Country Policy Review and Analysis

Key messages for working *with* and *for* countries

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EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

COUNTRY POLICY REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Key messages for working *with* and *for* countries

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is an independent and self-governing organisation. The Agency is co-funded by the ministries of education in its member countries and by the European Commission via an operating grant within the European Union (EU) education programme.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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You may cite this publication as follows: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021. *Country Policy Review and Analysis: Key messages for working with and for countries.* (A. Watkins, V. J. Donnelly, S. Symeonidou and V. Soriano eds.). Odense, Denmark

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With a view to greater accessibility, this report is available in accessible electronic format on the Agency's website: www.european-agency.org

ISBN: 978-87-7110-992-4 (Electronic)

ISBN: 978-87-7110-993-1 (Printed)

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FOREWORD

The essential focus of all work by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is to support its member countries in developing and successfully implementing policy for inclusive education. All work with member countries supports the Agency's ambition of being an active agent for change.

This report presents the main findings and key learning points from the Country Policy Review and Analysis (CPRA) activities. The Agency began CPRA in 2014. Between then and the end of 2020, 23 Agency members (countries and jurisdictions) took part in the work.[1]

The CPRA work has aimed to aid reflection on the development of policy for inclusive education and stimulate policy discussion in the country concerned. CPRA has been developed to offer policy-makers individualised country information. The overall focus has been to support leading decision-makers in Agency member countries to collect and analyse key information on their national policies for inclusive education and then provide them with a systematic reflection on their current policy frameworks.

Crucially, the CPRA process offers policy-makers country-specific recommendations for priorities to be addressed. CPRA involves a different way of working with and for Agency member country representatives. It is based on collaborative working procedures that aim to support a continuous learning and co-development process for all involved.

The CPRA outputs are essentially addressed to ministries of education. The outputs have the potential to be used as reference tools according to national-level priorities for inclusive education systems. It is also anticipated that the CPRA outputs will contribute to international-level requests directed to ministries of education. These may relate, for example, to European-level work and country contributions associated with the European Semester National Reform Programmes and international-level work linked to the reporting processes for the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

This report's essential focus is to explore the potential learning points from the CPRA work that will inform future policy development work **in** countries, as well as the Agency's future work **with** and **for** its member countries and jurisdictions. Looking across the CPRA key messages presented in this report, there is real potential to build upon the CPRA working processes and findings in order to support wider monitoring work in and with Agency member countries.

Cor Meijer

Director of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

[1] In 2021, United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) also began the CPRA process. As work is on-going at the time of writing, this report only covers the CPRA work from 2014 to 2020.

INTRODUCTION

The Country Policy Review and Analysis (CPRA) work has been developed since 2014 as a central pillar of the activities of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency). It provides individualised information on policy frameworks for inclusive education in Agency member countries and jurisdictions.[2] The CPRA activities put the Agency's wider findings and outputs into the broader European and international policy context for education and inclusion.

The CPRA work aims to support country policy-makers to reflect on the development of policy for inclusive education and stimulate policy discussion in the country concerned. Its central focus is to analyse the available information about current country policy for inclusive education; CPRA does not in any way address the actual implementation of the policy. The Methodology Report (European Agency, 2018) provides a detailed description of the CPRA working methods.

To date, the CPRA process has been implemented in full with 23 Agency countries. The CPRA methodology was initially developed via an iterative process involving Agency staff members and policy-makers from eight Agency member countries: France, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom (England) and United Kingdom (Scotland). They participated in a pilot phase of the work running throughout 2015/2016.

The methods and approaches used were built upon and validated during further work. Seven more Agency member countries participated in 2017/2018 – Belgium (French community), Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia and Spain – and five more in 2018/2019 – Cyprus, Czech Republic, Poland, Serbia and Sweden. During 2019/2020, two further countries – Belgium (Flemish community) and Netherlands – and one of the German Länder (Hessen) completed the process.

CPRA has provided the country teams involved in the work with a reflection on their current policy frameworks for inclusive education. It has identified recommendations for priorities to be addressed that are specific to their policy situation. The results of the analysis work with countries are available from the CPRA web area. These results are time-focused 'snapshots' of policy information.

This report focuses on identifying the key messages from the CPRA activities that can inform future work in countries around inclusive education, as well as Agency work with its member countries.

Each of the following sections of the report is guided by an essential question for future policy development work:

- What are the key messages from the CPRA findings about current work **in** countries?
- What are the key messages from the CPRA process about working **with** countries?

[2] Throughout the rest of this report, the terms 'country' or 'member country' refer to both Agency member countries and jurisdictions.

- What key messages can be identified from international and European-level work that align with CPRA activities and should be considered in wider policy development work in future?

Throughout the three sections, the key messages for **future policy development work** with countries that have emerged from the CPRA work are presented in text boxes. The key messages appear at the start of each section and at the end of sub-sections. These key messages are supported by the specific Agency work that informed the original CPRA framework, as well as wider research literature where relevant.

The final section summarises key messages from the CPRA work to date to highlight specific implications for the Agency's future work with its member countries.

Main steps in the CPRA work

The three main priorities within the European Union (EU) Education and Training (ET) 2020 framework and the European Commission's Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) originally provided the policy context for the CPRA work. The priorities are addressed to all learners and focus upon:

1. Ensuring equal opportunities in education and training
2. Improving educational outcomes
3. Reducing drop-out from general and post-compulsory education.

The CSRs identified several policy areas – measures – for countries to address in order to support policy development work in line with the strategic objectives. These measures were the starting point for the CPRA work. The various measures in the CSRs were reframed to align them with the Agency position on inclusive education systems: that 'all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers' (European Agency, 2015, p. 1).

Twelve policy measures were identified and agreed upon as key levers for meeting international and European-level policy goals and improving the quality of education systems for all learners. They are:

1. To improve inclusive education and to ensure that good quality education is accessible for all
2. To support improved co-operation, including greater involvement of parents and local community
3. To develop monitoring strategies, establishing a comprehensive accountability and evaluation framework for inclusive education
4. To improve the cost-effectiveness of the education system, combining efficiency, effectiveness, equity and inclusion
5. To increase participation in good quality inclusive early childhood education and care and enrolment rates in pre-school education
6. To improve student-focused measures, such as mentoring, personalised learning approaches and improved guidance

7. To improve the school ethos (such as the creation of supportive learning environments, adapting learning environments to specific learning needs)
8. To reduce the negative effects of early tracking (the early streaming of pupils by ability into different types of provision or schools) and to reduce the extensive use of grade retention
9. To support improvement in schools with lower educational outcomes
10. To improve the quality of school staff, focusing on the quality of teachers, quality in continuing professional development, developing teacher competences and reinforcing school leadership
11. To improve transition from education to work by increasing the coherence between employment incentives, education and vocational education and training; improving the quality and accessibility of apprenticeships; promoting cross-sector co-operation; simplifying the systems of qualifications
12. To improve educational and career guidance across all phases of inclusive education.

These 12 measures indicate the main areas where action must be taken to successfully implement a comprehensive policy framework for inclusive education. The country policy-makers involved in the CPRA work agreed that the 12 measures highlight aspirational policy goals for inclusive education that countries can align with, regardless of their current systems of educational provision and support.

The CPRA work with countries consisted of three main steps:

- Collecting relevant policy information
- Identifying policy approaches being taken
- Synthesising the information.

Each of these cumulative activities has led to different individualised outputs for countries; some outputs were made public (i.e. the final analysis grids), while others were addressed specifically to the country policy-makers directly involved in the work and produced for their consideration only.

The three main steps within the CPRA work are briefly outlined below.

Collecting information on country policies

The 12 European-level measures were the starting point for developing a framework to examine individual country policy documents. However, the 12 measures in themselves were too broad for such an analysis. Therefore, they were complemented with selected **thematic recommendations** from key Agency projects and activities. Annex 1 lists the measures and the associated recommendations in full.

The framework of measures and specific recommendations was developed into a multi-dimensional analysis grid, used as a tool to identify policy findings. The grid had three elements: national policy priorities, the 12 measures and associated evaluative comments. The CPRA grid was the outcome of collaborative co-development work between policy-makers from the pilot countries and Agency staff team members.

Country policy-makers were asked to complete the CPRA grid by first indicating the national policy priorities for inclusive education and then identifying key information. This could be a direct quote/extract, citation and source from their country's policy documents (i.e. existing legislation, policy statements, requirements outlined to schools, quality assurance mechanisms, tools and guidance, existing standards, monitoring mechanisms) that addressed the measures and policy recommendations of the CPRA grid. Finally, they were asked to note any evaluative comments they considered useful (such as plans for future policy, white papers and consultation policy documents).

Identifying the policy approaches being taken

The CPRA work used the concepts of prevention, intervention and compensation – set out in a Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving (Council of the European Union, 2011) – to examine countries' policy approaches. The country policy-makers involved in CPRA agreed that policy could be examined according to its intention.

The final information presented in country grids was therefore analysed (led by the Agency staff team in collaboration with country representatives) using the three policy purposes of prevention (P), intervention (I) or compensation (C). This analysis used an operational definition of P-I-C actions agreed with country policy-makers to identify and agree the **perceived intention behind the policy approach**:

- **Prevention** – policy initiatives aiming to avoid educational exclusion and longer-term social exclusion, before these issues emerge (for example, anti-discrimination legislation promoting a rights-based approach, avoidance of disabling policies that lead to gaps in provision, lack of qualifications, etc.).
- **Intervention** – policy initiatives supporting the effective implementation of inclusive education (for example, the provision of specialist support services and resources within mainstream education).
- **Compensation** – policy initiatives addressing the inability or inadequacy of legislation and/or provision to support high-quality inclusive education for all learners (for example, separate educational programmes or provision, support for failing schools, second-chance educational programmes).

The final analysis indicated which policy action approaches countries were taking in relation to each recommendation within each measure. For each recommendation, four possible approaches were recorded: prevention, intervention, compensation or no policy action indicated.

Synthesising the policy analysis findings

The final analysis was used to prepare a synthesis of findings for each country. The synthesis provides an overview of approaches being taken in relation to each of the 12 measures. In addition, the synthesis highlights current policy strengths and areas for

future policy development. The summary of policy strengths and areas for development was framed by some key questions for each country:

Do policy initiatives for an inclusive education system in the country …

- take all learners into account?
- safeguard the rights of all learners to high-quality inclusive education?
- promote the active participation of learners and their families in decision-making that affects them?
- monitor, evaluate and secure the effective implementation of an inclusive education system?
- identify and address barriers to the inclusive education system?

These key questions were developed in collaboration with the country representatives participating in the pilot phase of the CPRA activities.

As requested by the participating countries, the synthesis of findings was a short, confidential, but comprehensive report. It was developed with the intention that countries were free to decide how to use it within their own policy development contexts.

THE CPRA FINDINGS

This section looks at the **main findings** from the CPRA activities 2014–2020. It aims to answer the question: **what are the key messages around current work in countries that future policy development work needs to consider?**

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 on 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

The Agency's position and the starting point for the CPRA work is that inclusive education is a human-rights issue. It is a crucial part of wider progress towards more inclusive and equitable societies, as asserted by international organisations – such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017; 2020a) – and European organisations (Council of the European Union, 2018; Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020; European Commission, 2020a; 2020b).

Previous Agency work – such as Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems, Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion and Preventing School Failure – has underlined the need to consider specific aspects of policy development for wider inclusive education systems.

Overall, the CPRA work's findings highlight the importance of developing a range of interconnected policies and strategies to implement the principles of inclusive education. These policies are necessary to meet a significant number of measures and recommendations that are related to previous Agency work, EU education and training objectives, and international policy commitments, i.e. Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – UNCRPD (United Nations, 2006).

Within the CPRA work, the development of the grid for analysing policy frameworks led to the understanding that inclusive education is not only about policies securing the placement and support of learners in mainstream schools. It also entails ensuring there are policy mechanisms and strategies in place for all levels of education across the policy areas reflected in the 12 measures that the CPRA work covers.

During the CPRA work, discussions took place about the exact meaning of each policy recommendation embedded in the analysis grid. This clearly highlighted the range of issues that need to be considered if national education policies are to promote inclusion.

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 measures and policy recommendations in the CPRA grid 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

The European Commission notes the need to reduce low achievement by building on four pillars: monitoring policy implementation; 'prevention' (particularly for groups vulnerable to underachievement); 'early intervention' (for those 'already showing difficulties'); and compensation (for learners who have already had poor results and 'need a second chance') (2020a, p. 14).

The effective implementation of inclusive education systems requires a synergy between strategies to ensure that the system provides quality support for all learners. It also requires clear policy mechanisms that take a **prevention** policy approach and aim to avoid educational exclusion. The goal of inclusive education systems is supported by policy actions designed to prevent different forms of educational exclusion before they happen, rather than compensate with specific actions when prevention and intervention provisions are not enough to ensure that learners' needs in inclusive settings are met.

Long-term, sustainable developments towards inclusive education systems can be seen as a combination of these three types of 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.

The CPRA analysis of the **perceived intention behind the policy approach** being taken by individual countries shows that all countries have all types of policy approaches – prevention-intervention-compensation. However, the pattern and balance of these policy approaches across measures differ for each country.

In relation to the stated **national policy priorities for education** in the 23 participating Agency member countries:

- **Prevention** policy actions can be identified in all 23 countries' work.
- **Intervention** policy actions can be identified in 17.
- **Compensation** policy actions can be identified in 8.

In relation to the 12 policy measures examined in the analysis work:

- In most *countries* (21 out of 23), the predominant policy approach is **intervention**.
- **Intervention** is the predominant policy approach across most *measures* (11 out of 12). For all measures, countries mainly take a mix of prevention and intervention approaches.
- **Compensatory** policy approaches are less frequent; however, they are present in all countries and within all measures.
- *All countries* have instances where they are not taking any policy approach to a specific recommendation within a measure. This indicates a gap, showing that the country's policy agenda does not address the specific recommendation.

All countries take a preventative approach in relation to their overall stated policy priorities.

In relation to the 12 measures, all countries have prevention, intervention and compensation approaches.

Compensatory policy approaches and gaps or no policy actions are evident in all countries and across all measures.

There are different patterns of policy approach across the 12 measures

Looking at the CPRA analysis across all 23 countries, it is possible to identify some **indicative trends** in the policy approaches being taken in relation to the 12 measures and specific policy recommendations. For each specific recommendation within a measure, the approaches being taken were agreed with country representatives (i.e. prevention, intervention, compensation or no policy approach). Annex 2 presents the numbers and percentages of policy approaches taken linked to the measures.

Across all 12 measures combined, 30% of the policy approaches are indicated as prevention, 39% as intervention and 11% as compensation. For 20%, no policy approach is being taken.

Looking across the policy approaches being taken for the 12 policy measures, it is evident that the 23 countries have very different patterns of coverage and no clear trends are apparent.

However, it is possible to identify the **most** and **least** comprehensive coverage in relation to policy actions that are designed to prevent different forms of educational exclusion before they happen.

The **most comprehensive coverage** is indicated by a higher proportion (percentage) of prevention and intervention policy approaches, with a lower proportion of compensatory

approaches or of gaps in policy approaches. The measures with the most comprehensive coverage across countries were:

- Measure 2 to **support improved co-operation, including greater involvement of parents and local community**: 38% of policy approaches are indicated as prevention, 47% as intervention and 6% as compensation. For 9%, no policy approach is being taken.
- Measure 12 to **improve educational and career guidance across all phases of inclusive education**: 31% of policy approaches are indicated as prevention, 45% as intervention and 13% as compensation. For 11%, no policy approach is being taken.
- Measure 1 to **improve inclusive education and ensure that good quality education is accessible for all**: 34% of policy approaches are indicated as prevention, 41% as intervention and 16% as compensation. For 9%, no policy approach is being taken.
- Measure 5 to **increase participation in good quality inclusive early childhood education and care and enrolment rates in pre-school education**: 39% of policy approaches are indicated as prevention, 36% as intervention and 8% as compensation. For 17%, no policy approach is being taken.

The **least comprehensive coverage** is indicated by a higher proportion (percentage) of compensation policy approaches or where no policy approach is indicated, with a lower proportion of prevention and intervention policy approaches. The measures with the least comprehensive coverage across countries were:

- Measure 7 to **improve the school ethos (such as the creation of supportive learning environments, adapting learning environments to specific learning needs)**: 25% of policy approaches are indicated as prevention, 31% as intervention and 3% as compensation. For 41%, no policy approach is being taken.
- Measure 11 to **improve transition from education to work by increasing the coherence between employment incentives, education and vocational education and training**: 22% of policy approaches are indicated as prevention, 38% as intervention and 12% as compensation. For 28%, no policy approach is being taken.
- Measure 8 to **reduce the negative effects of early tracking (the early streaming of pupils by ability into different types of provision or schools) and to reduce the extensive use of grade retention**: 24% of policy approaches are indicated as prevention, 36% as intervention and 21% as compensation. For 19%, no policy approach is being taken.
- Measure 9 to **support improvement in schools with lower educational outcomes**: 26% of policy approaches are indicated as prevention, 36% as intervention and 12% as compensation. For 26%, no policy approach is being taken.

The 12 policy measures have different patterns of coverage across countries.

There is more comprehensive coverage of policies in measures related to support for improved co-operation and guidance, as well as improving inclusive education and early childhood education.

Coverage is 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

This section looks at the **working processes developed and implemented** within the CPRA activities. It aims to answer the question: **what are the key messages from CPRA about working with countries that future policy development work should consider?**

The CPRA methodology was built upon collaborative approaches with country policy-makers. These were essential for systematically identifying areas of policy strength and areas for policy development that 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

Within the CPRA activities, different forms of collaborative work were essential. The CPRA analysis grid used to collect and then analyse country policy information was itself the outcome of co-development work between policy-makers from the eight pilot countries and Agency staff team members.

The requisite work around the grid involved countries in a form of bilateral analysis of their systems. The participating countries worked with a peer group of policy-makers, but each country also looked at its own system independently.

Collecting the relevant policy information to complete the CPRA analysis grid (the first main step in the CPRA work) required the involvement of policy-makers working in different policy fields and social sectors within participating countries. Many participating countries formed working groups of people from different departments of the ministry of education and other institutions as a strategy to identify and map their existing policies against the CPRA measures. For several countries, this was the first time so many colleagues from within and outside the ministry of education had been involved in such a policy analysis task.

Such strategies were considered essential to form a comprehensive picture of all policies in place that affect inclusive education. Feedback from country representatives participating in CPRA indicates the usefulness of working collaboratively with a wide range of colleagues to first identify relevant policies and then develop a shared understanding of areas that may not be familiar to all stakeholders. This may occur where some policies are only considered relevant for the work of some departments or institutions.

The second step in the CPRA work focused on analysing the country policy information. This was also a collaborative process, led by the Agency staff team working with country representatives. This process involved detailed discussions and exchanges with and among policy-makers. It deepened the overall understanding of specific policy strategies and their

impact on inclusive education for both the country representatives and the Agency staff team.

In particular, revisiting the operational definitions of prevention, intervention and compensation and applying the definitions to specific examples of national policies led to a greater understanding of policy that can prevent exclusion for a wider range of learners. In a number of participating countries, country representatives took up these discussions from the CPRA work with their colleagues. They further explored the implications of the balance of prevention, intervention and compensation approaches and/or gaps in policy coverage for their individual country situations.

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

The third main step in the CPRA work focused upon developing a synthesis of policy analysis findings from individual countries. The prevention-intervention-compensation framework formed the basis for a synthesis of areas of strength and areas for development, framed by five key questions around initiatives for an inclusive education system in the country.

This synthesis systematically highlighted key information for country representatives. Many participants used it as a basis for initiating wider discussions around policy development for inclusive education. Examples from participating countries include using the synthesis as a reference document for wider legislative reforms and translating the synthesis into the national language and publishing it online as a public document for wider debate.

Many country representatives used the synthesis information within their ministry of education as a stimulus for discussion with their colleagues – and sometimes Agency team members – about future policy development requirements.

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

This section looks at important **international and European-level policy work**. It aims to answer the question: **what are the key messages from international and European-level work that align with CPRA activities and that future policy development work should consider?**

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 EU 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 international and European-level documents show a growing consensus around inclusive education, particularly areas of legislation and policy that need to be addressed to underpin systemic change. The CPRA work has attempted to reflect this consensus and examine how it is evident in countries' national-level policies.

Many international documents highlight the need to move away from a 'one-size-fits-all' mentality and recognise that equality and equity are not identical:

> Equal opportunities for all are crucial, but not sufficient: there is a need to pursue 'equity' in the aims, content, teaching methods and forms of learning being provided for by education and training systems to achieve a high quality education for all (Council of the European Union, 2017, p. C 62/4).

This issue has been highlighted more clearly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations (2020) estimated that 23.8 million additional children and young people are at risk of school drop-out due to the pandemic's economic impact. This economic impact is likely to affect the funding allocated to education (Al-Samarrai, Gangwar and Gala, 2020). It heightens the need to consider more efficient and effective ways to increase the quality of education for all learners within the system.

Developing inclusive and equitable laws and policies requires countries to recognise that learners' difficulties often arise from aspects of the education system itself. As Slee (2011) argues, developments towards inclusive education must include a practical understanding of the attitudes, processes and structures involved in exclusionary policies and practices.

Work with the 23 countries involved in the CPRA activities has reinforced the argument that across education systems, diversity must be seen as a catalyst for improvement. Countries should review, plan action, monitor progress and use data and information to bring about change to ensure that no learners are left behind (UNESCO, 2017).

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

The CPRA framework aims to align country legislation and policy with key UN Conventions. However, the CPRA findings highlight the fact that some countries do not yet include international or European-level conventions and strategies as an integral part of their national laws. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Education 2030 Steering Committee (2018) stresses the importance of all countries ensuring that the right to education is 'included in domestic legal frameworks and prominent in policy documents' (2018, p. 2).

Crucial here is the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It strengthens and broadens the right to education for all children, through consideration of three core principles: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; and the right to life, survival, and development of the child to the maximum extent. The proposed EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee provide further support for the rights of all children (European Commission, no date a). This is of particular importance in supporting a move away from inclusive education being linked primarily to disability.

Clearly, the rights of learners with disabilities must also be considered as one of the most vulnerable/marginalised groups. However, while the UNCRPD (United Nations, 2006) guarantees the right to inclusive education for such learners, it lacks clarity on the issue of where education should take place. In 2016, General Comment No. 4 on Article 24 of the UNCRPD was published, stating that:

> … the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the **general** education system should be prohibited, including through any legislative or regulatory provisions that limit their inclusion on the basis of their impairment or the degree of that impairment, such as by conditioning inclusion on the extent of the potential of the individual or by alleging a disproportionate and undue burden to evade the obligation to provide reasonable accommodation (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, Section II, §18).

Supporting the direction of travel towards consideration of broader groups of learners, the Comment describes inclusive education as:

> … a process … to provide all students … with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences (ibid., Section II, §11).

The view of inclusion as quality education for all learners is consistent with the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2015). This requires countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all as part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its pledge to leave no-one behind.

The 2030 Agenda goals and targets focus directly upon equity, inclusion, diversity, equal opportunity and non-discrimination. Increasingly, there is an acknowledgement that beyond disability, discrimination occurs based on gender, location, poverty, ethnicity, language, migration/displacement status, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes. There is also wide agreement that the focus on intersectionality needs to be strengthened (UNESCO, 2020b), recognising that discrimination does not fall 'on a single identity marker' (Bešić, 2020, p. 114). All aspects of an individual's identity 'intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities', which influences how the world perceives them (ibid.).

In support of the broader agenda, there is growing recognition of the need for synergies between strategies across Europe that target often marginalised groups. In addition to the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (European Commission, 2021), this includes the anti-racism strategy, Roma strategic framework, LGBTIQ equality strategy, forthcoming anti-Semitism strategy and work to mainstream gender equality. The Communication on the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 (European Commission, 2020c) recognises that a combination of personal characteristics – such as gender, racial/ethnic origin, religion/belief, sexual orientation and disability – that lead to specific challenges for migrants must be taken into account.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added new layers of exclusion. Schleicher notes:

> Those from privileged backgrounds will find their way around closed school doors to alternative learning opportunities, supported by their parents and eager to learn. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds will remain shut out if the school shuts down (2020, p. 2).

The pandemic has also amplified existing attainment gaps due to lack of space to study, lack of computers and internet access and lack of teacher preparedness (OECD, 2020; Schleicher, 2020; European Commission, 2020d). This lends further support to the need to broaden the focus of inclusion in line with the principle of 'all means all'.

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

The OECD (2018) notes that learners from low socio-economic backgrounds are twice as likely to be low performers. There is a need to improve the level of resources in education and focus on teaching quality to 'de-couple' attainment from socio-economic background and prevent school drop-out and youth unemployment.

UNICEF Office of Research (2018) suggests that inequality among children is driven by parental occupation. The report also examines migration background, gender issues and differences between schools. It suggests that high-quality early childhood education, a good minimum level of core skills and better data focusing on the degree of inequality could reduce educational inequalities.

A Eurydice report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020) examines system-level factors in school education and the inter-relationships between them that influence equity in the education system. Such factors include:

- Stratification, e.g. learner grouping based on ability/interests, etc.
- Standardisation – application of the same quality standards
- Support measures – to promote equity and mitigate disadvantage
- Diversity in types of schools – which can increase academic segregation and decrease equity.

The report notes that differences occur due to governance and funding issues, as well as curriculum and structural features, e.g. types of school. All factors are inter-linked, but the following in particular affect equity:

- Free school choice and differentiation of regulatory frameworks
- Academic admission criteria, early tracking and grade repetition
- School autonomy, where high levels can lead to differences in quality and affect equity
- Accountability relating to learner outcomes and other measures
- Measures to support disadvantaged schools and low-achieving learners

- Out-of-school activities.

Within the CPRA activities, these system factors are, to differing degrees, implicit and explicit within the analysis grid. As a result, the individual analysis work with participating countries has considered different facets of these equity factors to varying extents.

However, it is interesting to note the degree to which the **evaluative comments** from country representatives highlight issues around cross-sectoral governance and accountability processes, as well as levels of regional, local and school autonomy as critical factors that affect their policy development work.

The current CPRA framework covers many of the above areas. However, future developments should improve that alignment, raising the profile or changing the emphasis of particular factors to ensure a coherent approach to addressing key system issues and levers for policy development and change.

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

Policy development work that promotes equitable monitoring and accountability around inclusive education is a focus of international organisations (i.e. UN, UNESCO) and the EU Institutions. It is also an increasing focus of the Agency's work generally, and specifically through the CPRA activities.

CPRA's goal has been to provide a snapshot of policies for inclusive education in countries. It has aimed to provide a benchmark to support countries' short-, medium- and long-term policy development work.

Feedback from participating Agency member countries suggests that the CPRA work has been particularly helpful in meeting the reporting requirements for the UNCRC and the UNCRPD. Moreover, discussion with the representatives of participating countries points to the potential for further developing the CPRA work to inform national, but also European and international, policy goals and targets. The possible value of this is clear in current debates around the need for more systematic monitoring of developments towards greater equity and inclusion in education.

Achieving SDG 4 (and related goals for inclusive education systems) is a shared responsibility for the international community, governments, schools, teachers, parents, learners, members of local communities, non-governmental organisations and private actors. Developing an inclusive education system requires a 'strong enabling environment that provides … adequate resources, capacity and information to fulfil' this responsibility (SDG Education 2030 Steering Committee, 2018, p. 2).

The Incheon Declaration calls for:

> … strong global and regional collaboration, cooperation, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the education agenda based on data collection, analysis and reporting at the country level, within the framework of regional entities, mechanisms and strategies (UNESCO, 2015, p. 9).

The UNCRPD also highlights data collection on important issues related to inclusive education. States Parties are required to 'collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the present Convention' (United Nations, 2006, Article 31).

A recent evaluation of the European Disability Strategy (European Commission, 2020e) points to the need for a framework and comprehensive benchmarks and indicators to monitor the implementation of both the strategy and the UNCRPD. It stresses the need to include persons with disabilities in policy-making, to take account of persons with intellectual/invisible disabilities and to attend to children's rights. The Post-2020 European Disability Strategy (European Parliament, 2020) highlights the need for data with disaggregated quantitative and qualitative indicators on disability.

It is widely recognised that a single quantitative indicator cannot capture important factors in education – for example, the quality of teaching. This is why the ET 2020

monitoring also relied on 'structural indicators' (or 'policy indicators') collected by Eurydice and other expert networks/agencies.

Work on the new European Education Area will take forward the achievements of previous frameworks (European Commission, no date b). It will build on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the first principle of which is the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning (European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2017).

The Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 aims to lift quality in education. It offers support to Member States in identifying 'effective policy reforms that support better achievement in basic skills' (European Commission, 2020a, p. 13). This will 'concern curriculum and assessment' and the 'capacity of institutions and staff to be innovative and develop their learning approaches and environments' (ibid.).

Building on the key messages from CPRA work

Looking across the key messages in this report, there is 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.

However, the CPRA analysis framework itself requires review and development to ensure full alignment with current international and EU goals for inclusive education systems.

CPRA comprehensively covers the following priorities and issues for future work, set out in the European Education Area 2025 activities:

- Achieving school success for all by:
    - improving basic skills (including digital skills, environmental sustainability, climate change and sustainable development);
    - minimising the number of young people who leave education without at least upper-secondary education;
    - creating supportive environments for groups at risk of underachievement and with special learning needs;
    - ensuring well-being at school;
- Recognising the crucial role of early childhood education and care
- Developing the competence of and career paths for teachers, trainers and school leaders (European Commission, 2020a).

The current CPRA findings and outcomes can offer useful insights into these policy priorities. However, the European Education Area (ibid.) also outlines a number of policy priorities that the current CPRA framework does not directly cover. These include valuing linguistic and cultural diversity and the multi-dimensional issue of gender in education – these are central to developments in inclusive education as a high-quality approach for all learners. The need to consider these intersectional issues within policy development for

inclusive education is an area for future work with Agency member country representatives.

Moving from country policy review and analysis to country policy development support

All Agency work essentially focuses on supporting its member countries to develop and successfully implement policy for inclusive education. The possibilities for building on the key messages from the current CPRA methodology and working processes are fully in line with the Agency's ambition of being an active agent for change.

An updated CPRA framework could potentially develop as a tool to improve the monitoring of developments in inclusive education within and across Agency countries and support discussions around the UN Sustainable Development Goals and European Education Area priorities.

Offering policy-makers new opportunities to work collaboratively to consider the balance of prevention, intervention and compensation approaches within their policy frameworks could effectively support future policy development work. Such collaborative work could explore the implications of various patterns of approaches and/or gaps in policy coverage for implementing inclusive education policy in education systems with very different structures and features.

Building on the overall CPRA work, all future Agency activities with its member countries will feed into the Country Policy Development Support (CPDS) activity. The CPDS work will develop the CPRA working processes to build on findings that have proven useful for supporting countries, as outlined in the previous sections.

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.

This framework will develop over time. It will be based on past, current and on-going findings from all Agency activities. It will specifically address the agreed country priorities of:

- monitoring and evaluating policy implementation for inclusive education;
- developing strategies to support horizontal and vertical collaborative, cross-sector working;
- developing multi-level, multi-stakeholder quality assurance and accountability frameworks for inclusive education.

Crucially, the Agency's future policy development work will aim to support all its member countries to monitor developments as they work towards implementing the overarching principle of rights-based inclusive education, as the Agency's *Key Principles* report describes:

> 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 (European Agency, 2021, p. 14).

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ANNEXES

1. European-level policy measures and recommendations underpinning the CPRA work

The 12 policy measures below were identified and agreed upon as key levers for meeting international and European-level policy goals and for improving education system quality for all learners. These measures and the associated specific recommendations pinpoint the areas where action must be taken to successfully implement a comprehensive policy framework for inclusive education.

Measure 1: To improve inclusive education and to ensure that good quality education is accessible for all

Recommendations

1.1 There is a clearly stated policy for the promotion of quality in inclusive education. (Policy aims to widen access to education and to promote full participation and opportunities for all learners vulnerable to exclusion to realise their potential. Policy outlines how education policy-makers need to take responsibility for all learners.)

1.2 Legislation and policy are consistent with the principles of the UNCRC and the UNCRPD. (Legislation and policy uphold the right of all learners to full participation in school with their own local peer group.)

1.3 The concept of inclusion is clarified in education policy as an agenda that increases quality and equity for all learners. (Policy aims to address underachievement of all vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities.)

1.4 Legislation and policy for inclusive education is cross-sectoral. (Policy outlines procedures to ensure the efficient co-ordination of services, as well as clearly defining roles and responsibilities.)

1.5 There is a long-term multi-level policy framework for implementing quality inclusive education at national, regional and/or organisational levels.

1.6 Policy outlines how education policy-makers need to take responsibility for all learners.

1.7 Policy has the goal of supporting all teachers to have positive attitudes towards all learners.

1.8 Policy requires learning materials to be accessible.

1.9 Policy describes an effective framework of support for schools to implement inclusive education. (Support structures focus on different forms of educational resource centres that are locally organised to offer support to individual or clusters of schools.)

1.10 Policies outline a continuum of support for children and young people in schools, to meet the full diversity of learners' needs.

1.11 Policy outlines strategies for awareness-raising with all stakeholders in inclusive education.

1.12 Policy outlines the development of the role of special schools as a resource to increase the capability of mainstream schools and improve support for all learners. (The specialist knowledge and skills of special schools/resource centres are maintained and further developed so as to enhance support for learners, such as those with low-incidence disabilities.)

Measure 2. To support improved co-operation, including greater involvement of parents and local community

Recommendations

2.1 The full involvement of families in all educational processes is outlined in legislation and policy.

2.2 Policy for inclusive education places learners and their families at the centre of all actions.

2.3 Sharing information among professionals and families is a policy priority.

2.4 Policy has the goal of supporting parental interaction and communication with professionals.

2.5 Schools are expected and supported to involve a wider range of partners and foster formal and informal networks that support their practice.

Measure 3. To develop monitoring strategies, establishing a comprehensive accountability and evaluation framework for inclusive education

Recommendations

3.1 Policy describes clear mechanisms to evaluate effectiveness and quality in inclusive education.

3.2 Monitoring procedures ensure that inequalities in access to educational resources at regional or organisational levels are addressed.

3.3 Accountability measures that impact upon educational professionals' work reflect the importance of wider learner achievements.

3.4 Policy outlines common standards for service and provision evaluation for use across health, education and social services.

3.5 Policy outlines how to involve families in the process of evaluating quality of services.

3.6 Policy describes mechanisms to evaluate demand for services.

3.7 Policy supports opportunities for school teams to evaluate their practice through involvement in research and development activities.

Measure 4. To improve the cost-effectiveness of the education system, combining efficiency, effectiveness, equity and inclusion

Recommendations

4.1 National-level inclusive education strategies are linked to long-term financial support.

4.2 Funding policies and structures provide flexible resourcing systems that promote inclusion.

4.3 There are long-term funding commitments to support collaborative initiatives between various school-based, resource centre and research teams.

4.4 Policy outlines mechanisms for systematic data collection on expenditure and implementation that informs cost-effectiveness issues.

Measure 5. To increase participation in good quality inclusive early childhood education and care and enrolment rates in pre-school education

Recommendations

5.1 Policy clearly respects the rights and the needs of children and their families.

5.2 Support is available for families to recognise and understand the needs of their child. (Support focuses upon what is in the child's best interests.)

5.3 Policy outlines how early childhood intervention (ECI) services should be provided for children and families as early as possible and as quickly as possible, following identification of need.

5.4 Policy states that, in risk situations, the child's rights should come first.

5.5 Policy measures and guidelines clearly define quality standards for early childhood services and provision.

5.6 Early childhood guidance is developed jointly by departments of health, education and social services.

5.7 Policy for early childhood services supports cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary working at regional and local levels.

5.8 Policy ensures there are pre-school places offered to children coming from ECI services/provision.

5.9 Policy outlines how cost-free services/provision are made available for families.

5.10 Policy ensures the same quality of service irrespective of differences in geographical location. (Such as isolated or rural areas).

Measure 6. To improve student-focused measures, such as mentoring, personalised learning approaches and improved guidance

Recommendations

6.1 High expectations for all learners' achievements underpin policy for inclusive education.

6.2 Policy outlines that learners' voices should be listened to in decision-making that affects them.

6.3 Teaching, support and guidance have the goal of empowering all learners.

6.4 Appropriate educational support is available as necessary and is fit for purpose in meeting personal learning needs.

6.5 The learning process is based on flexible curricula based on learner-centred approaches and the development and implementation of individual learning plans as necessary.

Measure 7. To improve the school ethos (such as the creation of supportive learning environments, adapting learning environments to specific learning needs)

Recommendations

7.1 Policy supports school leaders to value diversity among staff as well as learners, encourage collegiality and support innovation.

7.2 Policy outlines the responsibility of school leaders to effectively communicate their vision for inclusive education to the school teaching team and wider school community.

7.3 Policy aims to ensure the recruitment of teaching staff from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities.

7.4 Policy supports schools to ensure teaching staff are able to meet diverse learning needs. (Teaching staff have competence and expertise to develop individual plans, implement learner-centred approaches and support learners in personalised learning.)

7.5 The school ethos and culture is guided by school strategic plans that have high expectations for the academic and social achievements of all learners.

7.6 School strategic plans describe how universal design for learning approaches are used to provide individualised learning tools and opportunities.

7.7 School strategic plans stipulate that all learners are entitled to be active participants in the life of the school and community.

7.8 School strategic plans have clear statements on the value of diversity.

7.9 School strategic plans describe mechanisms for shared leadership, teamwork and collaborative problem solving.

Measure 8. To reduce the negative effects of early tracking (the early streaming of pupils by ability into different types of provision or schools) and to reduce the extensive use of grade retention

Recommendations

8.1 Legislation across relevant public sectors has the goal of ensuring educational services enhance developments and processes working towards equity in inclusive education.

8.2 Policy outlines how support structures that impact upon inclusive education are diverse and easily available. (Support structures prevent early tracking and streaming of pupils at an early age).

8.3 Assessment mechanisms are in place to identify the support needs of learners at an early stage.

8.4 Data is available relating to learners' rights to age-appropriate education.

Measure 9. To support improvement in schools with lower educational outcomes

Recommendations

9.1 Clear mechanisms exist to identify schools with lower educational outcomes.

9.2 Policy outlines how methods of assessment, inspections and other accountability measures contribute to school improvement processes. (Accountability measures support inclusive practice and inform further improvement of provision for all learners.)

9.3 Policy aims to increase the capacity of all schools to meet a greater diversity of needs and support learners within their local communities. (Schools are supported to use innovative teaching methods, practical learning approaches and individual plans, focusing on learners' capabilities.)

9.4 Policy outlines clear incentives for schools to take all learners from their local community.

9.5 Policy requires school strategic plans to outline preventive educational action against dropouts. (Including necessary measures so that learners who become disengaged find new educational alternatives.)

Measure 10. To improve the quality of school staff, focusing on the quality of teachers, quality in continuing professional development, developing teacher competences and reinforcing school leadership

Recommendations

10.1 Policy outlines how all school staff develop the skills to meet the diverse needs of all learners. (Appropriate training and professional development is provided to all school staff, including teachers, support and administrative staff, counsellors, etc.).

10.2 Policy supports the development of high-quality and appropriately trained teacher educators. (With improvements in recruitment, induction and continuing professional development.)

10.3 Policy supports flexible training opportunities in initial and continuing professional development, for all teachers. (Schools and teacher education institutions will work together to ensure good models in practice schools and appropriate placements for teaching practice.)

10.4 All teaching staff are supported and develop a clear understanding of effective learning strategies. (Such as learning to learn and active learning approaches.)

10.5 Policy supports schools to develop strategic plans of staff training in inclusive education.

10.6 Policy outlines the specialised training pathways for specialists who support school communities to implement inclusive education.

10.7 Policy supports research into the effectiveness of different routes into teaching. (Including course organisation, content and pedagogy to best develop the competence of teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners.)

Measure 11. To improve transition from education to work by increasing the coherence between employment incentives, education and vocational education and training (VET); improving the quality and accessibility of apprenticeships; promoting cross-sector co-operation; simplifying the systems of qualifications

Recommendations

11.1 Policy ensures that VET programmes should address labour market skill requirements.

11.2 Policy aims at matching labour market skill requirements and learners' skills, wishes and expectations.

11.3 Policy outlines the development of partnerships and networking structures. (Partnerships with a pool of local employers to ensure close co-operation with regard to learners' supervised practical training and finding employment after graduation.)

11.4 Policy outlines how transition from education to employment is supported by adequate provision.

11.5 Policy supports the availability of meaningful VET options for learners to choose from.

11.6 Policy supports the availability of supervised practical training.

11.7 Policy outlines how sustainable employment opportunities are supported through the availability of appropriate, on-going support.

11.8 Policy outlines how VET programmes are reviewed periodically. (Both internally and/or externally in order to adapt to current and future skill needs.)

Measure 12. To improve educational and career guidance across all phases of inclusive education

Recommendations

12.1 Policy outlines the mechanisms for ensuring effective transition across educational sectors and phases. (There are well-organised transition processes among services to ensure continuity in the support required when learners move from one form of provision to another.)

12.2 Policy outlines how career counsellors/officers support learners and employers regarding employment possibilities. (Support is provided with job applications, inform and support employers and facilitate contact between both parties.)

2. Policy approaches taken

The analysis covers all 23 countries involved in CPRA work until the end of 2020.

It was completed using a count of which countries indicated they are taking a particular policy action approach in relation to each recommendation of a measure.

Four possible approaches were recorded: prevention, intervention, compensation or no policy action indicated. No policy action was indicated when no information was given in the analysis grid.

Percentages are calculated against the total for the measure (presented in the final column). Percentages (indicated in brackets) have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

Table 1. Total number and percentage of policy approaches taken linked to the measures

Policy measure	Prevention	Intervention	Compensation	No action	Total
Measure 1	156 (34%)	188 (41%)	75 (16%)	43 (9%)	462
Measure 2	61 (38%)	77 (47%)	9 (6%)	15 (9%)	162
Measure 3	56 (28%)	80 (40%)	7 (3%)	58 (29%)	201
Measure 4	27 (21%)	64 (50%)	17 (13%)	21 (16%)	129
Measure 5	116 (39%)	107 (36%)	25 (8%)	49 (17%)	297
Measure 6	67 (35%)	74 (39%)	34 (18%)	15 (8%)	190
Measure 7	59 (25%)	74 (31%)	8 (3%)	96 (41%)	237
Measure 8	34 (24%)	50 (36%)	30 (21%)	26 (19%)	140
Measure 9	38 (26%)	54 (36%)	18 (12%)	38 (26%)	148
Measure 10	53 (27%)	83 (42%)	7 (3%)	56 (28%)	199
Measure 11	52 (22%)	89 (38%)	28 (12%)	64 (28%)	233
Measure 12	20 (31%)	29 (45%)	8 (13%)	7 (11%)	64
Overall total	**739 (30%)**	**969 (39%)**	**266 (11%)**	**488 (20%)**	**2,462**

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