



## MAPPING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

An exploration of challenges and opportunities for developing indicators

As a result of the Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE) project work involving over 60 experts from 27 European countries, it is possible to highlight a number of key messages to guide future work in the area. These key messages are the focus of this paper, which presents a summary of the overall findings of the MIPIE project.

### **There are a number of factors underpinning developments in mapping the implementation of policy for inclusive education:**

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) as well as the European Disability Strategy 2020 and the ET 2020 strategic objective relating to equity in education all act as key drivers for inclusive education in countries. All of these international policy initiatives require systematic data collection to provide evidence of country compliance with relevant articles and objectives for inclusive education.
- There is a widespread awareness that evidenced-based policy making is critical for the long-term development of systems of inclusive education. Policy makers, data collection experts and researchers are aware of the need for data collection at national level that not only meets the requirements of international policy guidelines, but also works within a shared approach so as to promote a synergy of efforts at national and international levels. However, whilst the need for such data is clear, the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing such data in the best ways is far less clear.
- There is a need for all organisations working at the European level to engage in collaboration and a permanent exchange of information so as to maximise efforts and support national level work in the best possible way.
- There is a need for wide ranging information to be available to policy makers and a variety of complementary approaches to data collection to be taken by different organisations at both national and European levels.

All countries agree that mapping the implementation of policy for inclusive education is a complex and multi-faceted task. The concrete proposals outlined in the project work have the potential to be used as the basis for more detailed and long-term research involving the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. This data can be used to support current European level initiatives in this area – notably the Eurostat enquiry focussing upon special needs education – as well as country level work.

A number of specific issues for future data collection at national and European levels can be identified. These along with possible steps to address these issues are presented in the following sections.



## The need to develop evidence-based inclusive education policies

Inclusive education can be understood as the presence (access to education and school attendance), participation (quality of the learning experience from the learners' perspective) and achievement (learning processes and outcomes across the curriculum) of all learners in mainstream schools. A clear priority identified by all countries is the need to develop evidence-based policies for inclusive education.

### 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.

Policy makers need qualitative and quantitative data that informs them about the quality of education of learners with special educational needs (SEN).

These main 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 conduct detailed and specific qualitative research into cost effectiveness and other quality assurance related issues.

### European level work needs to 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 SEN;
- The need to integrate specific data gathering for inclusive education within all 'usual' educational data gathering activities.

European level agreements need to be reached on data collection to track inclusive education possibilities across all lifelong learning phases – from pre-school to adult education opportunities.

## Exploring current approaches to data collection at the European level

In examining the current and past work conducted by international organisations, three main approaches to data collection are apparent – data collection based on placement of learners identified as SEN, categories of SEN, or on the allocation of additional resources for SEN.

These approaches are all based on the same highly interconnected core concepts – the identification of SEN and subsequent support to meet a particular need. However, the different emphases in each approach lead to potential strengths and weaknesses.

**National level data should be available for EU level comparative work.** For this to be done in a meaningful way, there is a need for more clarity on what national data should be collected, how, using what techniques and by who at national and European levels. A ‘shared language’ for data collection relating to inclusive education based on shared understandings of key concepts at the European level is required.

In the longer term, work at the European level would focus upon data collection that allows policy makers to identify processes that ‘work’ in inclusive education. The prime focus would be on data that provides evidence of quality in inclusive education. Such work could potentially involve the development of an agreed set of indicators for qualitative data collection.

There is agreement that mapping the implementation of inclusive education at international level faces three main challenges. These relate to issues surrounding definitions, methods and inclusive education policies.

Evidence based policies can only be developed by drawing upon qualitative data that supports quantitative data collection work. However, the demands of current political priorities for quantitative data, particularly at the European level may reduce the emphasis on the collection of high quality qualitative information.

## Establishing a shared framework for mapping purposes

The MIPIE project leads to the call 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. A framework for data collection that would meet the requests of policy makers involved in the MIPIE project would provide information on: the education and learning outcomes of learners with SEN; policy levers shaping these outcomes; the impact of the specific characteristics both of learners and the education systems upon educational outcomes.

**Three dimensions underpinning such 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.

The proposed shared framework for mapping inclusive education explicitly identifies different foci for quantitative and qualitative data collection relating to:

- Input, process, outputs and outcomes of the education system,
- The system, school, classroom – and through these also – the learner levels.



Such a framework would enable national and international benchmarking to support:

- An understanding of the impact of differences in countries' education systems;
- The identification of similarities in countries' systems for inclusive education;
- The illustration of effects of different elements within systems, such as the degree of centralisation in education, teacher education and training for other education professionals, school autonomy and organisational framework and resources allocated to learners with SEN.

Crucially, such an approach can be built upon by countries to develop data collection in order to monitor learners' rights as well as to monitor the effectiveness of systems for inclusive education.

### Monitoring learners' rights

Future data collection must be in line with the UNCRPD (2006), as this is an increasing influence upon legal frameworks for education. Mapping the implementation of policy for inclusive education therefore requires indicators providing evidence that education systems are equitable for learners with SEN.

It is possible to identify key rights issues corresponding with the different phases of the input, process, output/outcomes model:

- *Input can be seen to correspond 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.*

**Within a comprehensive framework for mapping rights issues, both quantitative and qualitative indicators need to be identified in relation to:**

- Participation in education and training;
- Access to support and accommodation;
- Learning success and transition opportunities;
- Affiliation opportunities.

## Current and feasible quantitative indicators relating to participation

Existing information at country level indicates that it is possible to identify an indicator on participation rates of school age learners in mainstream education for national and European level data collection work. The indicator that is currently available from existing data focuses upon the *percentage of learners with SEN who are educated in segregated settings*. The operational definition of segregated education agreed upon by European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency) member countries, is where a learner is formally identified in a country as having SEN and follows education in separate special classes or special schools for the largest part – 80% or more – of their school day.

Work within the MIPIE project suggests that data on learners with SEN in segregated settings is currently the most comparable across countries and that this quantitative data can be used in indicating certain trends in provision and movements towards inclusion.

However, the potential usefulness of any data on participation could be greatly improved by linking it to more systematic data collection at the classroom and/or learner level. It can be seen that indicators more relevant to policy would not only be comparable – both between countries and within longitudinal data collection work – but would focus on participation in inclusive settings, not segregated provision.

**In line with the arguments relating to rights and equity for all learners in education, future data collection should take an approach in line with inclusive education as an approach for all learners.**

By examining data that might possibly be collected by countries, a feasible indicator could focus upon data relating to the *percentage of all learners of a certain age group (for instance 9 or 14 years old) that follow the mainstream curriculum with their peers of the same age for at least 80% of the time*. Data could be collected by all countries using an agreed approach: either collecting data for all learners of a particular age, or using a random sampling approach.

This indicator has a number of potential advantages: it would provide classroom level data to verify national or regional level data and would focus on all learners (not only those identified as having SEN) therefore emphasising inclusion, not segregation.

As a result of the MIPIE project work, it is argued that quantitative data collection in line with this proposed indicator is feasible and potentially useful and could be pursued at the European level in the near future.

## Monitoring the effectiveness of systems for inclusive education

Data that examines the effectiveness of systems for inclusive education would consider a number of areas: 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.

**Examining effectiveness of systems for inclusive education relates input to the key issue of cost effectiveness, with the corresponding descriptor focussing upon resource allocation.**

The process of education is related to four key issues and corresponding descriptors:

- 1 - Receptiveness to diversity, as evidenced via to admission data;
- 2 - Quality of learning, as evidenced via data on assessment;
- 3 - Quality of support, as evidenced via data on planning;
- 4 - Teacher effectiveness, as evidenced via data on teaching.

## **An agenda for European level data collection**

Through a consideration all of the proposals from the MIPIE project, a proposed agenda for future developments in data collection at the European level can be identified that is 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 Eurostat enquiry into quantitative data collection for special needs education. It should carefully explore if such data already exists by identifying useful data within existing datasets.

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. MIPIE project experts argued for a comprehensive set of data collection agreements covering concepts, definitions and methods that could be implemented at the national level as a 'minimum' for countries' data collection work.

This agenda would be based on the premise that inclusive education is a quality imperative and 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.

**For this European agenda to be enacted, four areas of agreement need to be reached across countries in order to support European level work:**

- Identify evidence required at national and at international levels;
- Identify the most effective data available as well as data that still needs to be developed;
- Define coherent data gathering procedures and mechanisms at European and at national level;
- Address comparability issues.

There is a need for synergies at national level between key stakeholders that would be based upon a clear rationale for data collection considering national, regional, school and classroom level data if overall country data is to effectively reflect practice.

Any data collection at the European level must clearly build upon existing national level data collection, directly link to the ET 2020 work and other European strategies and build upon UNESCO, Eurostat and OECD (UOE) data collection systems, as well as those used by the Agency and other international sources.

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. Such a platform – potentially based upon the work of the Agency – would aim to support the work of other European stakeholders in this arena as well as support country data collection work relating to inclusive education.

## References

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This paper is a summary of the main findings of the MIPIE project. The full project report: *Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education: an exploration of challenges and opportunities for developing indicators* (2011) can be downloaded from: <https://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/mipie>

Print copies are available upon request from the Agency Secretariat:  
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## The MIPIE project

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

Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education (MIPIE) is a project conducted by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education with support from European Community LLP Comenius funding under agreement number: 510817-2010-LLP-DK-COMENIUS-CAM. MIPIE has been a 1-year project involving over 60 experts from 27 countries:

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).

The overall goal of the MIPIE project has been to build on existing work being undertaken at national and European levels and – using information collected from countries during the project lifetime – develop recommendations in the form of an outline agenda for future national and European level data collection to be used for mapping the implementation of policy for inclusive education.

Specific project objectives have been to work with policy makers from 27 European countries in order to:

- Develop 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.

Two conferences were organised during the project lifetime – in Brussels during December 2010 and Budapest, March 2011. Both were co-hosted with the respective Ministries of Education for the countries and both had clear goals linked to the development of the eventual project outputs, including final project recommendations.

The full project report, the two conference reports, a collation of all current country data collection work, as well as all project materials can be downloaded from:

<http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/mipie>



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