KEY PRINCIPLES
POLICY BRIEF

SUPPORTING POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

In 2020, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) identified recurring messages in all its main work since 2011. The Agency has synthesised these messages into key principles to support the implementation of high-quality inclusive education for all learners. The key principles set out the necessary elements for an overall system for inclusive education, and aim to support countries that wish to further develop their inclusive provision in education.

The 2021 Key Principles are covered by an overarching principle around a widely agreed concept of rights-based inclusive education. They then set out five requirements for the legislative and policy context, and eight operational strategies, structures and processes for inclusive education systems.

OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE

> **Within legislation and policy, there must be a clear concept of equitable high-quality inclusive education, agreed with stakeholders. This should inform a single legislative and policy framework for all learners, aligned with key international and European-level conventions and communications, as the basis for rights-based practice.**

Establishing a single framework is crucial to fulfil all learners' rights, both to education and within education. The framework should provide inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all, and ensure that economic, social, cultural or personal circumstances do not become sources of discrimination. Stakeholders must be aware of the benefits of inclusive education as a basis for a more inclusive society.

A SINGLE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

There are five key requirements for the single legislative and policy framework outlined in the overarching principle:

> **Flexible mechanisms for funding and resource allocation that support the on-going development of school communities and enable them to increase their capacity to respond to diversity and to support all learners, without a formal diagnosis or label.**

As countries vary widely, so do funding and resource allocation methods. In all cases, funding must be transparent and equitable, and focus on increasing schools' capacity to reduce barriers to learning.

An effective governance plan that sets out clear roles and responsibilities, opportunities for collaboration and levels of autonomy throughout all system levels.

Stakeholders must be clear about levels of autonomy and decision-making within their areas of responsibility. Collaborative working at all system levels is essential.

A comprehensive quality assurance and accountability framework for monitoring, review and evaluation that supports high-quality provision for all learners, with a focus on equitable opportunities for those at risk of marginalisation or exclusion.

Accurate and reliable information on resources, inputs, structures and processes that impact learning is particularly important for minority groups and those potentially vulnerable to underachievement, to support equitable practice.

A continuum of teacher professional learning – initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development for teacher and teacher educators – that develops areas of competence in all teachers regarding assessment and needs identification, curriculum planning (universal design), inclusive pedagogy, engagement with and in research and use of evidence.

Teachers at all stages must be trained to work with a diverse range of learner needs. Teacher educators must have knowledge and experience in inclusive education to develop competences in others.

A single curriculum framework that is sufficiently flexible to provide relevant opportunities for all learners, and an assessment framework that recognises and validates attainment and wider achievement.

A flexible curriculum framework allows relevant learning opportunities for all learners, without separate curricula. Assessment enables adjustments to the curriculum and teaching approaches, identifies and overcomes barriers to learning, and informs support decisions.

OPERATIONAL ELEMENTS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Eight operational strategies, structures and processes are considered essential for inclusive policy and practice:

> **Structures and processes to enable collaboration and effective communication at all levels – between ministries, regional- and local-level decision-makers and between services and disciplines, including non-governmental organisations and schools.**

Communication, negotiation and involvement of all stakeholders – teachers, school leaders, learners, local and regional education policy-makers, etc. – enables sustainable development through partnerships, collaboration and engaging in shared activities.

> **A strategy to increase participation in quality inclusive early childhood education and support families experiencing disadvantage.**

Children who participate in early childhood education and care benefit in terms of overall development and academic performance. It improves their social inclusion and long-term life chances.

> **A strategy to support all learners at times of transition between phases of education – and particularly as they move into adult life – through vocational education and training, further and higher education, independent living and employment.**

Transition between education levels requires co-ordination to ensure that delivery of education continues smoothly, particularly for learners who are potentially vulnerable to underachievement.

> **Structures and processes to facilitate co-operation between schools, parents and members of the community to support inclusive school development and enhance learner progress.**

Family involvement in the education process is crucial. Co-operation with the local community helps schools to enrich learning experiences and outcomes and better support young people to develop the competences they need.

> **A system for data/information collection that:**
> - **provides feedback to inform on-going improvement across the whole system (e.g. monitoring access to formal and informal education, participation, learning and accreditation);**
> - **supports decision-makers at all levels to identify 'signals' that indicate the need for urgent action regarding schools needing additional support.**

Access to valid and reliable data is essential as an evidence base to develop inclusive educational policy at the regional, national and international level.

> A strategy to develop specialist provision to support all learners and increase the capacity of mainstream schools, detailing cross-sectoral working and professional development for all staff.

The expertise and resources from specialist provision can support a more inclusive system by ensuring quality support for learners who are potentially vulnerable to underachievement.

> A strategy to develop and support school leaders who work with others to create an inclusive and equitable school ethos with strong relationships, high expectations, proactive and preventative approaches, flexible organisation and a continuum of support to intervene when learners are at risk of failure and exclusion.

Effective school leadership positively impacts learner achievement, teaching quality and staff motivation.

> A guidance framework to develop learning and teaching environments where learners' voices are heard and their rights fulfilled through personalised approaches to learning and support.

When learners are listened to and given some influence in their own lives, teachers and learners become co-creators in the teaching and learning process. Learners, teachers, parents and communities work together to support progress towards shared goals.

CONCLUSION

If all of these components are present, then all levels of the education system should work together to become more equitable, effective and efficient in valuing learner diversity and raising the achievement of **all** learners and system stakeholders.

More detailed information on these Key Principles is available in the full report: **Key Principles – Supporting policy development and implementation for inclusive education**.