
Annual Report 2017



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



FACT SHEET FOR 2017

THE AGENCY

Full legal name	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
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Website	www.european-agency.org
Chair	Ms Ana Magraner
Director	Mr Cor J.W. Meijer
Established	1996
Member countries	In 2017, the Agency had 30 full member countries: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French speaking communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). Serbia participated as an observer country.
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Preface

In 2017, we continued to develop and refine the European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE) data collection and analysis methods and activities. We launched a new cross-country dataset analysis and new web-based tools.

We took forward our Country Policy Review and Analysis (CPRA) activities, providing member countries with information and recommendations regarding their progress in relation to key policy goals for inclusive education.

Moreover, we took forward a high number of thematic projects. This included organising two large-scale end-of-project conferences: one in Malta, focusing on Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education, and one in Portugal, focusing on Inclusive Early Childhood Education.

Serbia participated in our activities as an observer country and announced that it would join as a full member country in 2018, as Agency member country number 31.

The 2017 priorities also included consultancy work for individual member countries and commissioned assignments for organisations such as the European Parliament and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

As far as collaboration with the European Commission is concerned, the Agency was actively involved in one of its Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) Working Groups. This has afforded us the opportunity to help prepare a new policy framework at European Union (EU) level and participate in Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) and Peer Counselling Activities (PCAs) for individual member countries.

During the last months of 2017, we started discussing how the Agency can further help prepare policy reforms in individual member countries through the new Structural Reform Support Programme. This new programme is managed by the European Commission. We are keen to take up this challenge in 2018, when we will also review, with our member country representatives, the priorities for the remainder of the Agency's Multi-Annual Work Programme (MAWP) 2014–2020.

We would like to extend a warm thank you to all country representatives, experts and staff for their contributions to our work in the areas of policy, practice and research during 2017.



Image 1. Ana Magraner, Chair



Image 2. Cor J.W. Meijer, Director



Board meetings

During the year, the Management Board met four times to discuss key issues and prepare the Representative Board meetings. The Representative Board and the National Co-ordinators met twice at bi-annual meetings, in April (Malta) and November (Portugal), to review the work on current themes and projects, and discuss and decide on plans for future work.

Country Policy Review and Analysis work

The Agency's CPRA work provides countries with a reflection on their current policy frameworks for inclusive education. Furthermore, it offers each country specific recommendations regarding priorities to be addressed.

The framework is based on recommendations from Agency projects, the ET 2020 strategic objectives and the Council Country-Specific Recommendations addressed to countries, as well as country priorities regarding inclusive education.

In this work, the Agency uses a peer learning methodology to help country policy-makers to learn directly from each other, share information and facilitate policy change.

The CPRA activities will be continuous and on-going within the MAWP 2014–2020. They were launched in 2015 via a pilot activity involving eight countries. It was agreed to roll out the analysis activities to all countries, using a phased approach. Belgium (French speaking community), Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia and Spain are taking part in the second phase of CPRA work.

In 2017, CPRA focused on the various policy analysis activities with phase 2 countries. The activities centred upon using the analysis grid that has been developed and applying it to the different policy contexts depending on countries' individual situation and needs.

For further information and results from the first phase of CPRA, please visit the [CPRA web area](#).

European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education

The Agency's biennial data collection exercise aims to provide clearly focused data that informs the European Commission's ET 2020 strategic objectives and the implementation of Article 24 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

During 2017, the EASIE activities focused on analysing and publishing the 2014 dataset, collecting the 2016 dataset and preparing the statistical and background information for publication.

A [joint workshop](#) for Representative Board members (RBs) and data experts was held in Tallinn in September 2017 as an event associated with the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU.



Image 3. Laptop showing a number of graphs



During the workshop, the [2014 Dataset Cross-Country Report](#) was launched and the new web tools demonstrated. As a result of discussions in the joint workshop, new data collection possibilities have been identified. These will be developed into concrete proposals and incorporated into the 2018 data collection exercise. There will be an annual working meeting with the EASIE data experts in late 2018, focusing on the 2018 dataset.

The [Data section](#) of the Agency website presents all available quantitative and qualitative country data in an accessible, interactive and easily comparable way.

Thematic project work

All Agency projects directly or indirectly support the agreed EU priorities for education and training, including the following Europe 2020 targets:

- 75% of the population aged 20–64 should be employed.
- The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree.
- 20 million fewer people should be at risk of poverty.

The main priorities in 2017 were thematic projects focusing on Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education, Inclusive Early Childhood Education, Evidence of the Link between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion, Supporting Inclusive School Leadership, and The Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education.

Furthermore, the Agency published the final outputs from its project on Early School Leaving.

Below are short descriptions of the main project activities that took place in 2017.

Early School Leaving

Early School Leaving (ESL) was a desk research project, running from 2015 to 2016. It reviewed and analysed research literature, policies and available data from Agency member countries on ESL.

Main 2017 activities

In 2017, a [literature review](#), a [synthesis report](#) and a short [final summary report](#) were published. They focused on European research evidence and the extent to which research on ESL is reflected in EU policies.

Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education

This three-year thematic project targeted decision-makers at national and local levels. It focused on increasing schools' capacity to raise achievement by providing a high-quality education for all learners. The project worked with learning communities in Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom – UK (Scotland). The project participants (researchers and school leaders from Agency member countries) explored different pedagogical approaches and leadership strategies.

Main 2017 activities

The [final project conference](#) took place in Malta in April 2017 as an event of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU. It gave learning communities and participants the opportunity to share and discuss emerging findings and finalise the content of the project outputs. The project learning communities presented the work that they had undertaken during the project between 2015 and 2017. The videos that the learning communities



showed at the conference are available on the [Agency's YouTube channel](#).



Image 4. Mr Per Ch Gunnvall, former Agency Chair, Mr Evarist Bartolo, Malta's Minister for Education and Employment, and Mr Cor J.W. Meijer, Agency Director, at the final project conference (Photo: Jeremy Wonnacott, DOI)

The final project outputs include an [overview report](#), a [resource for self-review](#) and a [summary for policy-makers](#).

Inclusive Early Childhood Education

Commenced in 2015, the three-year Inclusive Early Childhood Education project analysed the factors that enable high-quality and equitable pre-primary education for learners in inclusive settings. It built upon the outcomes of the Agency's previous Early Childhood Intervention projects (2004, 2010).

Main 2017 activities

The [final project conference](#) took place in Lisbon in November 2017, together with the Agency's autumn bi-annual meeting. The project outcomes were presented at the conference. The project outputs have all been published on the Agency website and include: [An analysis of 32 European examples](#), a [literature review](#), a [synthesis report](#) and the [Self-Reflection Tool](#).



Image 5. Closing session with Mr João Costa, Secretary of State of Education, Portugal, Ms Ana Magraner, Agency Chair, and Ms Ana Sofia Antunes, Secretary of State for Inclusion of People with Disabilities, Portugal

All the information collected during the project's lifetime has been combined into a [summary report](#). This report is expected to support policy-makers and practitioners at local, national and European levels in promoting inclusive early childhood education provisions that will ensure the necessary strong start for all children.

Evidence of the Link between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion

This project is a literature review aiming to examine the link between inclusive education and the social inclusion of people with disabilities. In particular, two research questions guide the project:

- What is the link between inclusive education and social inclusion?
- What does current research say about inclusive education's potential as a tool for promoting social inclusion?

Inclusive education is understood as the provision of high-quality education in schools that value the rights, equality, access and participation of all learners. Social inclusion is mainly about social interaction and community participation



in the areas of education, employment, and living in the community.

The review ends with key policy messages and considerations.

Main 2017 activities

In 2017, the focus was on collecting and analysing data and writing the first draft of the literature review.

Supporting Inclusive School Leadership

This project started in 2017. It examines how policy-makers can support school leaders to implement inclusive practice and how different policy approaches at national and regional levels affect school leaders' work.

The project's initial phase focuses on collecting and analysing information about school leaders' work. It builds upon the extensive literature that is available in countries and European and international policies, as well as specific points of departure identified in past Agency work. The outcomes of this initial phase will indicate whether further activities in this area are needed and, if so, will determine the different activity tracks, which would begin in 2019.

The main target group for the project outcomes will be national-level policy-makers responsible for implementing inclusive education in schools.

Main 2017 activities

The work on drafting the literature and policy review started in mid-2017. The final policy review and the literature review will be finalised in 2018.

The Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education

This new thematic project focuses on the re-organisation of specialist, separate provision (schools and classes) and the

perceived shift in the role of such provision to support the right to inclusive education for all learners.

The project will have two phases:

Phase 1 involves a detailed mapping exercise on past and current trends and situations in countries in relation to specialist provision, as well as on perceived future trends. The methodology for this phase is to collect information via desk research.

Based on the main outcomes of phase 1, phase 2 will focus on PLAs, to be organised in two or three groups. These will consider different aspects and stages of policy reform and development for specialist provision to support inclusive education.

Depending on midpoint decision-making, the project activities will potentially run until 2019.

The intention is to work with country policy-makers from the Agency member countries and learn from each other about the changing role of specialist provision and policy development to support this changing role.

Main 2017 activities

Preparatory activities, including the detailed mapping exercise and desk research, started in 2017.

Additionally funded activities

The Agency conducts a small number of activities funded via additional grants from the EU and other sources to complement the work included in the main work programme. These additional activities enable the Agency to undertake work which reinforces the activities agreed by member countries within the framework of the MAWP 2014–2020.



Below are short descriptions of the main additionally funded activities that took place in 2017.

Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems

Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems (FPIES) is a three-year project co-funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Key Action 3 'Forward-Looking Cooperation Projects' framework. Through work with policy-makers and detailed case studies, the project examines different approaches to educational financing. The Ministries of Education from Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Slovenia are country partners in the project. Universitat Ramon Llull (Barcelona) is involved as an evaluator partner.

The FPIES findings will lead to the development of a concrete policy framework to guide further policy developments for financing inclusive education systems in European countries.

Main 2017 activities

The last five of the six [country study visits](#) (CSVs) hosted by each partner country took place in the first half of 2017. National and local policy-makers and key stakeholders participated to examine the countries' different models and approaches to financing inclusive education. A country thematic report was developed on the basis of each visit.

Universitat Ramon Llull has submitted the second evaluation interim report, based on analysis of data collected through focus group interviews and questionnaires at three CSVs. In line with the evaluation plan, it has also conducted a document review of the various materials prepared for the project.

In the last part of 2017, the main focus was on drafting the project deliverables, notably the synthesis report that will be used as the basis for drafting the policy guidance framework.

Country consultancy work

In March and August 2017, respectively, the Agency participated in the [Icelandic Audit Report launch conference](#) and the [Audit dissemination conference](#). These were linked to the [external audit of Iceland's system for inclusive education](#), which the Agency undertook in 2016. At the Audit Report launch, ministers and representatives of key stakeholder bodies signed a memorandum of co-operation declaring their common will to co-operate in implementing the Audit results. The key stakeholders met again at the Audit dissemination conference, which focused on discussing and disseminating the Audit results and on discussing ideas for further action.

Policy consultancy work for non-Agency countries

In late 2016, UNESCO contracted the Agency to provide input to Rwanda's Digital Talent Policy. This work was completed in February 2017. As a follow-up, the Agency participated in a workshop held in Kigali in May, together with UNESCO and the Rwandan Ministry of Youth and ICT.

European Parliament study on inclusive education

The Agency conducted a study entitled [Inclusive Education for Learners with Disabilities](#), requested and funded by the European Parliament. The findings were presented in October at the annual public workshop on disability organised by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional



Affairs. Members of the European Parliament and representatives from European institutions, international organisations and the main non-governmental organisations based in Brussels attended.

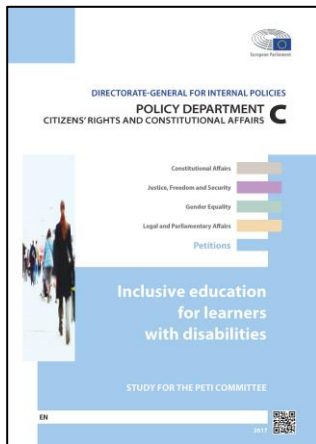


Image 6. Cover of the European Parliament study publication

Special events and thematic seminars

The Agency organised two final project conferences linked to its 2017 bi-annual meetings.

One focused on Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education and took place in the spring in Malta. The conference and bi-annual meeting were an event of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU.



Image 7. Drawing by a Polish participant of a workshop session with young learners from

Italy, Malta, Poland and the UK (Scotland) at the Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education final conference in Malta

The other took place in the autumn in Lisbon, Portugal, and focused on Inclusive Early Childhood Education.

At the autumn bi-annual meeting, the Agency held experience exchange sessions on topics suggested by Agency country representatives. Three topics were discussed:

- Complex, severe, multiple and mental health challenges in the mainstream school system: support and care systems
- General support systems for learners with special educational needs and additional needs
- School clusters and inclusive education: challenges for policies and implementation aspects.

Information provision

Web development

The Agency's website was further updated and developed during 2017.

The [Agency InfoDesk](#) – a closed web area for staff, country representatives and experts – was regularly updated with information about projects, events and the bi-annual meetings.

The website and intranet re-development work that commenced in 2016 has continued throughout 2017. First, a public survey was launched on the website to assess types of audience and accessibility issues on the current website. This was followed by a comprehensive survey for country representatives and Agency staff. The results of the surveys are reflected in the new features of the future website.



The future intranet, MyAgency, will essentially be a modern internal community website. It will enable effective, accessible and safe information-sharing for Agency staff, country representatives and experts. The intranet will be further developed during 2018.

The existing website was migrated over the summer. In July, users with visual impairment tested and gave feedback on the initial design and structure. In December, an external group of users with special needs tested the full site's accessibility and usability. The feedback was generally very positive, and all remaining issues have been addressed.



Image 8. A test user explaining how the magnifying tool works on the screen

A final survey will be sent out to a small number of country representatives and Agency staff in early 2018. The new website, with updated accessibility features and a modern technical and aesthetic re-design, will be launched in spring 2018.

Information dissemination via digital and printed media

During 2017, the Agency's online presence was promoted through [news items](#) from member countries, as well as updates on Agency events, publications and projects. The [eBulletin](#) newsletter and the Director's blog were additional tools

for disseminating information about the Agency's activities.

At the Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education final conference, the project learning communities presented the work that they had undertaken during the project between 2015 and 2017. In July, the videos that the learning communities showed during their presentations were made available on the [Agency's YouTube channel](#).



Image 9. Young people from the UK (Scotland) presenting their views on success and achievement at the Raising Achievement final project conference in Malta

Publications

The Agency has reviewed the type of outputs it shares with the public and provides to member country representatives. The newly designed 10-page final summary reports will be the main project output for translation. Longer reports will be available in English only. The final summary reports and selected tools are shared on the website. Open-source Word versions for adaptation are provided to the country representatives and will be available to the public upon request.

In addition to the publications listed in the previous sections, the Agency produced the following publications in 2017:

- The [Decentralisation in Education Systems Seminar Report](#)



- The [Agency presentation flyer](#) in 23 languages, updated in 2017
- [Legislation Updates](#) from nine countries.

Co-operative relationships and participation in key events

Throughout 2017, the Agency maintained co-operative relationships with the EU institutions, particularly with the European Commission, with members of the committees of the European Parliament and with Agency member countries' permanent representations in Brussels. These relationships are important to ensure visibility and support for the Agency's work for member countries in relation to the European stated priorities for education and training.

As far as the European Commission is concerned, the Agency has been actively involved in one of its ET 2020 Working Groups (Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education). The main purpose is to analyse and compare different policy options and help prepare a new policy framework at EU level. Activities include PLAs for individual countries. Peer counselling together with the Unit dealing with country analysis at the Directorate-General for Education and Culture is another form of collaborative activity. In the autumn, the Agency acted as an external expert in the field of inclusive education in a PCA in Bulgaria.

Furthermore, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion asked the Agency to join, as an external body, a working group that has been set up to examine issues of inclusive education in

the European Schools (based in Belgium, Luxembourg and a few more countries). The working group has been set up in response to criticism from the UN Committee responsible for following up on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Agency has also continued co-operating with the EU Presidencies. Thus, the final conference of the Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education project was an event of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU. Likewise, the joint EASIE workshop in September was an event associated with the Estonian Presidency. This co-operation helps to raise awareness about the important issues the Agency is addressing on behalf of its member countries.

The Agency also maintained close ties with other organisations and bodies in the field of education, such as UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Co-operation with these organisations adds important facets to the Agency's work and ensures that activities are mutually supportive and beneficial for member countries. This is also economically sound for countries which, for the most part, financially support all these organisations in one way or another. The co-operative relationships also provide opportunities for sharing information about work in Agency member countries with a wider audience, as well as gaining relevant information that can be shared in member countries.

Furthermore, the Agency Chair, Director and staff participated in a range of national, European and international events to share the outcomes of the Agency's work.



Financial review

In 2017, the Agency's basic operations were funded by the countries' membership fees and by an operating grant within the EU Erasmus+ education programme (2014–2020). The Agency received additional funding from the European Commission in support of the three-year FPIES project. Furthermore, the Agency conducted supplementary assignments for the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the European Parliament and UNESCO.

The Annual Accounts contain financial details for 2017.

Outlook

During 2018, the Agency will:

- finalise phase 2 of the CPRA activities, launch phase 3 work and conduct a review of the CPRA methodology and analysis grid with all RBs who have participated to date;
- refine the EASIE data collection tools in line with the agreements on future data collection, produce updated individual country reports and a cross-country data analysis report based on the 2016 EASIE data collection exercise and commence the 2018 data collection;
- start two new projects focusing on Examining the Potential of Inclusive Education Policies in Relation to Preventing School Failure and Preparing All Teachers to Effectively Include All Learners;
- take forward the projects focusing on Supporting Inclusive School Leadership and The Changing Role

of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education;

- complete the Evidence of the Link between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion project;
- complete, translate and disseminate the final Inclusive Early Childhood Education project outputs, including the project final summary report;
- organise a dissemination event to share the CPRA, EASIE and FPIES work, findings and outputs with key European-level decision-makers;
- conduct a number of additionally funded activities, including completing the three-year FPIES partnership project and acting as a technical body under the European Commission's new Structural Reform Support Service to support policy reforms of inclusive education in Cyprus and Poland;
- launch the new Agency website and develop a new platform for internal information-sharing;
- conduct a country survey to get RBs' input on policy priorities to be focused upon for the remainder of the current MAWP.



Image 10. Young learners

