

Inclusive School Leadership

A practical guide to developing and reviewing policy frameworks



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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policy frameworks**

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



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PREAMBLE

The [Supporting Inclusive School Leadership](#) (SISL) project aims to support national to local-level policy- and decision-makers to promote and develop [school leadership](#) that will foster inclusive education for all learners in different policy contexts.

The project also aims to investigate how to develop and promote inclusive school-level leadership through national and local-level policy frameworks and support mechanisms. The project activities and outputs inform wider discussions about school leadership. These discussions are required to effectively implement inclusive education as an approach for providing high-quality education and ensuring well-being for all learners in different policy contexts.

School leadership is increasingly highlighted as a crucial factor in achieving more inclusive education systems. Ideally, all forms of school leadership should be inclusive.

[Inclusive school leadership](#) takes place within a regulatory framework that universally defines inclusive education, determines which resources are available, which decisions can be made and what leaders are held responsible for. While some frameworks exist for school leadership and school leaders, the dimension of **inclusive** school leadership is largely missing from these general frameworks.

Within this document, inclusive education is understood in its widest sense with the goal of enabling participation, raising achievement, supporting well-being and creating a sense of belonging for **all** learners, including those most vulnerable to exclusion.

This policy framework sets out a vision, guiding principles, goals, objectives and a framework of [standards](#) and supportive policy measures. These can be used in collaboration, exchange or decision-making with the aim of guiding a more detailed set of policies, on-going maintenance or monitoring, or further developing existing policies to achieve the wider goal of inclusive education.

The policy framework respects country differences. It is presented as an open-source tool, which each country is free to adapt to its respective context.

Depending on the country context, the policy framework can be used to:

- contribute to and offer a basis for developing new policies aimed at leadership practice;
- support the review and further development of existing policies and policy frameworks;
- spark self-reflection (especially on the concept of inclusive school leadership, school leaders' role in inclusive education, and leadership training).

This policy framework is an output of phase 2 of the SISL project. The project activities and subsequent outputs focus on inclusive school leadership. They build on the phase 1 project work and the activities conducted with a cluster of European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (Agency) member countries: Hungary, Ireland, Malta and Sweden.



The phase 1 outputs are:

- a [review of international and European policy](#) documents and guidance (European Agency, 2018a);
- a [review of international and European literature](#) (post-2012) to agree operational definitions of key terms and identify key concepts underpinning policy and practice for inclusive leadership (European Agency, 2018b);
- a [country survey](#), directed at all Agency member countries, informed by the policy and literature reviews. The survey collected information from Agency member countries to analyse how far their policies specifically support inclusive school leadership practice;
- a [synthesis report](#), which provides an overview of the outputs above by introducing the definition of inclusive school leadership and presenting further analysis of the country responses. It considers how policy addresses three key levers – access, autonomy and accountability – that support effective inclusive school leadership and how policy, across these three levers, affects the practice of inclusive school leadership at different levels in the education system (European Agency, 2019a).

In addition to these outcomes, the policy framework builds on the following sources:

- [Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education](#) (European Agency, 2017)
- [Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion](#) (European Agency, 2019b)
- National documents and inputs from member country experts.

The first three sections of this policy framework provide an introduction and background information:

- [Section 1](#) provides background information on why a specific policy framework to support inclusive school leadership is needed.
- [Section 2](#) introduces the policy framework's target audience and explains how the policy framework can be used.
- [Section 3](#) briefly introduces the policy framework's different elements.

[Section 4](#) presents the policy framework's central elements: [mandate](#), [vision](#), [guiding principles](#), [goals](#), [objectives](#) and the [framework of standards and policy measures](#).



1. WHY IS A POLICY FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP NEEDED?

School leadership has a crucial influence on inclusive school practice, as it is both directly and indirectly connected with positive outcomes for learners (Mac Ruairc, 2013). School leaders are considered crucial in any change process that aims to raise the achievement and well-being of all learners in inclusive schools (Donnelly, Ó Murchú and Thies, 2016).

The demands on school leadership and, in particular, inclusive school leadership are many and diverse. The expertise required to successfully lead a school can hardly be found within one person. This means that, in the current complex and challenging education environment, school leaders must adapt to changes within the education system and, more specifically, to the needs of all of their learners. These demands are increasingly met by working in leadership teams instead of working as single leaders.

Inclusive school leadership takes place within a regulatory framework that universally defines inclusive education, determines which resources are available, which decisions can be made and clarifies responsibilities. While some frameworks exist for school leadership and school leaders, the dimension of **inclusive** school leadership is largely missing from these general frameworks.

Inclusive school practice is complex. In this light, there is a growing need to explain the meaning of inclusive school leadership and to support school leaders in developing the knowledge and capabilities they need to realise such practice by exercising inclusive school leadership. A dedicated policy framework serves this purpose.

The outcomes of phase 1 of the [Supporting Inclusive School Leadership](#) (SISL) project discuss different leadership models and key policy levers relevant for inclusive school leadership. These enabled the development of a policy framework specifically designed to support inclusive school leadership. Such leadership aims to address inequality, build community and enable full participation and valued outcomes for all learners, including those most vulnerable to exclusion.

These models and key levers include:

- the [core functions](#) of inclusive school leaders: setting direction, human and organisational development (see section 4.5);
- the [ecosystem model of inclusive education systems](#), which considers the roles and responsibilities inclusive school leaders undertake to fulfil the core functions, across all education system levels. This crucial role lies at the interface between education policies and their implementation in schools (see section 4.5);
- [key policy levers](#) of access, autonomy and accountability that, when enacted, enable and support inclusive school leaders to fulfil the above-mentioned roles and core functions (see section 4.3.4).

This policy framework aims to be applicable to **all** countries' contexts. The policy framework recognises that countries have different policy environments, such as being decentralised or centralised. Some already have detailed policy frameworks for school



leadership that they would like to review, while others would like to develop such frameworks.

1.1. Defining inclusive school leadership

This policy framework mainly uses the term **leadership**. Respecting different policy contexts, the project recognises that leadership can be performed by one leader or, to be effective, by a collaborative leadership team or distributed among several key actors within or linked to a school.

Leadership is understood as a process of providing direction and applying influence (Lumby and Coleman, 2016). It involves managing people's emotions, thoughts and actions decisively to influence others towards a preferred direction (Diamond and Spillane, 2016).

This policy framework takes the view that all school leadership should be inclusive. However, school leadership takes place in different school contexts that may be at different stages of inclusive practice. The framework differentiates between **school leadership** in general and **inclusive school leadership**.

Inclusive school leadership is specifically dedicated to addressing inequity to build community and the full participation of all learners. Research has identified three main leadership functions that must be performed for inclusive schools to run effectively (Billingsley, McLeskey and Crockett, 2017; McLeskey and Waldron, 2015; Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016). These main functions are [setting direction](#), [organisational development](#) and [human development](#) (European Agency, 2018b).

In this document, the term **school leader** refers to all those in key leadership roles in schools and learning communities. The term [inclusive school leader](#) can refer to both those in formal leadership positions and those within schools who show leadership in their practice.

Inclusive school leaders have the **vision** that 'all learners of any age' should receive 'meaningful, high-quality' education 'in their local community, alongside their friends and peers' (European Agency, 2015a, p. 1).

Such leaders combine elements of [instructional](#), [distributed](#) and [transformative](#) leadership models in their school leadership (see glossary). **Inclusive school leaders set direction towards more inclusive school practice**. They take responsibility for and value all learners irrespective of their background, needs or ability. They work to ensure every learner's full participation and engagement by **setting and communicating a clear direction** for inclusive education in schools.

Inclusive school leaders are aware that **leadership is a collective and co-ordinated effort**. Accordingly, they **distribute leadership** among key actors within or linked to a school. Therefore, **effective inclusive leaders do not act only as individuals** but within leadership teams. They have a role in **building partnerships** with staff, parents and external organisations. Inclusive school leaders use **transformative leadership** in the sense that they **lead and organise change** and **build capacity** for improvement aimed at the **best possible learning experience for learners**. This includes raising learners' achievement and



developing a sense of well-being and belonging for all. They develop staff and other stakeholders. Using all available evidence, experience and expertise, they **collaboratively create and sustain inclusive schools**.



2. WHO IS THE POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR AND HOW CAN IT BE USED?

This document offers a framework for all who have a vision of more inclusive and equitable education for all, acknowledging that individual school leaders and school leadership teams play a vital role in achieving this vision.

The policy framework's target user group is policy- and decision-makers at all education system levels. This includes everyone who has a mandate to influence inclusive school leadership practice. It covers policy-makers at national, regional and municipality level and those involved in school leadership themselves (for example, teachers, leaders at municipality, regional and national level) – regardless of whether they are officially labelled as 'school leaders'.

The roles and titles of these policy- and decision-makers at each level will vary across countries.

There are different ways to use this policy framework. Depending on the country context, the policy framework can be used to:

- **Contribute to and offer a basis for developing new policies:** This framework offers a blueprint for key elements to include in a policy focused on supporting inclusive school leadership or to address school leadership's role in wider inclusive education policy frameworks.
- **Support the review and further development of existing policies and policy frameworks:** This policy framework recognises that policy to support inclusive school leadership may exist as an individual policy or may be addressed cross-sectorally in different policies and at different policy levels. Where policy for inclusive school leadership or school leadership in general exists, this document offers a framework to:
 - review and improve existing policy that supports inclusive school leadership;
 - develop existing general school leadership policy to ensure an inclusive approach.
- **Spark self-reflection (especially on the concept of inclusive school leadership, school leaders' role in inclusive education, and leadership training):** Independent of developing or reviewing policies, this policy framework's key elements offer a framework for discussion and self-reflection on the practice of inclusive school leadership and school leaders' roles. Inclusive school leadership depends strongly on the conditions and context in which leaders fulfil their roles. Therefore, this framework supports professional dialogue between school leaders and policy-makers on the conditions needed to achieve the wider goal of inclusive education for all learners, raise their achievement, foster their well-being and ensure a sense of belonging.



A [self-reflection tool](#) accompanies this policy framework. The self-reflection tool aims to stimulate professional dialogue and collaborative policy development. It builds on the framework of standards to be achieved by school leaders and on the type of policy needed to support school leaders in their efforts to achieve this.

This policy framework and the self-reflection tool are open-source tools. They are designed to be adapted to the existing country contexts.



3. WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK?

Generally, a **policy framework** is understood as a document that sets out a vision, guiding principles, goals, objectives and, potentially, standards. It can be used in collaboration, exchange or decision-making. It aims to guide a more detailed set of policies, on-going maintenance or development of policies for implementation in practice.

This policy framework's main purpose is to support school leadership to work towards enabling full participation of all learners, raise their achievement and support their well-being and sense of belonging. This is in line with the Agency's and its member countries' efforts to promote long-term inclusion in wider society.

This policy framework includes the following elements:

- A wider [policy mandate](#) to contextualise policy focusing on and affecting school leadership. The mandate refers to several international and European-level guiding principle documents. It can be expanded by policies and legislation that provide the country's unique context, history and development path.
- A [policy vision](#) that outlines the ideal that the policy focuses on achieving.
- [Guiding principles](#) that underpin strategy or frameworks for supporting inclusive school leadership. Policy to support inclusive school leadership may not be a standalone document but interwoven into many others. In many country contexts, the goals, objectives and strategies are embedded in other educational policies and actions.
- A [policy goal](#) that provides a target to be reached through work within the inclusive education system.
- [Policy objectives](#) that should specifically be achieved.
- A [framework of standards](#), which are statements of aspirations for school leadership to achieve.
- [Policy measures](#) that support the achievement of these standards.



4. A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Comprehensive policies for any topic incorporate and clearly present goals and objectives. Policies also include various other information elements that put the specific policy goals and objectives into an operational context.

This section presents the policy framework's mandate, vision, guiding principles, goals and objectives and the framework of standards and policy measures for supporting inclusive school leadership.

4.1. The policy mandate

The framework or policy within the education system that supports inclusive school leadership varies greatly from country to country. It depends on the country's unique context, history and developmental path. However, all countries should refer to a number of international and European-level guiding principle documents to contextualise their policy that supports inclusive school leadership. Most countries have ratified a number of international agreements, such as the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) – CRPD (United Nations, 2006) and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) – CRC (United Nations, 1989). This means they should be incorporated into national policy and legislation.

Article 24 (Education) of the CRPD commits state parties to realise the right to education 'without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity'. Accordingly, 'States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning' (United Nations, 2006, Article 24).

The European Union Education Ministers' [Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education](#) (2015) also provides a strong mandate for policy that supports inclusive school leadership.

These references serve as examples of policy mandates that national policy may reference.

As a starting point, general education policy should reflect the broad definition of inclusive education set out by UNESCO International Bureau of Education: 'a process of strengthening the capacity of an education system to reach out to all learners' (2009, p. 9). As an 'overall principle', it 'should guide all educational policies and practices', based on the fact that education is a basic 'human right and the foundation for a more just' and equal society (ibid.).

Inclusive education is associated with principles of equity, social justice, democracy and participation. Inclusive education systems promote both equity and excellence for all learners (UNESCO, European Agency and G3ict, 2014, p. 11).



‘Improving educational attainment’ for all learners is ‘crucial not only to economic growth and competitiveness, but also to reducing poverty and fostering social inclusion’ (Council of the European Union, 2010, C 135/3).

In line with [General comment No. 4 \(2016\) on the right to inclusive education](#), inclusive education should be understood as:

A principle that values the well-being of all students, respects their inherent dignity and autonomy, acknowledges individual requirements and ability to effectively be included in and contribute to society (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, p. 4).

The United Nations [Sustainable Development Goal for Education](#) is to ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (2015).

The *Incheon Declaration* stresses that:

Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all (UNESCO, 2015, p. 7).

The *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching* argues that:

Ensuring effective equal access to quality inclusive education for all learners, including those of migrant origins, those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, those with special needs and those with disabilities — in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — is indispensable for achieving more cohesive societies (Council of the European Union, 2018, C 195/3).

The *Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education* echoes this view that inclusive education supports the wider goal of a more inclusive society. It advocates:

Ensuring inclusive education for all children and young people which combats racism and discrimination on any ground, promotes citizenship and teaches them to understand and to accept differences of opinion, of conviction, of belief and of lifestyle, while respecting the rule of law, diversity and gender equality (European Union Education Ministers, 2015, p. 3).



Under the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2015, learners themselves were given a voice at a European Hearing. In their key messages, the learners stressed that:

Becoming full citizens ... relates to the impact of inclusive education in being fully included in society:

- It is essential to be included in mainstream schools, in order to be included in society.
- The aim is that all are able to find their place in society.

The young people considered that all learners need to learn together in order to live together. They stated that this is the first step in the process towards social inclusion (European Agency, 2016, p. 19).

Setting the overarching context of school leadership's role within this understanding of inclusive education, *General comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education* states that:

... the committed leadership of educational institutions is essential to introduce and embed the culture, policies and practices to achieve inclusive education at all levels: classroom teaching and relationships, board meetings, teacher supervision, counselling services and medical care, school trips, budgetary allocations and any interface with parents of learners with and without disability when applicable, the local community or wider public (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, pp. 4–5).

The *Council conclusions on effective leadership in education* stress that:

Good educational leaders develop a strategic vision for their institutions, act as role models for both learners and teachers and are key to creating an effective and attractive environment which is conducive to learning. They are also major players in forging effective links between different levels of education and training, families, the world of work and the local community, with a common aim of raising learner attainment (Council of the European Union, 2013, C 30/2–C 30/3).

4.2. The vision

Inclusive school leadership aims to address inequity to build community and full participation. It focuses on developing an inclusive culture where all stakeholders are supported to work together, value diversity and ensure that all learners, including those most vulnerable to exclusion, receive a high-quality education. This vision was developed and agreed in the SISL project. It builds on the Agency's vision for inclusive education systems (European Agency, 2015a).



The vision of inclusive school leadership extends beyond the individual school unit. It includes roles and responsibilities within different policy levels, ranging from community to national level.

The **vision of the policy framework to support inclusive school leadership** is that existing policy and policy being developed support school leadership to build a culture and implement practice in which all learners are provided with meaningful, high-quality education, high expectations for their achievement, well-being and a sense of belonging within an equitable school environment.

4.3. The guiding principles

The guiding principles for achieving inclusive education systems support the development of clear, coherent general policy frameworks on education. These take a rights-based approach to support [equity](#), inclusion and non-discrimination. The policy frameworks should enable all learners to attend their local community school, with their peers, and ensure effective equal access to common curriculum and assessment frameworks that provide a high-quality education for **all** learners (Council of the European Union, 2018).

The following specific **policy principles** must underpin policy, strategy or frameworks for supporting inclusive school leadership:

- A [rights-based approach](#) to inclusive education
- A focus on improvement towards an inclusive education system
- A synergy between policy and inclusive school leadership practice
- A required balance of three key policy levers across different education system levels.

The following four subsections further explain these policy principles.

4.3.1. A rights-based approach to inclusive education for all learners

The recognition, protection, promotion and implementation of human rights is a guiding principle that each state is responsible for (United Nations General Assembly, 1998).

Inclusive education is not limited to special needs and/or disabilities. Rather, it has the vision that ‘all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers’ (European Agency, 2015a, p. 1). This includes a special responsibility for those learners vulnerable to exclusion (International Bureau of Education-UNESCO, 2016).

This policy framework takes a rights-based approach to education, underpinned by the guiding principles of the CRC (United Nations, 1989) and the CRPD (United Nations, 2006). Both conventions emphasise that every learner has the right to equal opportunities for education without discrimination.



A rights-based approach to education that embodies human rights education empowers children and other stakeholders and represents a major building block in efforts to achieve social transformation towards rights-respecting societies and social justice (UNICEF, 2007, p. 12).

These normative instruments clearly emphasise the concepts of efficiency, effectiveness, equity and inclusion. Thus, inclusion should be a means to raise achievement and well-being for **all** learners, including those most vulnerable to exclusion.

4.3.2. A focus on improvement towards an inclusive education system

Improving school systems to be more inclusive entails removing obstacles and barriers to inclusion. It also involves re-organising education systems, structures and resources to better meet all learners' needs within one integrated educational framework.

School improvement requires an equity-based systemic change, with a focus on the practice and competences of those working in the education system (Sailor, McLeskey, Satter, Waldron and Woods, 2017). This should also include a holistic view of individuals, respect for and valuing of diversity, effective transitions and recognition of the importance of collaboration and monitoring.

4.3.3. A synergy between policy and inclusive school leadership practice

Inclusive education takes place within an inclusive education **system**. This policy framework takes a holistic approach to inclusive education and the complex networks in the education system that affect every learner (European Agency, 2015a; 2019b; UNESCO, 2017).

Equally, international conventions and agreements, as well as legislation and policy at national, regional and community levels, affect inclusive school leadership. Policy determines the available resources and the degree of flexibility in decision-making. It also determines what school leadership (in every form), according to context and culture, is held accountable for in monitoring and evaluation processes.

Inclusive leadership practice, roles and responsibilities lie at the interface between education policies and their implementation in schools. It highlights the potential for school leaders to play a key role in supporting wider system transformation across different policy levels.

Inclusive school leadership is influenced by policy. It is also responsible for transforming policy and legislation into improved inclusive education practice, shaping policies that are relevant for the school environment and for stakeholders. Inclusive school leadership can also play a role in influencing local, regional and national-level policy if appropriate communication and feedback mechanisms to national-level decision-makers are in place.

4.3.4. A required balance of three key policy levers across different education system levels

The policy framework builds on the [ecosystem model of inclusive education systems](#). In the case of SISL, the model considers roles, responsibilities and practice undertaken by inclusive school leaders across all education system levels (European Agency, 2019a). The



policy framework focuses on examining how policy supports the fulfilment of these responsibilities.

Regarding policy frameworks for ensuring accountability, international and European recommendations include the need to clarify school leaders' role in quality assurance and ensure alignment between governance and accountability. The SISL phase 1 outcomes clearly show that school leadership needs to be empowered to make decisions and set a course to implement inclusive education in practice. However, that autonomy must be balanced with support and appropriate forms of accountability. These factors can determine a school leader's effectiveness in creating and leading an inclusive school. They influence how flexible school leaders can be in ensuring equity and sustaining inclusive practice for which they are held accountable.

Inclusive school leaders are responsible for leading schools that build on the principles of equity to raise the achievement and well-being of all learners in their [school community](#). For the whole school team to fully embrace inclusion, school leaders must set a strategic vision and attend to both human and organisational development. To achieve this effectively, the project findings suggest that school leaders need:

- **access** to status, appropriate pay, necessary resources, and training and professional learning and development for inclusive school leadership supported by national/local policy on inclusive education;
- **autonomy** to make informed decisions on the school's strategic direction, development and organisation, including fulfilling the vision of inclusive education for all learners;
- **accountability** in line with the degree of access and level of autonomy.

However, as stated above, accountability must be in line with the level of access to resources, support and professional learning and development and the degree of autonomy school leaders have at different policy levels.

4.4. The goals and objectives

The **policy framework's goal** is to support countries to improve their education systems and achieve the wider goal of inclusive education across all educational sectors and settings. It has a specific focus on school leadership and the policy environment in which it takes place.

The policy framework's objectives relate to the four guiding principles presented in the previous section. In line with this, the objectives are to develop policy that:

- emphasises every learner's right to equal opportunities for and access to education without discrimination;
- is forward-looking and focuses on improving the education system towards becoming more inclusive;
- takes into account the synergy between policy and inclusive school leadership practice;



- balances the three key policy levers of access, autonomy and accountability across different education system levels by:
 - ensuring school leadership has access to a positive status, appropriate pay, necessary resources, and the necessary training and professional learning and development;
 - providing school leadership with a degree of autonomy, which allows leaders, in collaboration with their school community, to make informed decisions on the school's strategic direction, development and organisation, including fulfilling the vision of inclusive education for all learners;
 - basing measures of school leadership accountability on the degree of access and level of autonomy school leaders have to make decisions in line with the vision of inclusive education.

To achieve the goals and objectives, the policy framework presents proposed **standards** for inclusive school leadership and the corresponding **policy measures** needed to implement those standards in inclusive school leadership practice. The standards are statements of aspirations and their achievement can be measured.

When presenting standards for inclusive school leadership, how the policy framework's objectives can be translated into policy measures that support the achievement of those standards is considered.

4.5. A framework of standards and policy measures

The policy framework presents the proposed standards required for school leadership to be inclusive and the linked policy measures needed to support the achievement of these standards. These standards are indicators of inclusive school leadership and a means to achieve the wider goal of inclusive education for all.

The standards and policy measures are based on findings from phase 1 of the SISL project and on additional sources and input from the country cluster (Hungary, Ireland, Malta and Sweden). They are organised according to the levels of the **ecosystem model of inclusive education systems**.

The [ecosystem model of inclusive education systems](#) sets out the main structures and processes that influence every learner's participation and that must be considered to maximise opportunities for learning, achievement and well-being.

1. **National/regional level** represents the key areas of national/state/regional policy that provide the context for school leaders' work.
2. **Community level** represents the community context.
3. **School level** represents the school or learning community where processes affect the learner's experiences in school.
4. **Individual level** represents the classroom practice that directly affects the learner.

Building on the knowledge collected in phase 1 of the project and on the participating countries' experience and expertise, the policy framework presents proposed **standards**



for inclusive school leadership practice. The individual standards refer to ‘inclusive school leaders’, as leadership practice is performed by individuals who may or may not be working in leadership teams and individual leaders can be accountable for achieving the proposed standards.

This practice cannot be seen as independent of the policies that affect it. Therefore, for each proposed standard, **supportive policy measures** are described. These policy measures should enable individual inclusive school leaders or leadership teams to work towards each of the proposed standards. The policy measures should be considered as indications of possible policy. However, there could be other policy measures that apply locally or regionally.

The presentation of the standards linked to supportive policy measures is designed to stress the synergy between expectations towards inclusive school leadership for implementing inclusive practice and the policy conditions needed to effectively achieve this.

The standards apply to the levels of the inclusive education ecosystem. The policy measures supporting the achievement of these standards can be at different levels in different countries. This means that the policy framework is flexible for use across a range of country contexts. The supporting policy measures may also be relevant for more than one standard; therefore, there is repetition of the measures within and across the system levels.

The standards and policy measures within each system level are categorised by the three [core functions of inclusive school leadership](#):

- **Setting direction:** Leadership is important for giving strategic direction, with a focus on the values underscoring inclusive practice and on the discourse that supports inclusive practice.
- **Organisational development:** Leaders and leadership teams are responsible for maintaining a school culture that is collegial, interactive and focused on supporting teachers and learners throughout the educational process. Fulfilling these functions enables school leaders to create an inclusive school culture with a focus on the learning environment, where every learner is a valuable participant expected to achieve through quality education.
- **Human development:** Leadership is one of the main drivers of teaching quality, which is the most important school-level influence on learner achievement. Supporting, monitoring and evaluating teaching practice is at the centre of this strategic role (European Agency, 2018b).

In addition, the supportive policy measures indicate how to address the objectives related to the three key policy levers – **access, autonomy** and **accountability**.



The following four subsections present:

- a short description of the relevant system level in which certain roles and responsibilities of inclusive school leaders are practised, and consideration of how this may vary across countries;
- proposed standards for inclusive school leadership practice in the form of statements;
- policy measures needed to support inclusive school leadership in achieving the standards.



4.5.1. The national/regional level: standards and supporting policy measures for inclusive school leadership



This level presents the key areas of national/state/regional policy. These areas provide the context for school leaders' work. School leaders collaborate with relevant stakeholders to support the implementation of national policies. School leaders should be enabled to provide feedback on implementation strategies and suggest improvements.

In some countries, the national/regional level applies to national education policy. In decentralised systems, it may apply to regional policy.

4.5.1.1. Setting direction

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
<p>Inclusive school leaders influence the development of national policy on equity and inclusive education through consultation and communication, taking a rights-based approach.</p>	<p>Provide access to communication between decision-makers and school leadership regarding education policy and accountability.</p> <p>Ensure the status and recognition of school leaders.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders translate and implement policies in ways appropriate to their school context and values.</p>	<p>Clearly state that schools should be inclusive and based on the principles of equity and human rights.</p> <p>Give school leadership teams autonomy to be flexible in adapting national policy (curriculum, assessment, school organisation) to local contexts.</p> <p>Give school leadership teams autonomy to appoint teachers and staff who take responsibility for and raise all learners' achievement and well-being through innovative learner-centred pedagogy.</p>



4.5.1.2. Organisational development

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
Inclusive school leaders manage school-level change (e.g. regarding curriculum and assessment frameworks; professional development/learning; funding and resource allocation; quality assurance and accountability).	<p>Enable access to support (including peer support) and on-going training for managing change, overseeing staff professional development to develop inclusive practice, and allocating resources to equitably support all learners.</p> <p>Ensure national/regional accountability measures are aligned with inclusive education policy, enabling school leaders to align school-level monitoring, self-review and evaluation.</p>

4.5.1.3. Human development

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
Inclusive school leaders engage in professional learning and development opportunities to enhance their capabilities to support inclusive education practices and raise all learners' achievement and well-being.	<p>Facilitate and support collaboration between ministry-, regional- and local-level professional learning providers and schools to develop a continuum of professional learning opportunities and an agreed framework of competences for aspiring and practising inclusive school leaders.</p> <p>Ensure specific training for school leaders on education in diverse settings and on developing inclusive education practices.</p> <p>Set criteria/competences for teachers and school leaders working in inclusive education and provide opportunities to develop the relevant capabilities.</p>



4.5.2. The community level: standards and supporting policy measures for inclusive school leadership



At this level, inclusive school leaders play a key role in building relationships with others outside the school. These include families, employers, support agencies, other schools, colleges and universities in the community. Leaders influence and shape collaboration with these stakeholders for the benefit of learners, their families and school staff. Leaders fulfil the core functions of both human and organisational development. Working jointly (e.g. with the health and social sectors), they can efficiently use resources and create a more coherent approach. This reduces duplication of provision or procedures in the longer term (Byrne, Maguire and Lundy, 2015). To facilitate these roles and functions, leaders need access to human and financial resources within and outside the school.

Policy for the community level may be developed at national, regional or municipality level. This depends on the education system's degree of centralisation.

4.5.2.1. Setting direction

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
Inclusive school leaders invite others to collaborate and establish multi-disciplinary partnerships with the school community to secure commitment to the shared vision of inclusion.	Ensure access to professional learning on inclusive education and personnel management. Give school leadership teams autonomy to develop the school vision. Align school self-evaluation accountability with the school leadership's vision of inclusion.
Inclusive school leaders communicate the school's guiding vision and lead its realisation.	Facilitate national or community-based dialogue to develop a shared understanding of inclusive education.



4.5.2.2. Organisational development

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
Inclusive school leaders enable and build partnerships with support agencies, other schools/institutions at other system levels and with businesses in the community to benefit learners.	Detail measures that facilitate inter-disciplinary working at all levels to ensure inclusive school leaders can effectively draw on the resources, experience and expertise of colleagues/other professionals. Emphasise increased collaboration between ministries/departments at national/regional/community level that have a key role in education and support for learners and their families.
Inclusive school leaders build school capacity for accommodating diverse learners through research engagement and collaborative professional learning and development activities, e.g. with universities.	Provide access to resources and support, and the autonomy to develop partnerships, including with universities and higher education institutions, to increase research engagement and well-informed practice.
Inclusive school leaders manage financial resources to meet the needs of the whole school community (learners, families and all school staff).	Provide access to adequate funding to meet the needs of the whole school community. Provide access to support with financial management and guidance on equitable resource allocation. Ensure school leadership has autonomy to make well-informed decisions on funding and equitable resource allocation. Set measures for accountability on managing and using financial resources aligned with other policy areas.



4.5.2.3. Human development

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
<p>Inclusive school leaders seek professional partnerships, critical friendships and networking with other school leaders for support.</p>	<p>Introduce strategies to develop leadership competences (e.g. school leadership or learning support leadership roles) for inclusive education in all relevant professional learning opportunities.</p> <p>Provide access to networks, coaching and mentoring opportunities, support for evaluation and consultation on school improvement.</p> <p>Ensure leadership autonomy in decision-making about school leaders' manifold duties, so they can balance administrative and inclusive school leadership issues.</p>



4.5.3. The school level: standards and supporting policy measures for inclusive school leadership



In the school or learning community, processes from the national/regional and community levels interact with the school level. These interactions influence school structures, processes and practices. This level focuses on the school's traditions, culture, ethos, values, ideology, patterns of authority and collaboration. It includes organising time to build professional learning communities and to engage with parents and the local community. This process 'sits' in both community and school levels.

4.5.3.1. Setting direction

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
Inclusive school leaders collaboratively identify and articulate a vision of inclusive education built on children's rights and equity.	State that the national education policy is built on principles of inclusion, children's rights and equity. Give school leaders autonomy to appoint teachers and staff who take responsibility for and raise all learners' achievement and well-being through innovative learner-centred pedagogy.
Inclusive school leaders collaboratively create and sustain a shared meaning of inclusive education in the school community.	State that the national education policy is built on principles of inclusion, children's rights and equity.
Inclusive school leaders guide and influence school organisation and resources according to principles of equity (fairness and inclusion).	Give access to professional learning, development and support to enable leaders to fulfil responsibilities relating to inclusion and equity. Set out accountability measures that monitor the enactment of principles of equity.



Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
<p>Inclusive school leaders promote a culture of continuous improvement, innovation and collaboration to develop teaching and assessment.</p>	<p>Ensure that initial teacher education and continuous professional learning and development focus on equity and diversity.</p> <p>Give school leaders autonomy to appoint teachers and staff who take responsibility for and raise all learners' achievement and well-being through innovative learner-centred pedagogy.</p>

4.5.3.2. Organisational development

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
<p>Inclusive school leaders ensure curriculum and assessment are fit for purpose and meet all learners' needs.</p>	<p>Ensure clarity regarding the functions of formative and summative assessment or assessment for learning and work towards an integrated assessment system that is fit for purpose and includes all learners.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders ensure a continuum of support in the school community for all learners, families and staff.</p>	<p>Provide access to on-going support that is appropriate to levels of autonomy.</p> <p>Ensure access to resources to support all stakeholders in the school community.</p> <p>Provide autonomy to support all learners without using labelling or bureaucratic processes.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders encourage engaging and challenging teaching and pedagogy and have high expectations to increase learners' interest in learning and raise their aspirations.</p>	<p>Provide access to resources to develop the workforce's capacity for diversity and implement national policy initiatives.</p>



Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
Inclusive school leaders encourage innovative teaching and learning approaches.	Provide access to resources to develop the workforce's capacity for diversity and implement national policy initiatives. Give school leaders autonomy to appoint teachers and staff who take responsibility for and raise all learners' achievement and well-being through innovative learner-centred pedagogy.
Inclusive school leaders engage the learning community in self-review and reflect on data to inform on-going school improvement.	Ensure that accountability and quality assurance mechanisms are coherent and support inclusive development.
Inclusive school leaders build structures/processes that support collaboration with families and actively engage them to promote learners' outcomes and well-being.	Include measures that allow school leadership to be held accountable (to learners, families, local community) through mechanisms that are aligned with other policy areas, ensuring support for inclusive education policy and practice.
Inclusive school leaders organise special needs support equitably to ensure learner achievement and well-being.	Ensure access to professional learning and development that cover knowledge of disability and diversity.



4.5.3.3. Human development

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
<p>Inclusive school leaders promote and facilitate collaborative opportunities for all staff, both in routine aspects of learning organisation and through innovative approaches, including embracing new technologies.</p>	<p>Focus on strengthening teaching and school leadership professions and recognise the benefits of collaborative practice in professional learning, development and support.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders focus on improving teacher and staff motivation, capacities and working environments to raise achievement and learner well-being.</p>	<p>Ensure access to resources to develop teachers and staff and their working environments.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders ensure that expertise and experience are continually developed and shared within and across the school and beyond.</p>	<p>Promote autonomy in developing/empowering teachers and staff through shared leadership tasks and collaborative professional learning and development.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders use distributed leadership to develop leadership potential in teachers and others in the school community.</p>	<p>Promote autonomy in developing/empowering teachers and staff through shared leadership tasks and collaborative professional learning and development.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders provide and foster professional learning and development opportunities for teachers and staff to develop their competences in raising learner achievement and well-being.</p>	<p>Promote access to career-long professional learning to develop enquiring and coherent approaches that build and sustain practice.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders facilitate reflective practice with the aim of transforming teaching and learning.</p>	<p>Promote access to career-long professional learning to develop enquiring and coherent approaches that build and sustain practice.</p>



4.5.4. The individual level: standards and supporting policy measures for inclusive school leadership



This level involves classroom practice that directly affects learners’ development and outcomes. Here, the school leader has a positive attitude. The leader is committed to raising all learners’ achievement and ensuring their well-being. The leader ensures that there are genuine opportunities for the learners to be heard and that their voices influence developments in their learning experience. Leaders and leadership teams should use their autonomy to adapt the curriculum and assessment frameworks to make them a basis for authentic learning activities. Frameworks should be fit for purpose and appropriate for learner diversity and local needs.

4.5.4.1. Setting direction

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
Inclusive school leaders set high expectations for all learners.	State that the national education policy is built on principles of inclusion, children’s rights and equity.
Inclusive school leaders aim for well-being and high achievement for every learner.	State that the national education policy is built on principles of inclusion, children’s rights and equity.
Inclusive school leaders influence learner-centred practice.	Ensure support for learner-centred education, a culture of listening to learners and involving them and families in decisions about their learning and progress (particularly at times of transition).
Inclusive school leaders establish a school-wide ethos that enables learners to offer their views to inform all phases of education. Their views are taken seriously, considered and acted upon where practicable.	Give school leadership teams autonomy to set out the vision, values and outcomes for which they (and other stakeholders) wish to be held accountable (e.g. equity, non-discrimination, meeting the requirements of all learners from the local community in terms of personal, social and academic outcomes).
Inclusive school leaders develop a school ethos that supports respectful interactions among all stakeholders.	Ensure access to support for school leadership development on conflict resolution, how to work on ethos and improve inclusive school culture.



4.5.4.2. Organisational development

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
<p>Inclusive school leaders support innovative and flexible practice in classrooms.</p>	<p>Promote access to career-long professional learning to develop enquiring and coherent approaches that build and sustain practice.</p> <p>Give school leaders autonomy to appoint teachers and staff who take responsibility for and raise all learners' achievement and well-being through innovative learner-centred pedagogy.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders provide a wide range of opportunities and support to ensure learners can take responsibility for their own learning, successes and achievements.</p>	<p>Promote access to career-long professional learning to develop enquiring and coherent approaches that build and sustain practice.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders monitor classroom practice, assuring high-quality education and well-being for all.</p>	<p>Give school leadership the autonomy to play a lead role in monitoring, self-review and evaluation, together with key stakeholders, to provide information on learner outcomes and reflect on data to inform on-going improvement.</p>
<p>Inclusive school leaders develop a culture of collaboration – positive and trusting relationships.</p>	<p>Focus on strengthening teaching and school leadership professions and recognise the benefits of collaborative practice in professional learning, development and support.</p>



4.5.4.3. Human development

Standards for inclusive school leadership	Policy measures supporting inclusive school leadership
Inclusive school leaders use data as a basis for teacher reflection and on-going improvement.	Access to data on different policy levels for use as an evidence base.
Inclusive school leaders ensure that teachers take responsibility for all learners, especially those vulnerable to exclusion, and promote professional responsibility and accountability.	State that national education policy is built on principles of inclusion, children's rights and equity.
Inclusive school leaders foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and each learner's academic, social and personal development.	State that national education policy is built on principles of inclusion, children's rights and equity. Give school leaders autonomy to appoint teachers and staff who take responsibility for and raise all learners' achievement and well-being through innovative learner-centred pedagogy.



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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary offers a shared language for all experts to use. Different sources for definitions have been used:

- Existing definitions that are already in use at the international level, particularly key terms defined within key literature quotations and citations
- Operational definitions developed within the SISL project.

Assessment for learning

Many countries use this term in a general way to refer to:

... assessment procedures that inform decision-making about teaching methods and next steps in a pupil's learning. Assessment for learning is a process usually carried out in classrooms by teachers/other professionals. It involves finding and interpreting evidence and working with learners to establish where they are in their learning, the next steps to be taken and the best ways of moving forward ([European Agency, no date](#)).

Core functions of school leadership

Research has identified the main organisational functions that must be performed for inclusive schools to run effectively (Billingsley, McLeskey and Crockett, 2017; McLeskey and Waldron, 2015; Skoglund and Stäcker, 2016). These functions fall into the three broad categories of [setting direction](#), [human development](#) and [organisational development](#). Fulfilling these functions supports leaders to challenge a school culture that identifies and reacts to learners. It enables them to create an inclusive school culture with a focus on the learning environment, where every learner is a valuable participant expected to achieve through quality education.

Distributed leadership

This firstly involves the devolution of responsibilities to middle leadership teams that are able to support and manage the transfer of knowledge and skills when necessary. Secondly, it enables all staff and school stakeholders to take responsibility by promoting flexibility and sharing practice. Thus, this leadership model involves the interactions between those in formal and informal leadership roles much more than the actions they perform. The main concern is how leadership influences organisational and instructional improvement (Harris, 2013).



Equity

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics, equity:

... 'considers the social justice ramifications of education in relation to the fairness, justness and impartiality of its distribution at all levels or educational sub-sectors'. We take equity to mean that a distribution is fair or justified. Equity involves a normative judgement of a distribution, but how people make that judgement will vary (2018, p. 17).

The OECD report *No More Failures* (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007) identifies two principles of equity: fairness (personal and social circumstances not being an obstacle to achieving educational potential) and inclusion (a basic minimum standard of education that is available to all learners, regardless of background or need).

Formative assessment

The Agency states that formative assessment:

... puts the learner at the centre of the assessment process. It provides the basis for personalisation according to the learner's interests and aptitudes.

Unlike summative assessment ('assessment of learning'), which has been traditionally linked to standardised, high-stakes tests and accountability, formative assessment can involve learners, enabling them to take a more active part in their learning. It is usually carried out in collaboration with others and can have substantial positive impacts on learner achievement ([European Agency, no date](#)).

Human development

The Agency notes that leadership is 'one of the main drivers' of teaching quality (2015b, p. 51), which is the most important school-level influence on learner achievement. According to Dorczak, school leaders' main role is 'to release and develop the talents of all teachers or other members of staff as well [as] recognising and activating the potential of all students' (2013, p. 55).

Ammann et al. support this, stating that school leaders are 'partly responsible' for their staff's professional and career development (2017, p. 123). Thus, school leadership focused on improving teachers' motivation, capacities and working environment is most likely to improve learner achievement.

At the centre of this strategic role is monitoring and evaluating teaching, in order to collect information to provide professional development that will 'support and motivate each teacher to work for all' learners (Black and Simon, 2014, p. 160). This is based on leadership's ability to build capacity by developing teachers' knowledge and skills, and to promote a school-wide professional community that facilitates reflective dialogue and collaboration about inclusive instructional practices (Humada-Ludeke, 2013; Erbring, 2016).



The *Empowering Teachers* case study further recognises the need for leaders to develop leadership skills in others – for example, ‘in teachers and middle managers to share or “distribute” leadership tasks’ and create an inclusive school culture (European Agency, 2015b, p. 51).

Inclusive school leaders

Inclusive school leaders (or leadership teams) have the vision that ‘all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers’ (European Agency, 2015a, p. 1). Such leaders combine elements of [instructional](#), [transformative](#) and [distributed leadership](#) models. They take responsibility for and value all learners. They work to ensure learners’ full participation and engagement by setting a clear direction, developing staff and other stakeholders and using all available evidence, experience and expertise to collaboratively create and sustain the learning community and support everyone to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Inclusive school leadership

Inclusive school leadership goes beyond organisation. It aims to address inequity to build community and full participation. It focuses on developing an inclusive culture where all stakeholders are supported to work together, value diversity and ensure that **all** learners, including those most vulnerable to exclusion, receive a high-quality education.

Inclusive school leadership is based on three dimensions of leadership:

- [Transformative](#): improving agency, facilitating innovation and change or organisational learning
- [Distributed](#): creating a shared, collective or organisational school leadership with a scope within and outside the school
- [Instructional](#): setting vision and direction regarding all learners’ learning, achievement and well-being.

Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership emphasises the importance of establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum and evaluating teachers and teaching. The prime focus is on leaders’ responsibility for promoting better measurable outcomes for learners, highlighting the importance of enhancing the quality of classroom teaching and learning (Day, Gu and Sammons, 2016).

Instructional leadership furthermore emphasises the creation of a supportive, encouraging work environment that can support the development of teaching practices best suited to improve academic performance (Hansen and Lárusdóttir, 2015). This type of leadership has also been termed ‘learning-centred leadership, leadership for learning or curriculum leadership’, as one key dimension focuses on developing and co-ordinating an effective school curriculum (Gumus, Bellibas, Esen and Gumus, 2018).



Learner-centred education/practice

Effective continua of support in inclusive education systems encompass personalised approaches to learning that engage all learners and support their active participation in the learning process. This involves developing learner-centred curricula and assessment frameworks; flexible training and continuous professional development opportunities for all educators, school leaders and decision-makers; and coherent governance processes at all system levels (Watkins, 2017).

Organisational development

School leaders play a critical role in implementing inclusive policy and practice and, in particular, in creating a school culture that embraces diversity and promotes inclusion (Cherkowski and Ragoonaden, 2016; Mac Ruairc, 2013). Thus, school leaders are responsible for maintaining a school culture that is collegial, interactive and focused on supporting teachers and learners throughout the educational process. Setting the tone for an inclusive culture requires school leaders to place emphasis on nurturing teacher morale, partnerships with parents and professional collegiality. This will then affect the learning environment created for learners (Fultz, 2017).

Using human and financial resources strategically and aligning them with pedagogical purposes can influence the way school activities improve teaching and learning. Thus, school leaders must be involved in decisions regarding teacher recruitment. Being able to select teaching staff is central to establishing a school culture and capacity that has a beneficial effect on learners' achievement (Stoll and Temperley, 2010).

Rights-based approach

A human rights-based approach to education aims 'to assure every child a quality education that respects and promotes her or his right to dignity and optimum development' (UNICEF, 2007, p. 1).

School community

This refers to the group of people closely attached to a school – its teachers, administrators, learners and the learners' families.

School leadership

This refers to all those in key leadership roles in schools and learning communities. Such leaders may also be referred to as headteachers, school directors or principals. There are various stages of school leadership, including teacher, middle and senior leadership. In this role, they focus on enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, learners and parents to achieve common educational aims.

Leading a school involves both leadership and management. It is important to acknowledge that school leaders need a balance of these two processes. Leadership is focused on values, vision and the future, whereas management is concerned with making the present work (West-Burnham and Harris, 2015).



Setting direction

Leadership is important for giving direction, with a focus on the values underscoring inclusive practice and on the discourse that supports inclusive practice. Furthermore, it is essential for exploring and sharing meanings about inclusion, aiming to promote learners' best interests both academically and socially, through fairness, justice and [equity](#) (Stone-Johnson, 2014). The vision of an inclusive school needs to be grounded in reflection among stakeholders about what constitutes inclusive practice and discussions about the values contributing to that practice (Ekins, 2013).

An important factor in achieving the strategic vision is attending to the development of professional competences of teachers and staff in working with diverse groups of learners.

Standards

Standards are statements of desired outcomes for the education system, which are agreed upon by key stakeholders.

Transformative leadership

Transformative leadership emphasises vision-setting and inspiration. It focuses on establishing structures and cultures that enhance the quality of teaching and learning, [setting direction](#), developing people and (re)designing the organisation (Day, Gu and Sammons, 2016). Transformative school leadership is traditionally associated with the ability to facilitate change and innovation by impacting on people and cultures within schools (Navickaitė, 2013).

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