



# MAPPING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION KEY POLICY MESSAGES

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the findings of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency) project on 'Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education' (MIPIE) and highlight how the project recommendations may contribute to European Union and international policy initiatives.

The pressure on policy makers to demonstrate how policies are leading towards greater educational inclusion creates a need for the systematic collection of qualitative and quantitative information that answers key questions and can be used both longitudinally by countries to map their own developments and comparatively across countries to compare relative developments.

## Mapping Policy for Inclusive Education – Trends at European and International level

Most EU Member States are signatories to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* 2006 (UNCRPD) and many have ratified both the Convention and the Optional Protocol. The EU is also a signatory to both the Convention and the Optional Protocol. The UNCRPD is central to the work of policy makers for inclusive education – Article 24 emphasises that people with disabilities have a right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity. It goes further outlining: 'States Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realising this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels ... The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity ...' (p. 17).

Furthermore, Article 31 outlines the responsibilities of States Parties with respect to statistics and data collection. States Parties are required to '... undertake to collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the present Convention' (p. 23).

The *European Disability Strategy 2020* provides a framework for action at the European level, as well as at national level to promote a barrier free Europe for the estimated 6 million men, women and children with disabilities across Europe. 'The overall aim of this Strategy is to empower people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their full rights ... It also identifies the support needed for funding, research, awareness-raising, statistics and data collection.' (p. 5).

These policy messages reflect a central recommendation from the *World Report on Disability* (2011) – the need for countries to develop existing data collection systems for quantitative data, but also to conduct detailed and specific qualitative research into cost effectiveness and other quality assurance related issues.

The main priorities in relation to mapping the implementation of policy relate to the need to develop evidence-based inclusive education policies. Five key policy requirements relating to data collection emerge from a consideration of the need for evidence on inclusive education at the national level:



- 1 - The need for national level data collection to be anchored within European level agreements;
- 2 - The need to understand the impact of differences in countries' education systems;
- 3 - The need to analyse the effectiveness of inclusive education;
- 4 - The need for data collection to provide evidence relating to quality assurance issues;
- 5 - The need to track the progress of learners in the long-term.

## The Agency Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE) project<sup>1</sup>

The overall goal of the MIPIE project has been to build on existing work being undertaken at national and European levels, as well as by the Agency – notably the indicators for inclusive education project work and the biennial data collection exercise relating to special needs education.

The MIPIE project – conducted with support from European Community Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) funding – involved over 60 experts from 27 countries<sup>2</sup>.

The specific project objectives were to work with policy makers and data collection experts in order to:

- Clarify a rationale for what information needs to be made available for policy makers;
- Identify what information is already available;
- Highlight the gaps in current information;
- Provide detailed proposals on how the necessary information could be collected in the future for the purposes of national, self-mapping and for European level comparative purposes.

## Project Findings and Recommendations

The MIPIE project identified a number of clear challenges for future European level data collection work relating to definition issues, data collection methods and approaches and differences in inclusive education policies across countries.

It was argued within the project that European level work relating to mapping policy for inclusive education must be aligned to the broad concepts of inclusive education as an approach for all learners. This will lead to:

- A re-interpretation of 'traditional' target groups for data collection in order to consider all learners at risk of exclusion, such as migrants or learners not attending formal education, as well as those with disabilities and/or SEN;
- The need to integrate specific data gathering for inclusive education within all 'usual' educational data gathering activities.

<sup>1</sup> More information is available from: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/mapping-the-implementation-of-policy-for-inclusive-education>

<sup>2</sup> Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French speaking communities), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (England, Scotland and Wales).



Three main areas of policy recommendations have been identified:

### **1. The need to establish a shared framework for mapping purposes**

The MIPIE project calls for the development of a shared framework for data collection that would build upon existing national data collection procedures, as well as international data collection agreements and procedures. Such a framework would provide information on: the education and learning outcomes of learners with SEN; policy levers shaping these outcomes and the impact of the specific characteristics both of learners and the education systems upon educational outcomes.

Three dimensions that underpin a shared framework can be identified:

- A move to a system based approach for data collection based upon shared concepts and definitions;
- The collection of evidence leading to both quantitative and qualitative benchmarks;
- The use of a multi-level framework for analysing policies at national and international levels.

### **2. Monitoring learners' rights**

Mapping the implementation of policy for inclusive education requires indicators to provide evidence that education systems are equitable for learners with SEN. It is possible to identify key rights issues corresponding to the different phases of the input, process, output, outcomes model:

- Input corresponds to equity in terms of access for learners with SEN and their participation in education in non-segregated settings;
- Process corresponds to equity in relation to educational opportunities for learners with SEN and the possibilities within the system to provide them with appropriate support to meet their needs;
- Outputs correspond to equity in terms of achievement opportunities and possibilities for success in academic and social learning and in the transition opportunities that are open to learners with SEN;
- Outcomes correspond to equity in relation to personal autonomy during and after formal education and in particular to the affiliation opportunities open to learners with SEN that support their inclusion into wider society.

### **3. Monitoring the effectiveness of systems for inclusive education**

Data that examines the effectiveness of systems for inclusive education would consider a number of areas – from initial assessment procedures to the on-going involvement of learners and their families in educational experiences and the effectiveness of learning environments in overcoming barriers and supporting meaningful learning experiences for all learners.

At *national level* data should:

- Facilitate planning and the monitoring of resources and personnel;
- Determine the effectiveness of teacher education;
- Evaluate system cost effectiveness.

At *school level*, data collection should:

- Provide information supporting teachers and school staff to plan and deliver appropriate support and provision;
- Give clear insights into how parents and learners are enabled to take a full part in the educational process.



## Areas for Further Policy Development

Through a consideration of all of the proposals from the MIPIE project, a potential agenda for future developments in data collection at the European level can be identified, built upon a synergy of efforts at the European and national levels. European level data collection work requires a comprehensive strategy, with activities to be completed in the short, mid and long-term.

**In the short term**, the data collection strategy should be based upon the current requirements of the Council of Ministers for quantitative data collection relating to special needs education.

**In the mid-term**, a European data collection strategy would focus upon the implementation of Article 24 of the UNCRPD and investigate precisely which key information and data may be required, examine whether such data exists and clarify what work is required to gather the data that may additionally be needed.

**In the long-term**, a data collection strategy should follow a clearly agreed agenda with countries working within a shared framework for data collection.

This agenda would be based on the premise that inclusive education is a quality imperative. It would work to provide countries with quantitative and qualitative insights into the effectiveness of inclusive education policy and the quality of inclusive education practice in terms of monitoring learners' rights and ensuring equity.

## Concluding Comments

It can be seen that, if overall country data is to effectively reflect practice in inclusive education, there is a need for closer co-operation at national level between key stakeholders. This co-operation should be based upon a clear rationale for data collection that considers national, regional, school and classroom level data. Any data collection at the European level must clearly build upon existing national level data collection, directly linked to the ET 2020 work (Council Conclusions May 2009) and other European strategies and build upon existing work already being conducted by international and European organisations.

Future European level work should foster synergies between stakeholders, in the form of closer alignment of data collection activities and work. The synergies needed for mapping the implementation of policy for inclusive education require work to be framed within a recognised platform, enabling the stakeholders involved in European data collection work to collaborate effectively, to share knowledge and expertise and to define common perspectives.

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## References

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