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# Multi-Annual Work Programme 2021-2027



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



# **MULTI-ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2021–2027**

**European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education**

# CONTENTS

<b>PREAMBLE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAWP 2021–2027</b>	<b>5</b>
Parameters for all MAWP activities	5
1. <i>The Agency as an agent for change as the premise for the new MAWP</i>	5
2. <i>An all-encompassing MAWP</i>	6
3. <i>An overarching activity that all MAWP findings and outcomes feed into</i>	6
4. <i>Organising activities around countries’ priorities</i>	6
5. <i>Addressing issues around intersectionality</i>	6
6. <i>Supporting quality assurance throughout the MAWP</i>	7
2021 as a transition year	7
Identification of policy priorities for MAWP work	7
1. <i>Monitoring/evaluation of policy implementation for inclusive education – what, how and who</i>	7
2. <i>Developing strategies to support collaborative, cross-sector working across all levels and sectors – horizontal and vertical collaboration</i>	8
3. <i>Developing multi-level/multi-stakeholder quality assurance and accountability frameworks for inclusive education</i>	8
4. <i>Ensuring the effective translation of national policies to regional, local and school levels</i>	8
Identification of new ways of working with countries	9
<b>ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE MAWP 2021–2027</b>	<b>10</b>
Country Policy Development Support (CPDS)	10
On-going activities	11
Thematic activities	12
<i>Thematic country cluster activities</i>	12
<i>Country System Mapping activity</i>	13
Additionally funded activities	13
Events	14
Operational activities	14

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## PREAMBLE

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The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is an independent organisation which acts as a platform for collaboration for its member countries in the field of special needs and inclusive education.

The Agency currently has 31 member countries covering 35 jurisdictions: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

The Agency has a mandate from its member countries to facilitate collaboration regarding country priorities that are aligned with and directly contribute to European and international stated priorities for education and training. These include:

- the European Union (EU) Erasmus+ education programme (2021–2027) goals;
- the stated dimensions (inclusion is one) of the European Commission’s [Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#);
- the European Commission’s [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027](#);
- the European Commission’s [Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#);
- the European Commission’s policy memo on [Strengthening the quality of early childhood education and care through inclusion](#);
- the United Nations (UN) [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#) on inclusive and equitable education, the UN [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989) and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2006), particularly Article 24.

The Agency Secretariat is based in Odense, Denmark. The Agency also has an office in Brussels, Belgium.

The Agency is funded by its member countries and supported by the EU institutions. The Agency has a legal basis at European level (Decision no. 791/2004/EC). It is one of seven European institutions supported with an operating grant under the Jean Monnet initiative within the EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–2013 and under the Jean Monnet initiative within the EU Erasmus+ education programmes 2014–2020 and 2021–2027.

This document presents the overall framework and rationale for the work that the Agency will implement during the 2021–2027 period. It describes the activities that will be implemented in order to meet Agency member countries’ agreed requests while directly supporting European Union (EU) level policy goals and initiatives. It was approved by Agency member countries in November 2021<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the public version of the approved internal document.

The point of departure for the Multi-Annual Work Programme (MAWP) 2021–2027 is the Agency [position on inclusive education systems](#). All Agency member countries are committed to working towards ensuring more inclusive education systems. They do so in different ways, depending on their past and current contexts and histories. Inclusive education systems are a vital component within the wider aspiration of more socially inclusive societies that all countries align themselves with, both ethically and politically. The ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers.

The MAWP 2021–2027 will comprise a range of activities and processes that will further explore how countries can effectively work towards this vision. The focus of most activities for the initial years of the MAWP period has been identified. However, given the MAWP's proposed developmental nature, the exact focus of all the thematic activities from 2023 onwards has yet to be agreed with Agency Representative Board members (RBs). The MAWP incorporates several information-gathering and reflection points for decision-making on the focus of further thematic activities.

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## DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAWP 2021–2027

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The Agency has developed the MAWP proposals presented here based on a series of progressive activities implemented in recent years.

In 2018 and 2019, reflection sessions with member country representatives focused on the Agency’s future role and work. These sessions identified the need for the Agency to provide more support to countries on changing, developing and implementing policy for inclusive education. There was general agreement that the Agency should further strengthen its role as an active agent for policy change and develop outputs focusing upon policy implementation, review and monitoring.

During 2020, the staff team conducted an analysis exercise mapping Agency work since 2011. The mapping analysis identified recurring messages and ‘gaps’ in recent work in relation to overall coverage of the whole [inclusive education ecosystem](#). This exercise examined overall outcomes and priorities for further work.

It also informed the preparation of a working document for the MAWP 2021–2027. This presents the parameters that will guide the implementation of all MAWP activities. Member country representatives discussed and approved these parameters at the autumn 2020 bi-annual meeting.

### Parameters for all MAWP activities

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[Six parameters](#) will guide the implementation of the MAWP 2021–2027. These parameters are summarised below.

#### 1. The Agency as an agent for change as the premise for the new MAWP

The Agency is now recognised as being able to provide key policy-makers in member countries – and at the European level – with evidence-based information and recommendations on how to implement inclusive systems of education ([Council of the European Union, 2018](#)).

This has opened up a new phase in Agency work: being an **active agent for policy change**.

The Agency as an agent for change is the premise of the MAWP 2021–2027. As such, all Agency work within the MAWP will aim to support policy-makers’ efforts to translate identified policy priorities for high-quality inclusive education for all learners into practical actions for implementation. This means providing country representatives with activities (processes) and resources (outputs) that:

- explore policy development issues;
- support self-reflection;
- share information about what other member countries do;
- aid policy review and development.

## **2. An all-encompassing MAWP**

The MAWP 2021–2027 will be all-encompassing. It will clearly reflect everything the Agency does. The different MAWP activities will be understood as mutually supporting and designed to inform overall Agency work.

The MAWP 2021–2027 will move away from the presentation of separate tracks of activities based on different funding streams. It will move towards a model that ensures inter-connected work, where all activities inform the overall Agency mission of being an agent for change. However, the Agency will continue to maintain strict financial walls between the budgets for different activities (member country contributions, EU operating grant, Technical Support Instrument, etc.).

## **3. An overarching activity that all MAWP findings and outcomes feed into**

All MAWP work will be organised around an overarching activity that all other work areas lead out of, and that work and findings feed into. This overarching activity will focus on examining policy frameworks for inclusive education systems and how to effectively implement them. Work in 2021 will build upon the current Country Policy Review and Analysis activities. They will then be developed throughout the MAWP into Country Policy Development Support activities.

All MAWP activities will support the development of a comprehensive framework and mechanism for examining and monitoring developments and the implementation of inclusive education policy in countries.

## **4. Organising activities around countries' priorities**

The Agency has agreed with RBs that:

- MAWP activities use peer learning whenever possible;
- work be organised in small working groups of countries with shared interests (cluster-based activities).

The Agency will use these approaches when designing methodologies for the MAWP activities. These approaches will lead to new policy reflection tools and outputs that provide countries with different forms of individualised information.

## **5. Addressing issues around intersectionality**

Intersectionality is the understanding that a person, group of people, organisation or social problem is affected and impacted upon by a number of pressures, forces, levers, discriminations and disadvantages. It is increasingly important for Agency work as an agent for change. All aspects of Agency work must consider everything and anything that can marginalise learners and increase their chances of exclusion. This includes, but is not limited to:

... gender, remoteness, wealth, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes ([UNESCO, 2020](#), p. 4).

## 6. Supporting quality assurance throughout the MAWP

Acting as an agent for change for inclusive education, a key task will be to develop and apply self-review tools to inform all aspects of Agency work. Through the evolving Country Policy Development Support activities, the Agency will provide feedback to countries on how to develop and improve their work.

In addition, the principle of continuous improvement will apply to the Agency's overall working procedures. The MAWP includes a period of self-reflection to systematically consider Agency operations generally.

## 2021 as a transition year

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At the autumn 2020 bi-annual meeting, member country representatives agreed that the first year of the new MAWP would be a time of re-adjustment, involving the finalisation of some activities and preparation and planning for others. Importantly, because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation, 2021 presented additional challenges and uncertainties in work planning and implementation. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, it was not possible to implement all activities as planned in 2020, so 2021 was required to 'compensate' for that and deliver some planned activities in different ways.

2021 therefore acted as a transition year from the old to the new MAWP. The work programme consisted of:

- completion of already running thematic activities;
- implementing regular annual activities;
- beginning new thematic projects and activities;
- further preparation for the new MAWP via scoping activities and a survey for RBs.

## Identification of policy priorities for MAWP work

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A survey of potential priorities for future Agency work was conducted with all Agency member countries in spring 2021. The country survey and subsequent discussions at the spring 2021 bi-annual meeting led to the identification of four priority issues. These will be the essential focus of new [thematic activities](#) beginning from 2022 onwards.

### 1. Monitoring/evaluation of policy implementation for inclusive education – what, how and who

Monitoring the implementation of legislation is a policy priority in many countries. However, agreed frameworks for collecting evidence-based information on policy implementation at different system levels – national, regional, local, even school level – are often lacking. There is a need for well-thought-out monitoring tools and indicators to monitor progress and guide further reforms. These tools could potentially offer possibilities for providing information to examine progress across regions, as well as across countries.

## **2. Developing strategies to support collaborative, cross-sector working across all levels and sectors – horizontal and vertical collaboration**

There is an increasing emphasis on effective cross-sector (horizontal), cross-system level (vertical) co-operation in countries. This is especially recognised as an issue in countries with highly decentralised systems, where roles and responsibilities must be transparent. Greater co-operation with a wider group of stakeholders/actors (health, employment, social sectors, civil society, etc.) is required to achieve policy goals. Strategies that reduce departmentalism/silo working approaches and increase co-operation at policy-making and implementation levels are necessary. This requires the development of shared understandings on key goals and concepts between stakeholders/actors.

## **3. Developing multi-level/multi-stakeholder quality assurance and accountability frameworks for inclusive education**

There is an increasing focus on this issue in countries. Many new initiatives to ensure quality at different system levels are being introduced. Frameworks may be in place, but they are often not co-ordinated across levels or sectors. Many countries report challenges in developing, reviewing and implementing multi-level frameworks for different stakeholders to support inclusive education. There is a recognised need for more information, including guidance and concrete examples of how to establish and maintain accountability frameworks. Possibilities for co-operation and peer learning between countries are seen as useful opportunities.

## **4. Ensuring the effective translation of national policies to regional, local and school levels**

All countries recognise the importance of ensuring effective policy implementation at different levels. There are clear challenges in introducing policy reforms that are then implemented in practice – laws and policies often remain disconnected from the reality of school and classroom practice. Countries recognise that efforts are required to reduce the policy-practice gap. Policy must be adapted or ‘translated’ for different contexts – i.e. system levels, but mainly school level. This is to ensure the work of different stakeholders is aligned with national policy and they are able to take responsibility for its implementation.

Regional and local authorities are seen as key players in ensuring effective policy implementation in practice, at school level. There are challenges in strengthening regional and local authorities’ capacity to implement policy. Some countries highlight differences, disparities and equity gaps between regions, local communities and schools that must be addressed.

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## Identification of new ways of working with countries

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During 2021, the country survey findings served as the basis for further discussions within RB scoping activities. Two online scoping meetings with member country representatives took place.

The first meeting collected ideas and inputs on the four priority issues identified for examination in the MAWP. Several recurring requests for future Agency work on the priority areas were identified:

- The need to consider the four themes in an inter-related way
- The need to tailor future activities to country contexts
- The need to develop the range of working processes with countries
- The need to link activity outputs to country contexts
- The need to provide structured examples of country work.

The second meeting focused on collecting additional ideas and inputs, particularly in relation to new ways of working within the MAWP. During the meeting, member country representatives agreed in principle with the proposals that future Agency work would focus upon a series of inter-connected, developmental thematic activities over the course of the MAWP.

It was agreed that the starting point for these inter-connected activities would be the collection of information on countries' overall education systems to ensure greater alignment between future thematic activities and individual country approaches to key issues around implementing inclusive education. Longer term, this information must be built upon to implement specific thematic activities that effectively support countries' individual, group/cluster and collective policy development and implementation requirements.

The Agency has taken all the cumulative inputs into account in preparing the overall framework for the remainder of the MAWP 2021–2027.

To ensure the flexibility required to implement inter-connected, developmental thematic activities that directly respond to RBs' policy development needs, the specific focus of thematic activities from 2023 onwards has not been fixed. The exact priorities for new activities will be discussed and agreed upon with RBs at regular intervals throughout the MAWP.

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## ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE MAWP 2021–2027

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This section presents an overview of the activities to be developed and implemented within the remainder of the MAWP (i.e. 2022 onwards). This section focuses on the essential purpose of the main activities and on important inter-connections between elements of MAWP work. The details of the discrete activities are presented within individual activity plans, as well as the annual work programme documents.

The scoping activities on Agency ways of working have led to agreements that the essential focus of Agency work must be to support countries individually and collectively in changing, developing and effectively implementing policy for inclusive education.

All the MAWP activities will:

- align with the agreed parameters;
- be more clearly inter-connected and developmental;
- incorporate opportunities for organising work in small groups of countries with shared interests (cluster-based activities);
- provide structured opportunities for the exchange of expertise between member country representatives from different countries;
- be linked and feed into an overarching framework that directly supports individual countries in developing their policies, i.e. Country Policy Development Support.

All MAWP work will aim to use a blended approach of in-person and online meetings and activities.

To organise the MAWP work coherently, a number of different types of activities have been identified, as outlined in the sections below. The inter-connections between the types of activities, and the fact they are mutually supportive and inform each other, must be emphasised.

### Country Policy Development Support (CPDS)

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The [Country Policy Review and Analysis](#) (CPRA) activities were a major development within Agency work with member countries during the MAWP 2014–2020. CPRA centred upon a form of highly structured policy review. Future Agency work will now move towards considering implementation issues and how to understand and overcome the policy-practice implementation gap. The overall findings, as well as learning points around effective working processes within the CPRA activities, are the basis for the overarching Country Policy Development Support (CPDS) activity.

The CPDS activity will be central within the Agency's role as an agent for policy change in inclusive education (1<sup>st</sup> MAWP parameter). This development work will:

- ensure an all-encompassing MAWP that provides added value from all activities for the Agency's collective work, so that that all countries benefit from the knowledge and findings from all activities (2<sup>nd</sup> MAWP parameter);

- be the overarching activity that all MAWP work is organised around, that all other work areas lead out of, and that work and findings feed into (3<sup>rd</sup> MAWP parameter).

The overall goal for CPDS will be to support countries from where they are in their policy development work. The framework will be developed and then implemented over the course of the MAWP. It will be based on past, current and on-going and future findings from all Agency activities.

From 2022 onwards, the CPDS activities will focus upon developing a comprehensive framework and mechanism for examining and monitoring developments in the implementation of inclusive education policy in countries. This development work will be organised around the inter-connected priorities of monitoring and evaluation, cross-sector working, multi-level/multi-stakeholder quality assurance and accountability frameworks that support and ensure the effective translation of national policies to regional, local and school levels.

The CPDS work will be developed over the course of the remaining MAWP using the outcomes from the [thematic country cluster activities](#). These will begin in 2023 and run throughout the remainder of the MAWP period, as described below.

## On-going activities

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The CPDS activity will be implemented on a continuous basis throughout the MAWP period. Alongside this work, there are several on-going and/or recurring activities that will be implemented at intervals throughout the 2021–2027 period:

**European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE)** will be implemented annually with a range of data and indicator outputs being made available each year.

**Legislation updates** from member countries will be provided every two years. These will draw on other areas of thematic activities and on specific inputs from countries.

The **overviews of country systems** for inclusive education are consistently one of the most frequently used resources on the Agency's website. Within the MAWP, this important resource will be regularly updated. As a starting point, in 2023, the current information will be completely re-organised. This work will draw on the information collected in a number of other MAWP activities, notably the mapping of all member countries' education systems and the activity on legislative definitions around learners vulnerable to exclusion. Further updates are then scheduled for 2025 and 2027.

The Agency's **Key Principles** work focuses upon synthesising and then highlighting the fundamental issues for inclusive education systems emerging across all the Agency's activities and outputs. Three short reports have been published within past multi-annual work programmes (in 2003, 2009 and 2011). The current Key Principles work will be finalised by the end of 2021. The fifth report in the Key Principles series will be developed in 2026.

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## Thematic activities

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A number of thematic activities have already been agreed upon and are currently running.

The **Supporting Inclusive School Leadership (SISL)** activities will be completed by the end of 2021.

The following activities are scheduled for completion in 2022:

- **Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion (TPL4I)**
- **Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education (CROSP)**
- **Inclusive Digital Education (IDE)**
- **Legislative definitions around learners vulnerable to exclusion.**

In 2021, two longer-term activities began:

- **Voices into Action (VIA):** Including the Voices of Learners and their Families in Future Agency Work
- Learning from the COVID-19 Pandemic – **Building Resilience through Inclusive Education Systems (BRIES).**

These are scheduled for completion by the end of 2022 and 2023, respectively, followed by short activity output production and dissemination phases.

From 2023 onwards, structured opportunities for revisiting past thematic activities in order to identify impact and examine application and use of Agency outputs will be developed.

### Thematic country cluster activities

Responding to country requests for more tailored activities to support policy development needs and building upon learning points from current activities, MAWP thematic work from 2023 onwards will be organised as thematic country cluster activities. These activities will be developmental and build upon each other throughout the course of the entire MAWP.

Initial activities in 2022 will identify and examine the wider system factors that support or hinder the successful implementation of countries' policy frameworks for inclusive education. These activities will centre upon a detailed mapping of all member countries' education systems. The proposed [country information-gathering and mapping](#) activity is described below.

Building on that information, MAWP work in 2023–2024 will centre upon a series of activities designed to support the work of individual and small groups of countries around the identified priorities, i.e. monitoring policy implementation, developing strategies to support collaborative, cross-sector working, developing multi-level/multi-stakeholder quality assurance and accountability frameworks and ensuring the effective translation of national policies for inclusive education to regional, local and school levels.

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From 2024 onwards, thematic country cluster activities will be focused upon priorities identified by RBs within the course of this on-going work and via inputs to country priority [surveys and scoping activities](#).

### **Country System Mapping activity**

The Country System Mapping activity will be the basis for the thematic country cluster activities. It will begin in late 2021 and run throughout 2022. This will be an extensive information-gathering exercise involving all Agency member countries. It will focus on systematic information collection leading to a detailed mapping of the key features of all countries' systems for inclusive education. The mapping will take a whole-system view and cover a range of thematic issues relating to the effective implementation of national policies at regional, local and school levels. However, the specific focus will be on countries' approaches to monitoring and evaluation, cross-sector working and quality assurance.

The information-gathering and mapping activity will aim to collect the necessary information on country systems to ensure greater alignment between individual country approaches to the key issues and topics focused upon in the MAWP's initial thematic cluster activities from 2023 onwards. The information collected will make it possible to 'group' countries in homogeneous or heterogeneous clusters, depending on the needs of the countries and activities. The aim will be that countries can exchange with and learn from peers who are taking similar – and different – approaches to issues they are facing. Building in possibilities for more homogeneous and heterogeneous clusters will ensure that activity outcomes are relevant for all countries, not just those taking a particular approach.

### **Additionally funded activities**

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Throughout 2021, the Agency has conducted an external evaluation of the implementation of the European Schools' Action Plan on Educational Support and Inclusive Education. The European Schools are based in six EU countries. The European Schools' Board of Governors (comprising the EU Ministries of Education and the European Commission) commissioned the Agency to conduct this evaluation. This work will be completed by early 2022.

During 2021, the Agency has provided technical support for five activities funded under the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP). Such activities are fully funded by the European Commission and focus upon changes to educational legislation or policy development for inclusive education. The activities have been implemented in full co-operation with the Ministries of Education in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Poland and Portugal.

Work in the first four of these countries was finalised in 2021. The work in Portugal involves designing a system to monitor the implementation of the law on inclusive education. It will be completed in 2022.

From 2022 onwards, the Agency will continue its co-operation with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) which,

through the [Technical Support Instrument](#) (TSI, successor to the SRSP), will continue to provide technical support to ministries of education for their reform work.

The Agency will consider possibilities for other additionally funded activities on their individual merits as they arise. All such future work will be guided by the parameter of an all-encompassing MAWP that aims to ensure added value from all activities for the Agency's collective work and that all countries benefit from the knowledge and findings from all activities.

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## Events

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During the period of the MAWP, the Agency will organise different types of online and in-person meetings, conferences and thematic seminars. Such meetings will support the implementation of specific activities, but also aim to provide professional development opportunities for policy-makers and practitioners.

During 2021, the **Agency bi-annual meetings** have been held as online events. Bi-annual meetings with member country representatives are key opportunities to review on-going activities and discuss and approve plans for future activities. From 2022 onwards, the intention is that these should shift back to in-person events, co-hosted with an Agency member country. In 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic situation permitting, the bi-annual meetings will be held in Greece and Bulgaria.

During the **experience exchange sessions** held as part of the bi-annual meetings, countries will be invited to share specific examples of legislation and/or policy development for inclusive education. These offer other country representatives insights into their work.

As part of the spring 2022 bi-annual meeting in Greece, the Agency will **celebrate 25 years of Agency work** with an event involving all RBs, NCs and staff.

Linked to longer-term thematic work, **activity dissemination events** involving representatives from all countries will be organised.

Throughout the remainder of the MAWP, **other events** will be organised as required to support specific activities, as well as the Agency's overall mandate from member countries to facilitate collaboration regarding country priorities for inclusive education. During the MAWP period, the Agency will explore possibilities for hosting events in co-operation with other organisations working in the field (for example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – [UNESCO](#)). Co-hosted events will be open to organisations and country representatives not usually directly involved in Agency work. These events will, therefore, help to maximise dissemination opportunities and increase Agency impact.

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## Operational activities

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The Agency's overall work is necessarily supported by a range of crucial administrative and operational activities. These ensure that the thematic activities agreed with country representatives are effectively implemented.

During 2021, **self-review activities** (SRA) have been implemented. These aim to develop new quality assurance tools to support the Agency's overall operations. From 2022 onwards, the Agency staff team will take different actions to put the self-review development and implementation plans into operation. This work is anticipated to have a significant impact on the Agency's operations in coming years.

A number of **country surveys** are scheduled during the MAWP period to identify country priorities for future thematic cluster activities. The surveys will be linked to subsequent online scoping meetings with member country representatives, where survey findings will be discussed and decisions made on next overall priorities for future MAWP work.

The Agency's **information dissemination and production activities** are central to its overall operations. Information dissemination work includes producing, publishing and disseminating all Agency outputs in both offline and digital formats. These formats comply with internationally recognised accessibility standards. A key focus of information dissemination development work within the MAWP will be to ensure Agency outputs are more tailored to country situations and meet the needs of a range of stakeholders. The 2022 survey will be an important starting input for the initiative to extend the Agency's reach to other stakeholders, such as researchers, school leaders, teachers, parents and learners.

Throughout the MAWP, activities to **monitor the impact of Agency work** will take place. Identifying and then analysing different types of examples of Agency impact is crucial for Agency efforts to improve overall operational activities. The findings of the self-review activities will be used as a basis for revising current and developing new impact monitoring procedures to be implemented throughout the MAWP period.

Actively maintaining mutually beneficial **co-operative relationships** with other organisations working in the field of inclusive and special needs education will be an important on-going operational activity. This will include regular information exchange, as well as potential collaborative activities with specialist European organisations and key international bodies and organisations, such as UNESCO and its institutes (International Bureau of Education and Institute for Information Technologies in Education), UNICEF-CEECIS region, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Labour Organization and the World Bank. Co-operation with such organisations is sought and maintained when there are clear benefits for the Agency collectively, as well as for member countries via the increased quality of Agency work.

From 2021 to 2025, the Agency will continue to be involved in the European Commission's Education and Training Working Groups. It will be a member of the working groups on:

- Early Childhood Education and Care
- Schools (subgroup on Pathways to School Success)
- Equality and Values in Education and Training.

Participation in these working groups will enrich Agency thematic work and activities, and provide a forum for sharing key messages and findings from Agency work with its member countries with a wider stakeholder group.

