. The sections below discuss these types of provision.

1.1.1. In-school specialist provision

1.1.1.1. Provision for individual learners

Most countries develop and use individual education programmes, particularly for learners with SEN, within the school context. Countries including Luxembourg, Norway, Poland and Sweden note schools are responsible for organising additional support for individual learners. In the UK, in-school teams are responsible for developing, implementing and evaluating individual education programmes. In Poland, teams of teachers, class tutors and specialists monitor the implementation of individual education and therapy programmes and the progress of learners enrolled in special education.

In Greece, evaluation of learner progress is part of the individual education planning process. In Greek schools, the Interdisciplinary Educational Evaluation and Support Committee specifies the core axes of an individual education plan. The Educational and Counselling Support Centres initially devise the plans for each learner. Learners with disabilities and their parents have a say in drafting their individual education plans. This is to identify short- and long-term objectives and to monitor their implementation, in co-operation with teachers.

Most countries also refer to access arrangements the school makes for specific learners. Countries such as Norway emphasise the responsibility of the school and the teaching staff to organise specific preventative and supportive strategies that enable all learners to participate in the learning process. These include, for example:

- flexibility in the curricula;
- supportive equipment;
- adjusted conditions for assessment.

Other countries, such as Portugal, explicitly mention ‘universal design for learning’ or ‘differentiated teaching’ as key pedagogical strategies that support not only individual learners, but the whole class. Finally, countries such as Sweden emphasise the role of health and welfare services, such as the ‘school health service’, which involves a multi-disciplinary team within the school.

1.1.1.2. Collaborative teaching and additional adult support

Several countries refer to the use of collaborative classroom teaching (or ‘team teaching’) and additional adult support to address the diversity of learners and needs in the classroom.

Many countries use an **additional adult in the classroom as a resource for mainstream teachers**. For example, in Italy, learners with SEN attend mainstream classes in which special teachers (support teachers) assist subject teachers. Another example comes from Poland, where assistance during lessons, provided by non-pedagogical staff, helps subject



teachers and allows all learners to follow the programme. In such cases, the presence of a second adult in the mainstream class helps the teacher deliver the lesson.

Many countries use **teaching assistants** in mainstream classes to support individual learners. Some countries, such as Germany, indicate that special educational support is provided, as a rule, during joint class lessons. In Croatia, teaching assistants and expert communication intermediaries ensure quality education for learners with disabilities. Other countries, such as Ireland, allocate special needs assistants to primary, post-primary and special schools to address learners' additional care needs and so facilitate their inclusion. Such assistance is sometimes for a specific number of hours per week. For example, in Belgium, the assistance is for four hours per week per learner.

1.1.1.3. Special units/classes

The Agency's operational definition of inclusion considers mainstream schools to be inclusive of learners with SEN if the learners are educated in mainstream classes with their non-disabled peers for at least 80% of the time. This 80% benchmark allows for partial placement in some form of special class, unit or other grouping. The Agency's data collection activity (EASIE) also uses this definition (European Agency, 2016c).

'Partial integration' means that some learners are partially educated in a mainstream class (for subjects mastered through mainstream programmes) and partially educated in a special class (for subjects mastered through intensified teaching or special programmes). Here, the learner belongs to a mainstream class, with the special class offering regular sessions for some form of special programme.

Table 1 indicates that nearly all countries provide learners with **partial or full placement** in some form of special class, unit or other grouping within the mainstream school. In many countries, special classes/units refer to some form of partial integration arrangements for some learners with SEN within mainstream schools. These are often seen as a form of 'special school' within the mainstream school, particularly when they are called 'special units'. Enrolment is often similar to that for special schools. It is evident that, in these cases, special units act as a resource directed mainly to the learners and not the school staff.

Following a change in legislation, Greece re-oriented its inclusive classes. This also aimed to avoid special education being replicated in mainstream settings. Inclusive class teachers support learners in the mainstream classroom, in co-operation with the class teachers. They differentiate activities and educational practices and adapt educational materials and the educational environment. If learners so require, they receive one-to-one support in a separate room. In these cases, the aim is for the learner to be fully included in the mainstream class in future.

Placement arrangements differ widely within countries. For example, in Germany, the expected enrolment time may vary, according to the learner's needs, from full-time to temporary. A range of terminology with different meanings is also evident in the countries' responses. This often indicates a varied amount of time spent with mainstream peers and different levels of collaboration among staff. The various terms indicate different and, at other times, apparently similar arrangements (i.e. special unit, special



class, integration class, inclusion class, special teaching group, nurture group, learning support zone, reference school, preferential attention school).

Some countries have arrangements for some learners to partially attend a special unit/class and a mainstream class. These partial integration arrangements give learners who may be unable to follow the mainstream curricula for most subjects an opportunity to join peers for some subjects or activities. This is evident in Estonia, where special classes in mainstream schools are usually part-time placements. In Croatia, the education of learners with SEN in mainstream schools can entail either full or partial integration. In these cases, the special units/classes operate as a resource for the learners. They aim to help them overcome difficulties and follow the mainstream curricula.

In some countries, mainstream schools are designated for particular groups of learners. These schools specialise in educating learners with a specific special need (such as visual impairment, autism, etc.). They are considered inclusive in that the whole school is equipped and welcoming for these learners. These schools are a resource directed mostly to learners, since they target specific needs. They holistically educate learners with disabilities in an inclusive setting by offering them the necessary support and adaptations to follow the official curricula. They also facilitate social inclusion and allow families to balance work and family life. In Portugal these are called 'reference schools' and in Spain 'preferential attention schools'. The Spanish 'preferential attention schools' educate learners with a range of disabilities.

1.1.1.4. Co-ordination of provision

Co-ordination is a key component of in-school specialist provision. Some countries clearly note **schools' responsibility for organising any additional support** that individual learners need. For example, in Lithuania, school leaders can be responsible for employing specialists, in agreement with the school authority. School leaders may also organise psychological and pedagogical support. In some countries, schools can employ teachers, psychologists, speech therapists and special educators.

In other countries, all education professionals are responsible for supporting an inclusive environment. Teachers have to organise adjustments to meet learners' needs. Professionals from the education, social and/or health sectors can sometimes belong to a school full-time to contribute to the provision of support.

Some countries mention the development of a **new role for support co-ordination within a school**. For example, in Malta, professionals can contribute to the development and implementation of inclusive education and support services within schools. In Poland, the head of the nursery school, school or institution may appoint a person whose responsibilities include support planning and co-ordination. These tasks focus on identifying forms of support, the duration of the support and the number of hours for each form. However, the school authority is responsible for the total number of hours allocated for school support.

Overall, the countries' responses show that professionals who are responsible for co-ordinating support can be a resource for both learners and school staff.



1.1.2. External specialist provision

Most countries report having **external centres and institutions** as part of their specialist provision. These are out-of-school resources that support individual learners and/or empower schools and teachers.

The country reports use different names to refer to these centres. For example, some countries call them 'resource centres for inclusion', others 'competence centres', 'resource centres' or 'reference centres'. This type of resource may be responsible for:

- needs identification and educational planning;
- short-term or part-time support for individual learners;
- provision for training and courses for teachers and other professionals;
- support for parents;
- development and dissemination of materials and methods;
- support for transition between phases of education;
- support in entering the labour market.

More information about these different forms of support is provided below.

1.1.2.1. External provision to support learners

The most widely described direct service to learners is the provision of **individualised assessment**. Almost all countries report this type of external service. For example, in Croatia, the regional authority office or City Office for Education of the City of Zagreb issues a 'first-instance decision' on the appropriate education programme for each learner. The professional teams responsible for assessments and official decisions often carry out psychological, pedagogical, special educational and medical diagnosis assessments.

Individualised assessment is often linked to individualised educational planning of adapted placement or support for learning. For instance, in Portugal, all learners who need additional support require an individual education plan, which is prepared by a multi-disciplinary team. This team comprises teachers, other professionals, parents and, when possible, the learners themselves. In some cases, the decision on support measures is school-based.

In Greece, learners can refer the assessment of their special educational needs to the multi-disciplinary teams of the Educational and Counselling Support Centres. The Centres' role and mission are not limited to special needs education, but have a more inclusive orientation. This extends to counselling and career guidance. They also support the psycho-social development and progress of all learners, regardless of SEN, disability or vulnerable social background.

Another area of direct service to learners relates to the transition between different phases of education. This includes the transitions from early childhood to primary, to secondary, and to post-compulsory and vocational education. Services may include specific programmes or career counselling and guidance. An example comes from



Lithuania, where transition services are available to children of families emigrating or returning to the country after a period of emigration.

Finally, some countries note a form of temporary provision involving **education at home or in healthcare/special institutions**. This applies to learners who, due to health or psychological issues, cannot attend mainstream classes.

1.1.2.2. External provision to empower schools and teachers

Many countries reference specialised consultancy, which helps to improve educational opportunities for specific learners. Almost all countries (except Belgium and Switzerland) refer to the operation of counselling centres. These specialist centres generally operate at local community levels and are in direct contact with schools. However, levels can range from national agencies (e.g. the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre in Iceland, the National Council for Special Education Support Service in Ireland, the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools in Sweden), through regional or district level (e.g. counselling and guidance centres in Poland), to multi-disciplinary teams inside schools or clusters of schools (e.g. Lithuania, Malta).

These centres are seen as essential for mainstream schools that lack expertise in the various areas of SEN. They provide the necessary specialist support for individual learners and for staff and parents. For example, in Iceland, the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre provides early intervention, multi-disciplinary assessment, counselling and access to resources. It is also responsible for training parents and professionals to deal with diverse learner needs.

Some centres are in the early stages of set-up (i.e. in Luxembourg), while others are being modified and strengthened (i.e. in Greece). In some cases, such as in Hungary and Sweden, the centres may serve both mainstream and special schools.

Countries such as Cyprus empower mainstream schools to act inclusively by locating special schools near mainstream schools and facilitating common activities. In Austria, special schools have evolved into 'competence centres' that provide advice to stakeholders at the school and/or local level. Finland and Greece have transformed special schools into a national network of specialist provision for delivering support services to schools. At the schools' request, these centres usually assess learners' needs to ensure they have access to appropriate support.

In some cases, schools might take the form of resource centres. For example, 106 'territorial support centres' (CTS) operate regionally in Italy. These are core schools dedicated to providing support and consultancy to promote inclusion. Similarly, ICT Resource Centres (CRTIC) in Portugal form a national network of centres that assess learners' needs and support inclusion.



1.2. Profiles and skills of professionals

The ability of specialist provision to provide a continuum of support relies on a wide range of specialists, as **Table 2** indicates. In nearly all countries, specialist provision professionals have to address special education issues to promote quality inclusive education at the school level. Specialists may be SEN teachers who are qualified in special education and/or in a specific type of special need. Their role is to support learners with SEN to follow the curriculum, taking into account their abilities and needs.

Professionals can also guide teachers as they adapt their practices to learners' specific needs. According to the country reports, these specialists may include special pedagogues from pedagogical-psychological services who provide consultancy to learners receiving support, parents or guardians and teachers. They may also be teaching or learning assistants who help the teacher deliver lessons or provide in-class support to specific learners. Some countries also emphasise the role of sign language interpreters.



Table 2. Areas covered by professionals involved in specialist provision by country

Country	Special education	Social and welfare	Rehabilitation	Health issues	Early intervention	Personal development	Transition to work
Austria	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	Yes	Yes
Belgium (Fr)	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Croatia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Cyprus	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Denmark	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Estonia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes
Germany	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Greece	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes
Hungary	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info
Iceland	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info
Ireland	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	Yes
Italy	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Latvia	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Luxembourg	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Malta	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



Country	Special education	Social and welfare	Rehabilitation	Health issues	Early intervention	Personal development	Transition to work
Norway	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Poland	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Portugal	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Serbia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Spain	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Sweden	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info
UK (England)	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
UK (Scotland)	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info

No info: information not available



In Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Norway, Slovakia, Switzerland and UK (England), professionals working in specialist provision also address health issues. Reports mention nurses, healthcare assistants and physicians. In most countries, specialists include paramedical staff who address functional issues.

Country reports from Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Portugal mention speech and language therapists among the professionals working in specialist provision. They provide targeted support to learners with speech and language difficulties. Occupational and physical therapists improve learners' ability to perform daily activities, to maintain their psychological and physical status.

Professionals working in specialist provision also address social and welfare issues. Some country reports emphasise learners' rights to welfare services and the role of social workers in supporting learners and families (for example, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Sweden and Switzerland). Social pedagogues support families and ensure learners' rights to education and safety, such as by mitigating school drop-out.

Psychologists are often among the professionals working in specialist provision. They help improve learners' psychological strength and mental health, fostering personal development and creating a safe environment that is favourable for education.

Malta and Switzerland also include professionals addressing early intervention. Their country reports describe these professionals as 'early intervention teachers' or 'early interventionists'.

Finally, Greece, Ireland and Poland include professionals dedicated to learners' transition to the labour market, such as vocational advisers or career counsellors.





2. MAIN POLICY REFORMS UNDERPINNING EXISTING SPECIALIST SERVICES

This chapter focuses on country policy reforms implemented in the last 10 years concerning specialist provision. It explores the effects of policy developments related to specialist provision's changing role into a resource for stakeholders in mainstream settings. It also discusses policy strengths and areas for improvement highlighted by participating countries.

2.1. Promoting a rights-based approach

The analysis of country replies shows that countries are actively involved in policy development and reform to reconceptualise and re-organise specialist provision towards inclusive education. This includes:

- meeting the UNCRPD's requirements by educating more learners with SEN in mainstream schools;
- redefining SEN and inclusive education;
- moving away from medical labels;
- focusing on social inclusion, universal approaches and systemic reform.

Reforms aim to transform specialist provision as a way to develop inclusive education systems, protect learners against discrimination and meet their rights to high-quality education. Finland, for example, emphasises the need to strengthen learners' individual rights to educational support. Meanwhile, countries such as Norway stress the importance of the school system being responsible for providing high-quality education to all learners. To support a system-wide change, reforms in many countries, including Estonia, Greece,



Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg and UK (England), promote a continuum of support and services.

2.2. Reshaping the relationship between mainstream and specialist provision

Countries including Hungary and Ireland have **changed their policy approach to special educational needs**. They have moved away from a medical approach to disability, which focuses on learners' weaknesses, to an educational approach concentrating on barriers to learning. Barriers may arise from the learning environment and/or the need for assistance that may result from it. Greece, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Norway and Sweden describe reforms aimed at building mainstream schools' capacity to provide a quality education for all learners.

Policies in countries such as Finland and Switzerland refer to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, developed by the World Health Organization (2001). The aim is to promote a holistic approach to assessment and intervention that assumes that good quality education is available to all learners.

2.3. Developing new support systems

Hungary, Slovakia and Sweden incorporate **new models of learner support** and promote **differentiated teaching and learning approaches**. In Finland, a three-tier model of support is in place. It starts with general support in the first tier, provided through differentiated teaching and part-time special education (either as co-teaching or in a smaller group) within general support mechanisms. In this tier, all learners experience high-quality teaching that provides a range of activities for them to access, process and respond to differently. If learners are not making progress, the next tier involves additional support. In the third tier, special support (including additional professionals) is provided to learners with more complex needs.

Greece also has a three-tier model of support. Regional Centres for Educational Planning (PEKES) are being established. Their main aim is to plan, monitor, co-ordinate and support the educational role of public and private schools. At the local level, Educational and Counselling Support Centres have been established. They have a wider role and mission, not limited to special needs education, but with a more inclusive orientation. Local School Networks of Education and Support (SDEY) and Diagnostic Educational Evaluation and Support Committees (EDEAY) have been established to strengthen the transition of special schools into support centres.

To develop a new support model, most countries' policies have **transformed their special settings, such as special schools, into resource centres**. While nearly all countries regard special schools as a necessary part of the continuum of support provision, some explicitly



connect the changing role of specialist provision with this transformation (e.g. Greece, Portugal, Serbia and Spain). The transformation requires stakeholders from special settings to act as consultants for mainstream settings, providing schools with their knowledge and accumulated experience.

Italy, Norway and Poland have introduced **assessment and support centres** for learners and school stakeholders in their policies. Services are addressed to learners, families and staff and provide multi-disciplinary assessment, counselling and guidance. Services to learners may include assessment and diagnosis, special education consulting, further study and career counselling. Services to staff may consist of professional counselling and support, as well as in-service training opportunities in Italy and Norway.

2.4. Identified strengths of policy reforms on specialist provision

As part of this project, countries were asked to report on the strengths of their policy reforms related to specialist provision. Although the information is basic, some positive changes are highlighted in Table 3.



Table 3. Strengths of policy reforms highlighted by participating countries

Country	Improve inclusive education opportunities for learners with SEN	Improve quality of education for all	Provide a continuum of support	Increase the number of specialists	Improve support to teachers for differentiated teaching	Improve quality of support provided by specialist provision	Support flexibility at local level
Austria	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info
Belgium (Fr)	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info	No info
Croatia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info	No info
Cyprus	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	No info
Denmark	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info
Estonia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes
Germany	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info
Greece	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info
Hungary	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Iceland	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info
Ireland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes
Italy	No info	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info
Latvia	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info



Country	Improve inclusive education opportunities for learners with SEN	Improve quality of education for all	Provide a continuum of support	Increase the number of specialists	Improve support to teachers for differentiated teaching	Improve quality of support provided by specialist provision	Support flexibility at local level
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info
Luxembourg	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Malta	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	Yes
Poland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Portugal	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info
Serbia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	Yes	No info
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Spain	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	No info
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info
UK (England)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
UK (Scotland)	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info

No info: information not available



According to most participating countries, policy reforms undertaken in the last 10 years to transform specialist provision support the implementation of inclusive education. As **Table 3** shows, recent policy developments have contributed to:

- improving inclusive education opportunities for learners with SEN (in 21 countries);
- improving the quality of education for all (in 19 countries);
- developing a continuum of support (in 15 countries);
- increasing the number of specialists supporting inclusive education (in 3 countries);
- improving the level and quality of support provided to stakeholders for differentiated teaching (in 13 countries);
- improving the quality of support provided by specialist provision (in 7 countries);
- increasing the flexibility of support provided at local level (in Norway).

In particular, the transformation of the role of specialist provision has led to:

- a significant increase in the range of services delivered to learners, teachers and families;
- a recognition of all forms of learner needs, including those of vulnerable groups;
- the development of preventative actions, such as early intervention services or drop-out prevention.

Many countries also emphasise the empowering effect of policy initiatives to transform the role of specialist provision. They particularly highlight:

- positive changes in attitudes towards inclusive education at the school level as mainstream schools become more aware of learners' diverse needs;
- mainstream stakeholders' increasing awareness of the necessary skills for differentiated teaching, extra-curricular activities accessible to all, individual education plans and appropriate adjustments in the school environment;
- schools' increasing commitment to developing a holistic approach, combining education, welfare and health services to enable learners' social inclusion.

2.5. Identified policy areas for improvement

According to participating countries, changing the role of specialist provision is connected with its ability to act effectively as a resource for the whole system. Countries have identified a number of policy areas that can support such an improvement. They particularly highlight the need to:

- **Change the approach to SEN.** This may involve eliminating parallel/separate systems of a special or remedial nature or preventing unnecessary labelling of learners as needing an official decision of SEN. Countries also stress the need to change attitudes and raise awareness about the benefits of inclusion.



- **Improve inclusive education opportunities for learners with SEN.** This can be done by eliminating barriers to learning and discriminatory practices in the school environment. Some countries state that this could help disconnect the provision of support from the need for an official decision. It would also encourage school stakeholders to see inclusive education as an opportunity instead of a burden (Ebersold and Meijer, 2016).
- **Improve co-operation among stakeholders.** This involves promoting synergies among stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision. Nearly all countries emphasise the need to improve co-operation among stakeholders from specialist and mainstream provision, as well as between central, regional, local and school levels.
- **Improve capacity building.** Most countries also emphasise the need to increase the effectiveness of specialist provision to support learners and professionals. This involves developing adequate capacity building opportunities for specialist and mainstream stakeholders.
- **Improve participation and achievement opportunities for all learners.** Some countries identify the need to improve all learners' levels of participation and achievement in both specialist and mainstream education.
- **Improve the level and quality of support.** Many countries focus on the effectiveness of support and specifically the need to provide high-quality and evidence-based support.
- **Reduce territorial disparities.** Some countries mention variations in the way schools operate within a country. In particular, there is a need to reduce inequalities between regions (e.g. between urban and rural areas) and to increase consistency among schools, municipalities and regions in implementing inclusive education.

Table 4 summarises these main policy areas for improvement.



Table 4. Main policy areas for improvement emphasised by participating countries

Country	Reduce the growing number of learners with SEN/change the approach to SEN	Improve inclusive education opportunities for learners with SEN	Improve co-operation among stakeholders	Improve capacity building	Improve participation and achievement opportunities of all learners	Improve the level and quality of support	Reduce territorial disparities
Austria	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Belgium (Fr)	No info	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Croatia	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Cyprus	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Denmark	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info
Estonia	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Germany	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info
Greece	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hungary	No info	No info	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	No info
Iceland	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	Yes
Ireland	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Italy	No info	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Latvia	No info	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lithuania	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info



Country	Reduce the growing number of learners with SEN/change the approach to SEN	Improve inclusive education opportunities for learners with SEN	Improve co-operation among stakeholders	Improve capacity building	Improve participation and achievement opportunities of all learners	Improve the level and quality of support	Reduce territorial disparities
Luxembourg	No info	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
Malta	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Norway	No info	No info	Yes	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Poland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Portugal	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Serbia	No info	No info	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes
Slovakia	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	Yes	No info
Spain	No info	No info	Yes	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes
Sweden	No info	No info	Yes	No info	Yes	Yes	Yes
Switzerland	Yes	No info	Yes	No info	No info	No info	No info
UK (England)	No info	No info	Yes	Yes	No info	No info	No info
UK (Scotland)	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info	No info

No info: information not available





3. FURTHER POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

As mentioned, further policy developments should focus on specialist provision as a resource for stakeholders in mainstream education. In their reports, countries identify the following key levers in changing the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education:

- governance mechanisms enabling effective co-operation strategies and mechanisms among special and mainstream provision at all levels;
- funding mechanisms supporting the transformation of specialist provision into a resource for mainstream provision;
- capacity building mechanisms enabling specialist provision stakeholders to act as a resource for mainstream provision;
- quality assurance mechanisms for specialist provision promoting transparent and accountable systems for inclusive education.

The following sections discuss these key levers in more detail. The final part of the chapter connects further policy developments to the countries' journeys towards inclusive education. The issues discussed in this chapter form the basis for further analysis during Phase 2 of the CROSP project.

3.1. Governance mechanisms to support co-operation

For resource allocation mechanisms to be effective, they require a regulatory framework that is a backbone for labelling the system instead of the learners. They must also combine the different dimensions of high-quality systems for inclusive education in a balanced way (Watkins and Ebersold, 2016; Busemeyer and Vossiek, 2015; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016).



Countries emphasise the need to promote governance mechanisms for effective cross-ministerial and cross-sectoral co-operation. Improving the quality of co-operation mechanisms helps to prevent problems arising from overlapping roles and responsibilities, competition between different tiers of government or a lack of transparency in resource flows. For example, Greece highlights inter- and intra-ministerial co-operation to promote effective support to learners with SEN and their families. According to Italy and others, network governance provides a cohesive way to plan resource allocation. This can include the development of early childhood guidance services that are jointly run by the departments of health, education and social services.

Another governance issue, raised by Germany, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland, is that of centralisation and decentralisation. Some countries see decentralisation as a challenge for implementing reforms, while others consider local and school responsibilities to be essential.

Governance mechanisms related to specialist provision also need to identify collaborative strategies linking community-based health and social care issues with education. Such strategies foster convergences between rehabilitation, accessibility, welfare and education. According to the country reports, learning networks can offer learners an effective continuum of support by giving schools a range of valuable resources. For example, Iceland stresses the need to build localised cross-sectoral teams around the country. Norway insists that support services should work more directly and systematically with pedagogical guidance at the local level.

A focus on governance mechanisms related to specialist provision allows many countries to address territorial inequalities surrounding inclusive education and the changing role of specialist provision (e.g. Finland, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and Sweden).

3.2. Funding mechanisms to support efficiency

The country data shows that funding mechanisms are essential for transforming specialist provision into a resource for mainstream provision. Funding mechanisms can be disempowering if they prioritise a medical approach or do not adequately fund specialist provision's new role (European Agency, 2016a; 2018; Ebersold and Meijer, 2016).

Not all countries provide detailed information on current financing mechanisms related to specialist provision. Greece emphasises the need to link national inclusive education strategies with long-term financial support. Poland notes that funding the new role of specialist provision could make it possible to transform special schools into resource centres offering innovative support and/or counselling services. This also provides an opportunity to identify effective financing strategies. Portugal describes strategies to move from input-based resource allocation to an environmental approach to disability, focusing on barriers to teaching and learning.

The focus on specialist provision funding informs the effectiveness of resourcing strategies (European Agency, 2018). Some countries emphasise the ability of specialist provision



professionals to cover all learner needs and to adequately support teachers in mainstream settings. As Ireland highlights, this could make it possible to restrict the need for an official decision regarding eligibility for support to learners with the most severe needs.

3.3. Capacity building mechanisms to empower all stakeholders

Capacity building is a key lever that Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Serbia and UK (England) emphasise. High-quality initial and in-service teacher training on inclusive education reduces the need for specialist provision. It also increases schools' capacity for inclusion (European Agency, 2012).

According to the country reports, this can be achieved by providing professionals with the skills and competencies required to adequately support mainstream provision stakeholders, as well as learners. For example, Croatia indicated plans to develop training courses for specialist provision professionals to support learners with varying needs. Capacity building may also entail providing training courses for municipalities to support the development of inclusive educational environments.

The focus on capacity building can promote innovative and flexible learning environments, guidance, counselling, supervision and support methodologies that help foster a school development approach. Such methodologies and tools can:

- empower teachers to focus on eliminating barriers to teaching and learning;
- empower school leaders to transform school practices and classrooms, rather than adapting learners to school requirements;
- adequately support learners and parents.

Capacity building may also include new assessment strategies aimed at supporting the system, rather than focusing solely on specific learners.

Reforms undertaken also promote services and agencies that enhance the quality of teaching provided to learners who need support. Such providers can consolidate, co-ordinate, develop and deliver a range of continuing professional development initiatives and support for staff working with learners with SEN in a variety of educational settings.

Countries emphasise research surrounding in-service teacher education, professional co-operation and career development. For example, Poland aims to promote collaboration with higher education institutions to develop national teacher training that takes preparation for inclusive education into account. Meanwhile, Denmark looks to increase parents' and learners' involvement in research and development projects.



3.4. Quality assurance mechanisms to increase accountability

Supporting the changing role of specialist provision also builds upon a quality assurance system, considering the role of specialist provision in implementing inclusive education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014; European Agency, 2016a; 2018). According to many countries, quality assurance can be achieved through systematic data collection and adequate reporting mechanisms.

Countries agree on the need to develop quality assurance mechanisms based on criteria surrounding specialist provision in inclusive education. For example, Switzerland mentions that monitoring mechanisms can help identify the enabling effect of specialist provision. Such mechanisms may provide reliable evidence that, with appropriate support, all learners in mainstream settings can acquire skills that enable them to continue their education and ultimately join the labour market.

Countries including Lithuania and Portugal stress the value of increasing specialist provision's accountability towards inclusive education at all levels. They emphasise the need to develop criteria and standards for resource centres and specialists.

Overall, quality assurance can be supported by a framework for mapping the available information on specialist provision within inclusive education systems. This includes developing standardised assessment procedures and using common concepts to support the implementation of inclusive education.

3.5. Countries' journeys towards inclusive education

As [Chapter 2](#) mentions, policy developments vary among countries depending on their respective journeys towards inclusive education.

Policy developments may relate to:

- setting/establishing the transformation of specialist provision into a resource for mainstream schools;
- strengthening the transformation of specialist provision into a resource for mainstream schools;
- promoting integrated systems for inclusive education.

The following sections describe each approach to policy development to support the transformation of specialist provision.

Based on information provided by countries, each approach is discussed in light of:

- main challenges faced;
- the direction of further policy developments;
- changes in legislation, funding, governance or capacity building mechanisms.



3.5.1. Setting/establishing the transformation of specialist provision into a resource for mainstream schools

Some countries suggest that initial policy developments should emphasise the shift to a model aimed at resourcing the whole system (refer to [Table 5](#)). Certain countries endeavour to decrease the number of learners enrolled in special schools. They do so by supporting inclusive practices and a change in attitudes in mainstream settings. Countries also call for policies and strategies for transforming special schools into resource centres and redefining specialist roles. For example, policies should detail how special teachers can move from special schools to mainstream settings to share their expertise and support learners.

Legal changes should support country commitments to inclusive education systems, focusing on all learners' rights. According to some reports, this may require more transparent admission policies in schools to ensure learners and their families have access to local schools.

Countries also emphasise **governance issues** – in particular, the need to institutionally anchor specialist provision under the responsibility of ministries of education. They also suggest increasing the financial and managerial responsibilities of local and regional authorities. According to some, increased responsibilities at regional and local levels support co-operation among stakeholders.

From a **financing perspective**, countries assert the importance of financial investment and policy changes needed to transform special schools into resource centres. Financial investments may help special schools become an external resource for mainstream schools. They may increase the number of skilled experts in inclusive education and support capacity building within mainstream schools. Investments may also fund the development of training courses and initiatives to increase stakeholder awareness of inclusion.

Changes in funding can incentivise the move away from a medical approach, towards an educational approach. This supports the development of assessment procedures focusing on systemic needs rather than on learner needs. According to some countries, resource allocation mechanisms should target inclusive education rather than special needs education focusing on different types of disability.

Finally, countries touch on **capacity building issues**. As mentioned, they call for a support model aimed at resourcing the whole system. According to some, further developments should provide methodological support and tools to enable stakeholders from both specialist and mainstream provision to implement changes. Countries stress the need to embed inclusive education issues in training courses to enhance teachers' professional skills. They also insist on the development of new methodological materials for teachers working with diverse learners. This may help reduce negative attitudes towards inclusive education.



3.5.2. Strengthening the transformation of specialist provision into a resource for mainstream schools

Another group of countries has already started to transform specialist provision into a resource for mainstream education. Further policy developments within these countries need to consolidate or accelerate the implementation of the developing support model. Such policies aim to:

- decrease the number of learners enrolled in special settings;
- overcome inconsistencies in how mainstream schools take responsibility for inclusive education and meet learners' needs;
- overcome some specialist provision professionals' negative attitudes and their reluctance to change practices and implement new professional standards;
- promote co-operation with the health and social sectors;
- reduce cross-territorial inequalities;
- discourage parents and professionals from opting for special school and special class placements.

Regarding **governance issues**, further policy developments may relate to decentralisation mechanisms. Such mechanisms may strengthen co-operation among education, health and social services. This includes relationships between stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision at school and classroom levels. Further developments may also aim to improve transparency in school admission and placement procedures.

From a **funding point of view**, transforming specialist provision into a resource for mainstream schools may require **changes in financing systems**. According to some countries, this includes flexibility to promote innovative and empowering support approaches and/or to support dual placements. This is especially relevant for learners with more complex needs.

Policy changes may also work to **connect capacity building mechanisms to the effectiveness of specialist provision**. Countries strive to improve existing training opportunities to empower stakeholders to implement inclusive education. This can be achieved by developing inclusive courses in initial and in-service teacher training for specialist and mainstream professionals. It can also be supported by resource centres. Providing stakeholders with methodological and technical support, developing standards and guidelines related to inclusive education and collecting and disseminating examples of good practice from specialist and mainstream provision can also help. Finally, specialist professionals may require new skills to enable them to act as advisers in mainstream settings, so policies can include developing training opportunities.

From a **monitoring perspective**, some countries recognise the need to develop reliable data collection systems to monitor costs and trends towards inclusive education. Others suggest improving the quality of existing reporting mechanisms.



3.5.3. Promoting effective integrated systems for inclusive education

A third group of countries has already transformed specialist provision into a resource for mainstream settings. For these countries, further policy developments focus on improving the overall quality of the education system by promoting efficiency and cost-effectiveness. They should aim to increase stakeholders' capacity to remove barriers to learning and to implement inclusive education more efficiently.

According to country reports, **legal changes** can help ensure equal participation and achievement opportunities for all learners. Some countries assert the need to increase consistency among schools, municipalities and regions in implementing inclusive education. Others emphasise the need to improve the effectiveness of special support to learners and stakeholders involved in implementing inclusive education at regional, municipal and school levels.

Further policy developments may aim to **improve the quality of existing governance mechanisms** and **connect funding with a school development approach** that focuses on barriers to learning. To achieve this, policy reforms should aim to develop integrated systems for inclusive education and should clarify the responsibilities of stakeholders and monitoring mechanisms. Some countries plan to develop network governance that promotes collaboration among national, regional and local stakeholders, and educational experts. Others plan to promote collaborative teaching practices between special education and mainstream teachers. In some countries, professional responsibilities include interdisciplinary co-operation in both the mainstream and specialist sectors.

Countries also emphasise the need for further **quality assurance**. According to some, specialist and mainstream provision can embed inclusive education issues within school development plans and monitoring mechanisms. Others state that such mechanisms can build on specialist provision standards.

Finally, countries refer to **strengthening existing competencies and skills within schools and classes**. For some, this may be achieved by improving the guidance that specialists provide to mainstream stakeholders at regional, municipal and school level.

Table 5 summarises the main policy approaches for countries to transform the role of specialist provision. Each approach is framed by the three outlined areas for development along the journey to inclusive education.



Table 5. Policy approaches to support the transformation of specialist provision

Policy approach	Set / establish the transformation process	Strengthen the transformation process	Promote effective integrated systems for inclusive education
Focus	Shift to a support model aimed at resourcing the whole system	Consolidate or accelerate the implementation of the new support model	Improve education systems' efficiency and cost-effectiveness
Legal changes	Prevent discrimination in accessing education	Improve access to high-quality educational support in mainstream schools	Ensure learners' participation and achievement in mainstream schools and classes
Financing	Invest in a new support framework (resource centres, increased numbers of specialists, etc.)	Use flexible funding mechanisms to promote innovative and empowering support approaches	Connect funding with a school development approach focusing on barriers to learning
Capacity building	Develop capacity building mechanisms focusing on inclusive education issues	Improve the effectiveness of capacity building mechanisms	Strengthen existing competencies and skills within mainstream schools and classes
Governance	Increase responsibilities of specialist provision towards inclusive education at local and school level	Strengthen co-operation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms	Embed specialist provision in network governance and quality assurance mechanisms



CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The changing role of specialist provision towards supporting inclusive education is closely related to ensuring the rights of all learners to high-quality inclusive education, as emphasised by the UNCRPD (UN, 2006) and UNCRC (UN, 1989). This rights-based approach builds on an education culture where the system takes responsibility for and is responsive to implementing inclusive education.

Transforming specialist provision to support mainstream provision can help schools remove barriers to learning. This shift demands that:

- provision moves away from debating how learners fit into schools or services, towards designing appropriate approaches and services;
- parallel systems of a special or remedial nature be eliminated as whole systems are enabled to meet all learners' diverse needs.

Beyond delivering support to learners or families, the changing role of specialist provision towards inclusive education involves providing methodologies, guidance and support services to mainstream stakeholders.

This report offers insights into the key project questions focusing on the types of cross-sectoral policy frameworks, developments and reforms required to support the changing role of specialist provision. Phase 2 of the CROSP project will elaborate on these insights.

According to country reports, most countries are making significant efforts to develop new approaches. Changes in specialist provision legislation generally aim to:

- **empower mainstream education stakeholders** to improve all learners' levels of participation and achievement;
- **promote synergies** among stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision;
- **promote a school development approach** focusing on eliminating barriers to learning and discriminatory practices;



- **empower learners** to have equitable learning and achievement opportunities;
- **empower families** to be actively engaged in the education process.

To achieve these aims, specialist provision involves a continuum of support, including special education, social and welfare activities, rehabilitation, health, early intervention and personal development. It consists of:

- **in-school provision**, ensuring assistance to learners who are in mainstream classes or partially out of mainstream classrooms (e.g. special classes, units, programmes);
- **external provision, aiming to empower schools** to act inclusively (e.g. resource centres, networks of special schools or support centres);
- **external provision to schools**, providing individualised support to learners enrolled in mainstream settings (e.g. physiotherapists);
- **external provision, such as special schools**, dedicated to learners requiring intensive support (e.g. those with visual or multiple disabilities).

Countries seek for specialist provision to act as a resource for the whole system and to enable mainstream provision stakeholders to remove barriers to learning and participation for all learners.

For some countries, further policy developments would mean setting/establishing the changing role of specialist provision towards inclusive education and increasing learners' rights to high-quality inclusive education. For example, policies could support transforming special schools into resource centres.

Another group of countries needs to consolidate reforms already undertaken to transform specialist provision into a resource for mainstream provision. This could be done by focusing on capacity building mechanisms.

A third group of countries needs to improve stakeholders' ability to remove barriers to learning and to promote more effective implementation of inclusive education. Policies could, for instance, support learner participation and achievement in mainstream schools and classes.

Some common issues underlie further policy developments in changing the role of specialist provision:

- governance mechanisms to enable effective co-operation strategies and mechanisms among special and mainstream provision at all levels;
- funding mechanisms to support the transformation of specialist provision into a resource for mainstream provision;
- capacity building mechanisms to give specialist provision stakeholders the required skills and methodologies to be a resource for mainstream provision;
- quality assurance mechanisms for specialist provision to promote transparent and accountable systems for inclusive education.

These specific cross-sectoral policy areas need further development to effectively support the changing role of specialist provision in supporting mainstream schools to be inclusive. Policy-makers consider these issues highly relevant in improving specialist provision's role



as a resource for mainstream provision. Consequently, these issues are crucial in supporting the implementation of effective, high-quality and cost-effective inclusive education policies. They require:

- policies and strategies that support the transformation of specialist provision into a resource for mainstream schools (funding, capacity building, governance, quality assurance);
- ways to promote co-operation mechanisms between specialists and mainstream professionals that enable school stakeholders to implement inclusive education;
- methodologies for specialist provision to be a resource.

It is necessary to identify the critical factors and key drivers that can enable specialist provision professionals to be an effective resource for mainstream provision. Such an analysis can support the changing process and empower mainstream settings to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

The findings of this report provide the basis for further analysis during Phase 2 of the CROSP project, which aims to enable member countries to develop more effective strategies to improve the role of specialist provision for inclusive education.





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