FINANCING POLICIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Policy Guidance Framework – Methodology

Countries' inclusive education policies are embedded in multi-level and multi-stakeholder systems for inclusive education, covering mainstream and specialist provision. In their current form, these systems for inclusive education are far more complex than the general education system. The level of complexity of such systems indicates the journeys countries are on towards inclusive education (European Agency, 2016).

The premise of the Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems (FPIES) project is the need for policy-makers across Europe to have more detailed information about the impact of funding mechanisms on inclusive education that can be used to guide their policy developments.

One of the main outputs of the FPIES project activities is the Policy Guidance Framework. The intention behind the guidance framework is to support discussions at national and local levels in countries regarding financing policies for inclusive education systems that have the potential to reduce disparity in education.

A tool for policy-makers

The intended target audience and potential users of the Policy Guidance Framework are decision-makers for inclusive education working at different system levels – national, local and/or regional, but potentially also school level. The guidance aims to provide a framework for considering and identifying what comprehensive financing of inclusive education systems aims at, covers and includes.

This aim is fully in line with the original requests from Agency Representative Board members who attended the FPIES scoping meeting in spring 2016. During this meeting, ministerial representatives from Agency member countries identified the need to improve factors around management, accountability and governance in relation to the financing of inclusive education systems.

On the basis of their discussions, three questions have directed all FPIES project activities:

1. What are the funding and governance mechanisms that prevent exclusionary strategic behaviours?

2. What are the funding and governance mechanisms that support integrated services and cross-sectoral and cross-territorial services?

3. What are the funding, monitoring and accountability mechanisms that promote flexibility at national, local and school level?

During the scoping meeting, there was an agreement that project activities should lead to a practical tool for policy-makers that would support their work in developing financing systems for inclusive education.

Subsequent work with the teams of representatives from the six partner countries' Ministries of Education led to the identification of a number of key parameters for the Policy Guidance Framework. Namely, it must:

- build on the overall project conceptual framework;

- use the findings and results of the project analysis as a content basis;

- focus upon the funding of inclusive education systems that aim at high-quality education for all learners;

- apply to different 'types' of education systems – centralised/decentralised;

- have the potential to be used at different system levels – national, local and school;

- present a 'comprehensive' view of financing, covering and incorporating different possible funding models and approaches;

- have the intention of promoting policy thinking and implementation;

- have the possibility to promote a shared language and way of thinking about financing across system sectors and levels;

- be a tool that supports the work of different levels of stakeholders (government/municipality/school teams and individuals).

Finally, building upon other areas of Agency work (notably the Country Policy Review and Analysis activities), a further parameter for the guidance framework was to support the move towards financing policies that incorporate a balance of policy actions that take preventative, intervention or compensatory approaches to funding education systems and provision to support different learning needs. Work within the FPIES project has clearly indicated that comprehensive financing policies for inclusive education systems place an emphasis on funding strategies that take a prevention and intervention policy approach, while minimising the reliance on compensatory funding policy actions.

Inter-connected project activities and outputs

The FPIES Policy Guidance Framework has been developed as an end point within a range of inter-connected FPIES project activities. These activities included the development of a project conceptual framework, the collection of detailed country information and the analysis and synthesis of this information to inform the guidance framework.

Figure 1 shows the main steps in developing the project outputs. In addition, the essential inter-connections between these activities are shown and the outputs listed within this figure are hyperlinked and can be directly downloaded.
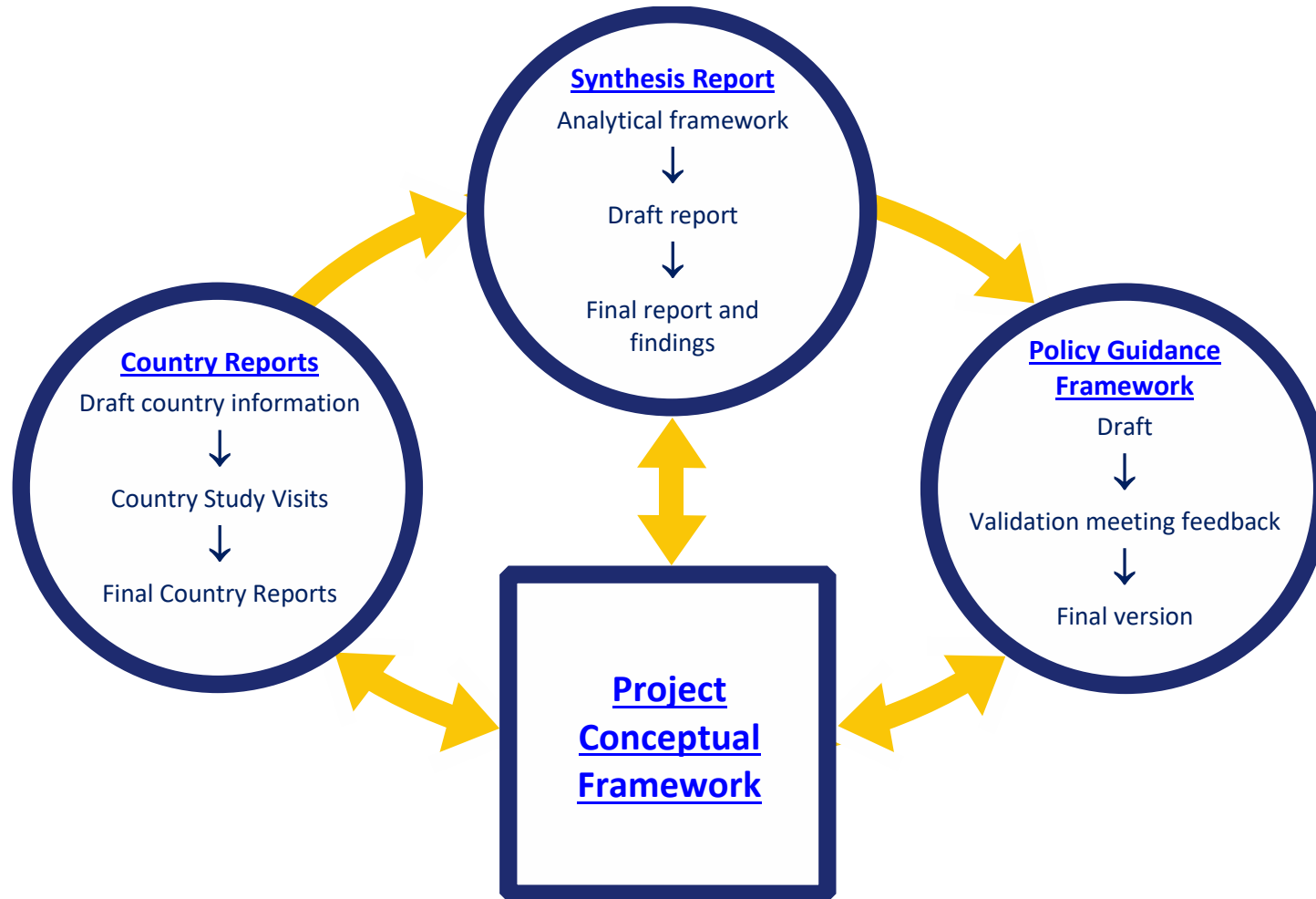
Figure 1. Inter-connections between the FPIES project activities

The project synthesis report presents the overall methodology used in the FPIES project in detail.

Main steps in developing the Policy Guidance Framework

A number of main steps linked to specific activities were taken in developing the FPIES Policy Guidance Framework.

Initial draft

The outline proposals for the guidance framework were presented to the FPIES partner representatives (Project Advisory Group members and Country Analysts) in June 2017. At that time, the main intentions for the guidance framework were agreed upon, as well as the initial ideas for what type of material should be developed, i.e. a 'model' policy with some sort of 'self-review' element and/or tool.

It was also agreed at this meeting that the guidance framework would be an open-source tool that could be further developed within different country contexts.

A first draft of the guidance framework was prepared in spring 2018. The draft was based on the project analysis presented in the synthesis report. This analysis examines fundamental topics that connect funding mechanisms for inclusive education systems to four resourcing issues. The project analysis indicates that four main issues frame high-quality and cost-effective inclusive education policies:

- Preventing costly and inequitable exclusionary strategies

- Providing incentives for a school-development approach that supports schools' social responsibility towards inclusive education

- Ensuring innovative and flexible learning environments through capacity-building

- Developing transparent and accountable systems for inclusive education.

These four issues, along with the associated financing policy factors and drivers, provided the basic structure for the policy framework presented in the guidance.

The initial draft was sent to the FPIES partner representatives for their feedback. As a result of the comments received, a second draft version was produced.

Validation meeting

The second draft of the Policy Guidance Framework was circulated to all Agency Representative Board members ahead of the June 2018 FPIES validation meeting in Athens, Greece.

This event aimed to formally present and launch the project synthesis report, as well as conduct working sessions to collect Agency representatives' feedback on the draft Policy Guidance Framework. The discussions focused on five feedback questions:

1. Are the Preamble and the section on Financing Policy Elements clear? Have you any suggestions for improving these sections?

2. Are the policy goals and objectives presented in the Policy Guidance Framework clear? Have you any suggestions for improving the section?

3. Is the Self-Review Tool clear and easy to use? Please provide any suggestions for improving the tool.

4. Is there anything else you want to add or delete?

5. Have you any ideas on how you might use the Policy Guidance Framework in your country?

As well as the agreed collated feedback from three working groups, individual written feedback was collected from 35 meeting participants: 31 Agency member country representatives, three representatives from the Greek Ministry of Education and a representative of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report team.

Immediately following the validation meeting, the partner representatives from the Netherlands organised a working meeting with eight of their colleagues involved in national education policy to get their feedback on the guidance framework.

The feedback from this working meeting and all of the feedback from the validation meeting was collated and used as the basis for re-working the draft guidance framework.

All of the feedback collected indicated that the various respondents agreed with the basic premise, goals, structure and main content of the guidance framework. However, a number of recurring points emerged, including the need to:

- clarify that the target audience is decision-makers;

- use more visuals, tables, etc., so the key messages are clear and prominent;

- include more cross-referencing with other Agency materials;

- clarify some of the terminology.

As a result, it was agreed to:

- restructure the order of the content;

- develop the Self-Review Tool as a much shorter, stand-alone document;

- develop a stand-alone graphic of the policy goals and objectives presented in the guidance framework;

- present the information about the methodology for developing the guidance framework in a separate annex (this document);

- develop a glossary to explain the main terms and concepts;

- provide a useful resources section with more information on materials and tools that could support countries in developing their financing policies.

Final draft

On the basis of all the feedback collected, a final draft was developed and circulated to all project partner and Agency representatives in autumn 2018.

In addition, the final draft was presented at a second national-level meeting in the Netherlands, organised by the partner representatives. Twenty people attended the workshop, most of them from the regional, local or school levels (national- and municipality-level policy advisors and officers, directors of regional school alliances, policy officers and controllers from regional school alliances, educational professionals, parents).

Feedback was provided on this version via email. The feedback collected was mainly related to specific issues for final clarification, but essentially approved the final draft materials. Based on this round of input, a final version of the Policy Guidance Framework was developed ready for the production process.

An open-source tool

The final FPIES Policy Guidance Framework consists of a number of inter-connected resources. In addition to this document, the following materials are available:

- The overall Policy Guidance Framework document
- The FPIES Financing Policy Self-Review Tool
- A web-based graphic of the policy issues, goals and objectives presented in the guidance framework
- A glossary of terms
- A useful resources list
- A dedicated webpage on the FPIES Policy Guidance Framework.

The FPIES Policy Guidance Framework focuses upon the **what and why of financing** inclusive education systems that apply across country situations. It cannot realistically focus upon the how and when of funding, as these issues must be considered and taken forward within a specific country context.

For this reason, the FPIES Policy Guidance Framework has been developed as an open educational resource. Any user can freely access and use the Policy Guidance Framework. They can share comments, additions or updates via the public website, as well as adapt the guidance framework to their own personal context under the Creative Commons licence.

This will allow the Policy Guidance Framework to:

- be sustained beyond the FPIES project duration;
- be adapted as needed to different educational and geographic contexts.

The Self-Review Tool that builds upon the guidance framework has the intention of supporting reflection on and discussion about financing policies for inclusive education with a range of stakeholders in countries. The Self-Review Tool has been translated into 24 Agency member country languages to further support the potential flexibility of its use in countries.