



COUNTRY POLICY REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

KEY MESSAGES FOR WORKING *WITH* AND *FOR* COUNTRIES – POLICY BRIEF

INTRODUCTION

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) aims to support its member countries in developing and successfully implementing inclusive education policy. All work with member countries supports the Agency's ambition of being an active agent for policy change. All Agency work aligns with its ultimate vision for inclusive education systems, which is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers.

The Agency's **Country Policy Review and Analysis** (CPRA) work ran from 2014 to 2021. CPRA offered Agency member countries individualised information on policy frameworks for inclusive education. It also put the Agency's wider findings and outputs into the broader European and international policy context for education and inclusion.

CPRA supported country policy-makers to reflect on the development of policy for inclusive education and stimulated policy discussion in the country concerned. It analysed the available information about current country policy for inclusive education; CPRA did not address actual policy implementation.

This policy brief presents key messages from the CPRA activities that can inform countries' future policy development work around inclusive education, as well as Agency work with and for its member countries.

CPRA METHODOLOGY

The CPRA methodology was developed during a pilot phase involving Agency staff and eight Agency member countries. The methods used were built upon and validated during further phases with other member countries. By the end of 2021, 24 Agency member countries (i.e. countries and jurisdictions) had participated in CPRA.

The Agency and member country policy-makers agreed that policy development work can be understood in terms of its ***perceived intention***. Policy approaches may be designed to:

- **prevent** different forms of educational exclusion before they happen;
- **intervene** to ensure that good quality inclusive education is available for all learners at all times;
- **compensate** with specific actions and provision when prevention and intervention do not adequately meet learners' needs in inclusive settings.

In the CPRA work, the pilot group identified 12 key policy measures for meeting international and European-level policy goals and improving the quality of education systems for all learners. Agency staff examined member countries' policy approaches related to these measures. They classified the approaches as prevention, intervention or compensation and identified gaps if no policy action was indicated.



MAIN FINDINGS

The CPRA findings suggest that working with countries to specifically examine a particular policy's perceived intention can highlight useful information to support policy development work. By considering the balance of prevention, intervention and compensation approaches and/or gaps in policy coverage, individual countries gain relevant information for their policy development for inclusive education systems. This consideration also highlights wider European-level messages, providing a potential measure of the direction of travel in policy development towards more preventative approaches.

Inclusive education systems require a comprehensive range of policies



Inclusive education is not only about policies to support individual learners. A range of policies at all levels must refer to and implement inclusive education.

The 12 measures and policy recommendations highlighted in the CPRA work can help policy-makers to reflect on their existing national policies across all sectors that affect inclusive education.

Sustainable development towards inclusive education requires a combination of three policy approaches



Long-term, sustainable developments towards inclusive education systems can be seen as a combination of prevention, intervention and compensatory approaches. A country's journey towards an effective and equitable inclusive education system can be identified by movements away from mainly compensatory policy actions, towards more intervention and prevention-focused policy actions.

There are different patterns of policy approach across the 12 policy measures



The Agency member countries involved in the CPRA work had very different patterns of approach towards the 12 policy measures. While no clear trends were apparent, it was possible to identify the most and least comprehensive coverage.

The member countries had more comprehensive coverage of policies for the measures related to support for improved co-operation, guidance, inclusive education and early childhood education.

Coverage was less comprehensive for policies addressing the measures related to school ethos, improving transition from school to work, reducing the negative effects of early tracking and grade retention, and supporting improvements for schools with lower educational outcomes.

THE CPRA PROCESS

The CPRA process was built upon collaborative approaches with member country policy-makers. These were essential for systematically identifying areas of policy strength and areas for policy development that member country representatives could use in different ways in their own contexts. The collaborative, co-development working processes have the potential for further development in future Agency work with its member countries.

The benefits of working collaboratively



Collaborative work within ministries of education, and with other ministries, institutions and authorities, is a prerequisite to ensure coherent policies for inclusive education. A collaborative approach helps to identify existing policies that unintentionally contribute to exclusion and work against the goal of inclusive education.

Recognising areas of strength and areas for development



Systematically identifying areas of strength and areas for development within policy frameworks is a prerequisite for setting short- and long-term policy priorities for inclusive education. Identifying areas of strength and areas for development can support discussions among all education stakeholders about the policy changes needed to achieve more inclusive education systems.

ALIGNMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN-LEVEL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

International and European-level work reinforces the need for further development work with countries on inclusive education policies that focus on ALL learners. There is a particular need to integrate specific international and European Union commitments/requirements into national law and policy. Collaborative, cross-sector work to identify and address system factors that are a barrier to equity for all learners is also necessary.

The importance of considering international and European-level developments



Key work at international and European levels can support dialogue within national policy development work. Such dialogue can lead to a clear, widely agreed view of inclusive education and ensure that international conventions are enshrined in national law and policy.

Taking the direction of travel into account



Key work at international and European levels re-affirms important policy developments that guide the direction of travel. Currently, these emphasise the need for programmes that focus on a wider range of learners – particularly those experiencing disadvantage – to break the direct link between inclusion and special educational needs/disability that exists in many countries. Evidence-based policy development must take a multi-dimensional approach to inclusive education that considers individual and within-group differences when examining marginalising factors in schools and in the wider education system.

Understanding system factors that affect equity in education



To fully address education-system factors relating to discrimination and the underachievement of vulnerable groups, policy must focus on equity and the importance of fairness in educational opportunities. Policy should clearly communicate that it is possible to develop education systems that are both high quality and equitable.

THE FOCUS OF FUTURE POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORK WITH COUNTRIES

There is potential to further develop the CPRA work to inform national, European and international policy goals and targets. An updated CPRA framework could potentially develop as a tool to improve the monitoring of developments in inclusive education within and across Agency member countries and support discussions around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and European Education Area priorities.

There is also potential to build upon the CPRA findings to support wider monitoring work in and with Agency member countries. The CPRA outputs benchmark countries' current policy situations. In the longer term, countries could revisit these outputs to track specific policy changes and developments.

Building on the overall CPRA work, all future Agency activities with its member countries will feed into the Country Policy Development Support (CPDS) activity. CPDS will develop the CPRA working processes to build on findings that have proven useful for supporting countries. CPDS will aim to establish a comprehensive framework and methodology for working with member country representatives. This will enable them to examine and monitor the effective implementation of policy frameworks for inclusive education systems in their countries.

For further information on CPRA, refer to the summary report, *Country Policy Review and Analysis: Key messages for working with and for countries*.