Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education

Final Synthesis Report

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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CHANGING ROLE OF SPECIALIST PROVISION IN SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Final Synthesis Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education (CROSP) project, carried out by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency), focused on the re-organisation of specialist provision to support the right to inclusive education for all learners. The project's overall aim was to identify and analyse challenges and opportunities within country policy and practice that influence the re-organisation and reform of specialist provision towards inclusive education for all learners. The project had two phases.

Phase 1: mapping specialist provision approaches in European countries

Phase 1 covered a detailed mapping exercise on past and current trends and situations in 26 Agency member countries in relation to specialist provision, as well as on perceived future trends (presented in the phase 1 synthesis report (European Agency, 2019a)). Countries were invited to respond to the CROSP questionnaire. This covered all types of specialist provision that support mainstream provision at compulsory education level.

Analysis of the questionnaire data indicated that Agency member countries are actively developing policy to reconceptualise and re-organise specialist provision towards inclusive education. Their main policy reforms involve promoting a rights-based approach, reshaping the relationship between mainstream and specialist provision, and developing new support systems.

In many countries, the transformation of specialist provision towards inclusive education results in more learners being educated in mainstream settings. It also leads to positive changes in school-level attitudes towards inclusive education. Additionally, it increases schools' awareness of the need to develop inclusive and flexible learning environments.

Data analysis highlighted the need to further enable specialist provision to act as a resource for mainstream provision and to equip stakeholders to implement inclusive education. The transformation of specialist provision into a resource involves developments in four main policy areas that policy-makers consider relevant: governance, funding, capacity building and quality assurance.

Phase 2: developing a roadmap for changing the role of specialist provision

Phase 2 built on phase 1's key findings, aiming to enable member countries to develop more effective strategies to improve the transformation of the role of specialist provision for the implementation of inclusive education. Using a peer-learning approach, 18 countries engaged in thematic workshops and exchanged experiences and views on the topic.

The findings of the thematic workshops were analysed and revealed six mutually complementary guiding principles. These underpin the re-orientation of the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education:

Guiding principle 1: Developing a shared commitment to inclusive education

All stakeholders should develop common values and a shared commitment to providing all learners with high-quality learning opportunities in mainstream settings. Specialist provision for learners who need support should build upon a socio-pedagogical approach, not a medical one.

Guiding principle 2: Promoting knowledge exchange and acquiring inclusive competences through co-operation and networking

Decision-makers and education professionals from both the mainstream and specialist sectors should exchange knowledge through collaboration at all educational levels, as well as local/regional/national levels.

Guiding principle 3: Providing continuous professional learning on inclusion

Continuous learning opportunities should be provided to all staff from specialist and mainstream provision, including those with leadership roles (i.e. aiming to instil inclusive skills and competences).

Guiding principle 4: Supporting inclusive school leadership and management

A universal design approach to teaching and learning should act as a resource and underpin the work of professionals with leadership roles from both the mainstream and specialist sectors.

Guiding principle 5: Encouraging stakeholders' active involvement

Families, learners and other community stakeholders should be supported to participate actively in the learning and teaching process.

Guiding principle 6: Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation

All staff from specialist and mainstream provision should work towards a whole-school approach focusing on barriers to and facilitators of teaching and learning.

Each guiding principle was then connected to several **policy priorities and strategies** that countries **identified as effective** during the workshops. In turn, each policy priority and strategy was broken down into **key actions, as examples of effective implementation** of the associated policies and strategies.

This analysis process was the basis for developing a **roadmap for changing the role of specialist provision**. Overall, this roadmap connects the 6 guiding principles with 17 policy

priorities and strategies, along with some examples of steps or milestones for effective implementation. It particularly aims to:

- help countries to assess/monitor their own situations, by identifying strengths and weaknesses and where they are in their journeys towards changing the role of specialist provision;
- support countries to define policy areas that need further development and next steps to be taken, along with responsibilities of all stakeholders.

The CROSP self-review tool (European Agency, 2022a) includes all guiding principles, policy priorities/strategies and indicative key actions in the form of self-reflective questions.

The CROSP tool is an **open-source document**. It aims to enable participants to develop a continuum of support for assisting the implementation of inclusive education.

INTRODUCTION

The current educational policy framework increasingly focuses on inclusive education systems that aim to meet the rights of all learners to an inclusive education with their peers in their local communities (European Agency, 2015a). All Agency member countries agree on and are working towards this vision for inclusive education systems. All learners, including those from vulnerable groups (for example, children with special educational needs and/or disability, Roma children, children with a migrant background, etc.), have recognised rights to inclusive education. A key question for many countries is, therefore, to clarify what specialist provision's role should be in supporting all learners' rights to inclusive education.

The Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education (CROSP) project focused on the re-organisation of specialist provision to support the right to inclusive education for all learners. The project had two phases:

- Phase 1 (2017–2018) covered a detailed mapping exercise on past and current trends and situations in 26 Agency member countries in relation to specialist provision, as well as on perceived future trends (presented in the phase 1 synthesis report (European Agency, 2019a)).
- Phase 2 (2019–2022) built on phase 1's main outcomes, focusing on peer-learning activities. These included thematic workshops with 18 policy-makers from Agency member countries. The peer-learning approach aimed to enable member countries to develop more effective strategies for improving specialist provision's role for inclusive education. This process concluded with the development of a **roadmap**, in the form of the CROSP self-review tool (European Agency, 2022a), providing a holistic overview of policy priorities and strategies, as well as the major steps or milestones (i.e. key actions) in the change process.

This report provides more details on phases 1 and 2 of the CROSP project. It first describes the situation and trends in Agency member countries in relation to specialist provision, as a result of phase 1 activities. It then presents the methodology and key findings of phase 2,

including the suggested roadmap and the CROSP self-review tool for transforming the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education.

Project background

The rights-based approach to inclusive education, advocated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), promotes high-quality education for all. Policy frameworks in many countries increasingly focus on education systems that aim to meet all learners' rights to an inclusive education with their peers in their local communities (European Agency, 2015a). Working towards this rights-based goal, countries increasingly recognise the need to change the role of specialist provision.

Instead of placing learners who need support in special settings, education systems are moving towards expecting mainstream education professionals to meet diverse needs (European Agency, 2015a; Council of the European Union, 2018). Many countries have developed special schools to support and meet the needs and rights of specific learners. These may include groups of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion from educational opportunities (for example, Roma children, children with a migrant background, children with special educational needs/disabilities, etc.). For these groups, separate specialist provision aims to ensure their right to an education.

However, it is important to clarify specialist provision's role in supporting all learners' rights to inclusive education. Instead of special classes or special schools, the rights-based approach requires mainstream professionals to promote educational change to effectively meet all learners' needs within mainstream classes (Ainscow, 2005; Florian, 2005; European Agency, 2013; 2016a; 2017a).

European countries have implemented reforms to support this shift in expectations by:

- transforming special settings into resources for mainstream provision;
- creating special units or classes aimed at supporting both learners and stakeholders from mainstream settings;
- requiring specialist provision professionals to work in mainstream schools;
- developing assessment mechanisms that jointly involve professionals from mainstream and specialist provision (European Agency, 2013; 2016a).

Countries' perceptions of the role of specialist provision may differ, depending on their progress towards inclusive education (European Agency, 2016a; 2016b; 2017a; 2017b). In the CROSP project, **'specialist provision' refers to special schools, special units and special classes, as well as professionals providing educational or other support, advice and guidance to learners, families and schools**.

However, these forms of specialist provision may not always support the development of inclusive education systems. Learners who need support are often enrolled in special schools and special classes, where they may have fewer learning and participation

opportunities than their peers. School staff also face difficulties in addressing learners' needs without labelling the learners.

Despite the progress achieved, serious challenges persist. As the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities notes:

> Many millions of persons with disabilities continue to be denied the right to education and for many more education is available only in settings where persons with disabilities are isolated from their peers and where the education they receive is of an inferior quality (2016, p. 1).

Consequently, there is a need for more systematic information collection and examination of the changing role of specialist provision to support learners' rights to inclusive education.

Project aims

The CROSP project aimed to address this topic by identifying country policies and practices that support the changing role of specialist provision towards inclusive education.

CROSP's overall purpose was to identify and analyse challenges and opportunities within country policy and practice that influence the re-organisation and reform of specialist provision towards inclusive education for all learners.

Phase 1 entailed desk research to map past and current trends and situations in countries in relation to specialist provision, as well as perceived future trends.

Phase 2 aimed to enable member countries to develop more effective strategies for improving the changing role of specialist provision in implementing inclusive education.

The sections that follow describe the phase 1 and phase 2 activities and their main findings in more detail.

PHASE 1: MAPPING SPECIALIST PROVISION APPROACHES IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Phase 1 of CROSP described past, current and future trends in relation to specialist provision in countries. It aimed to form a clear overview of the development of specialist provision in meeting learners' rights to education generally, and inclusive education more specifically.

The CROSP project identified and analysed factors within country policy and practice that support the changing role of specialist provision towards inclusive education for all learners. Two key questions served to examine this changing role:

1. What types of cross-sectoral policy frameworks are needed to effectively support the changing role of specialist provision in supporting mainstream schools to be inclusive?
2. What types of developments and reforms to different forms of separate specialist provision are required to ensure that all learners' rights to inclusive education are effectively met?

Twenty-six Agency member countries participated in the mapping exercise for phase 1 of CROSP: Austria, Belgium (French community), Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom (England and Scotland).

The participating country representatives prepared reports with inputs from their national networks of experts. The reports covered all types of specialist provision that support mainstream provision at compulsory education level. This included support for learners in special schools, units and classes. It also included professionals providing support, advice and guidance to learners and stakeholders from mainstream provision. The reports contained data on the number of special schools, classes and professionals in each country. They also described structures and processes, such as policies, systems of support and transformation processes.

Analysis of the country reports provided key information on:

- specialist provision's current role and main characteristics;
- countries' main policy reforms in relation to specialist provision;
- further policy developments that are needed to transform the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education.

Defining specialist provision

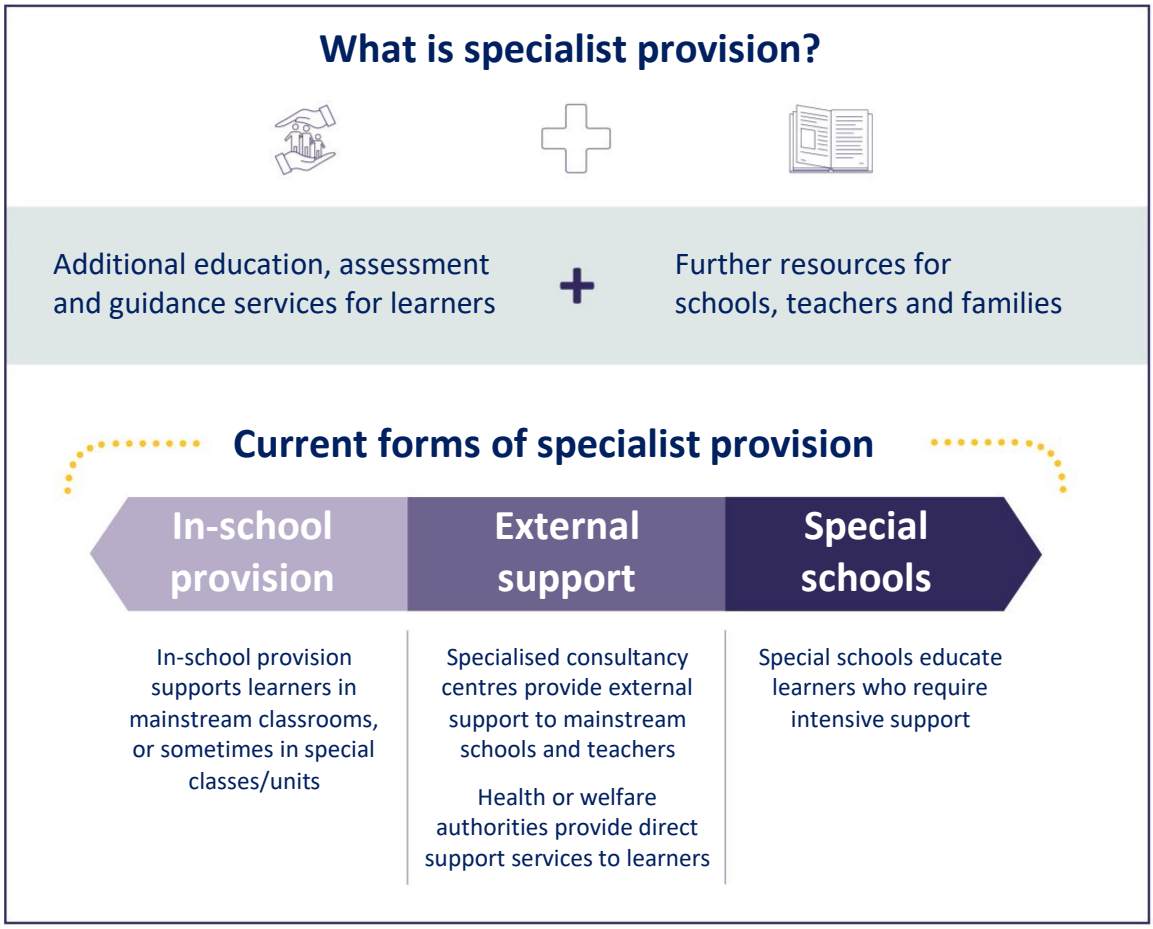


Figure 1. Definition of specialist provision

Specialist provision services involve various groups of specialists covering special education, social welfare, rehabilitation, health, early intervention, personal development and transition pathways within the education system.

Agency member countries are actively developing policy to reconceptualise and re-organise specialist provision towards inclusive education. Their main policy reforms involve:

- promoting a rights-based approach;
- reshaping the relationship between mainstream and specialist provision;
- developing new support systems.

Benefits of changing the role of specialist provision

In many countries, the transformation of specialist provision towards inclusive education results in:

- preventing learner drop-out;
- more learners being educated in mainstream settings and receiving the support they need;
- positive changes in school-level attitudes towards diversity in learning;
- schools' increased awareness and capacity to develop inclusive and flexible learning environments;
- teachers developing skills to support all learners.

These benefits favour greater inclusion and the development of more inclusive systems to provide high-quality education for all learners (European Agency, 2015a).

Policy areas that can drive change

The analysis of country information reveals the need to further enable specialist provision to act as a resource for mainstream provision and to equip stakeholders to implement inclusive education. The transformation of specialist provision into a resource involves four interrelated areas that policy-makers consider relevant:

- Governance mechanisms to support co-operation between specialist and mainstream provision at all levels
- Funding policies and strategies that support specialist provision to act as a resource for inclusive education
- Capacity-building mechanisms that enable specialist provision professionals to effectively support stakeholders in mainstream education
- Quality assurance mechanisms for specialist provision that promote transparent and accountable systems for inclusive education.

These policy areas relate to key components, which have been identified in previous Agency work, for developing efficient and cost-effective resource allocation mechanisms and reducing disparity in education (European Agency, 2016a; 2018).

The CROSP phase 1 synthesis report (European Agency, 2019a) contains more information on the phase 1 findings. An animated video and an infographic conveying key messages from phase 1 are also available on the CROSP web area. These multimedia outputs explain what specialist provision is, why its shifting role to support inclusive education is important and how policy can aid in this shift.

PHASE 2: DEVELOPING A ROADMAP FOR CHANGING THE ROLE OF SPECIALIST PROVISION

Building on phase 1's key findings, the overall purpose of phase 2 was to enable member countries to develop more effective strategies to improve the transformation of the role of specialist provision for the implementation of inclusive education.

It particularly aimed to answer three key questions:

1. Which policies and strategies can be developed to support the transformation of specialist provision into a resource for mainstream (in relation to funding, capacity building, governance and quality assurance)?
2. How can co-operation mechanisms between specialists and mainstream that enable schools' stakeholders to implement inclusive education be promoted?
3. Which skills and methodologies are required for specialist provision to be a resource?

The project also focused on preparing stakeholders from mainstream and special schools (leaders, teachers, support staff, other professionals, learners, families) for the change process. This involved developing values, attitudes, beliefs and other personal qualities required for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Eighteen Agency member countries participated in the phase 2 peer-learning activities: Austria, Belgium (Flemish community), Belgium (French community), Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

The peer-learning approach

CROSP phase 2 followed a peer-learning approach. Based on existing methodologies (i.e. Andrews and Manning, 2015) and previous Agency work (i.e. Country Policy Review and Analysis; Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems), this engaged policy-makers with a shared professional focus and knowledge in pre-agreed activities and discussions with each other. It provided an opportunity to:

- **engage in a structured collaborative review process** – policy-makers were engaged in a process that involves a structure for framing the discussions and analysing the information gathered;
- **support innovation** – in this review process, policy-makers had the opportunity to compare their own policies with those developed by other countries, with the aim of identifying areas to improve in their inclusive education policies;
- **support countries in improving their policies** – the peer-learning approach involved developing project outputs that can help to improve inclusive education policies at national level.

The peer-learning approach had three interrelated aims:

- **A content-related aim**, including, as far as possible, systematic learning between countries. The goal was to go beyond information-sharing and provide a forum for reflecting on policy challenges. This offered a deeper understanding of the four thematic areas and insights into how policies and strategies are implemented to support the changing role of specialist provision. It also provided evidence on the effectiveness and efficiency of the respective policies and strategies.
- **A process-related aim**, including collaborative review and self-reflection. This allowed countries to learn from each other, by identifying the strengths and challenges of existing policies and strategies in changing the role of specialist provision towards inclusive education.
- **An outcome-related aim**, including developing a tool, and national-level dissemination and follow-up activities.

Project activities

Through the peer-learning approach, the countries learnt about policies, strategies and actions that support the changing role of specialist provision and policy development on inclusive education. Project participants gave and received feedback based on their own systems and knowledge from their peers.

Countries were asked to indicate their priority areas during an initial scoping meeting. Based on these priorities, country clusters were formed. The peer-learning approach

encompassed two rounds of workshops and two online meetings. A final conference with all Agency member countries took place in spring 2022.

Figure 2 shows all the project activities. They are also presented in more detail below.

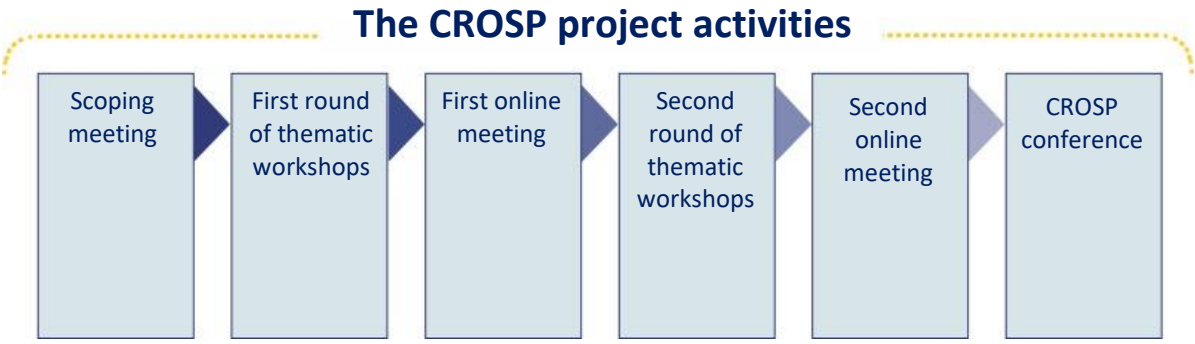


Figure 2. The CROSP project activities

Scoping meeting

Four working group discussions took place during a scoping meeting with Agency member country representatives. The aim was to clarify which concrete issues to prioritise in phase 2.

First round of workshops (2020)

The first round of workshops took place online in October 2020. It consisted of four thematic workshops addressing the four issues (governance, funding, capacity building, quality assurance) identified in phase 1. These issues were important topics or policy dimensions to be considered for changing the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education.

For each thematic area (governance, financing, capacity building and quality assurance), the first round of workshops identified the **policies and strategies** that effectively support the changing role of specialist provision towards inclusive education.

Countries provided information related to a set of questions, building on the discussions in the scoping meeting (set out in Annex 1). Questions were addressed to policy-makers, with input from local stakeholders involved in the practical implementation of the changing role of specialist provision.

At the end of the meeting, the countries collectively identified and highlighted effective policies and strategies.

The dialogic structure

With the aim of actively engaging all participants in the discussions, the workshops followed a dialogic structure approach.

Figure 3 illustrates how the first workshop was framed.

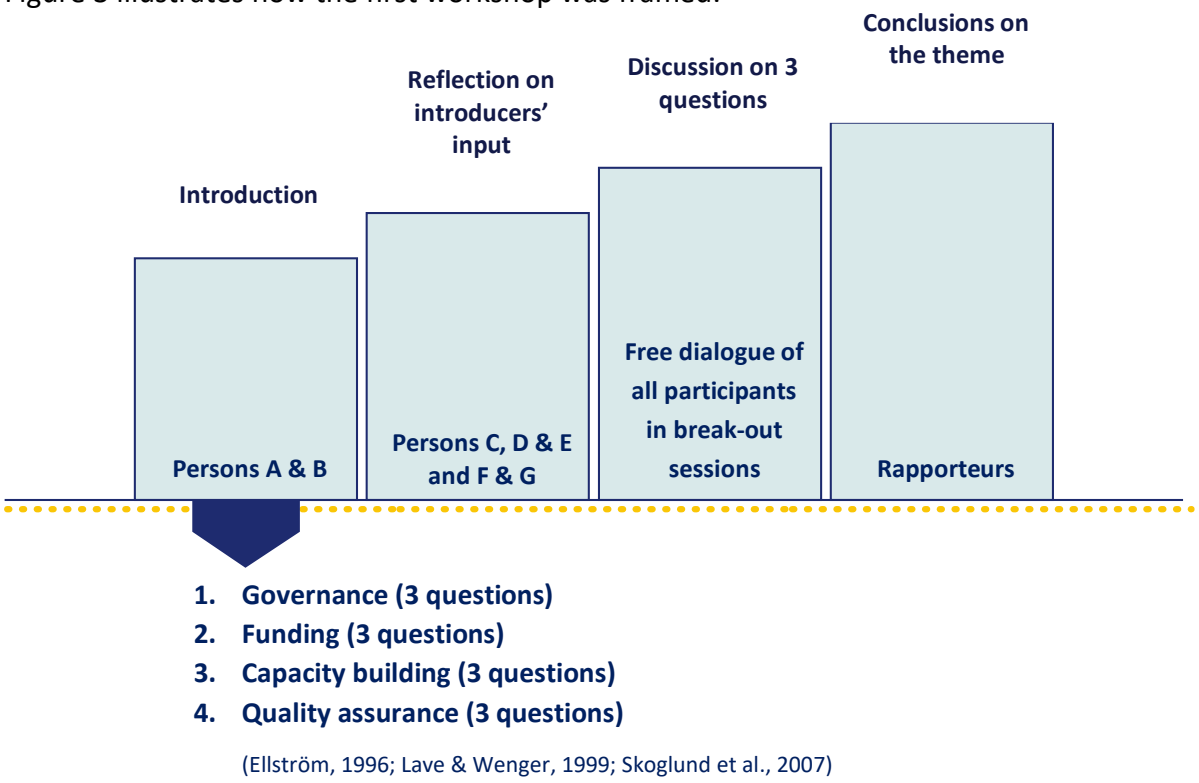


Figure 3. The dialogic structure of the CROSP workshops

As Figure 3 indicates, the workshop structure aimed to strengthen the peer-learning approach. Different participants took part in discussions on different topics, but both days followed the same structure and process. According to this, all participants were assigned a role. Beforehand, they were sent a detailed programme which asked them to identify their specific role in each of the online sessions. They were also encouraged to prepare in advance to respond to the thematic questions and contribute meaningfully to the discussions.

During the workshops, the country exchanges took the following form:

- For each thematic area, the session began with two participants (persons A & B) presenting for 10 minutes, each covering the three thematic questions.
- Three participants (persons C, D & E) then commented on each of the presentations and linked them to their own country experiences.
- Two more participants (persons F & G) reflected on what they heard and provided additional country-specific input.
- The whole group of participants then split into separate sessions to discuss the three thematic questions in more depth.

A formative evaluation of the CROSP peer-learning approach found that the dialogic structure offered a deeper understanding of the four thematic areas and insights into how different policies and strategies can support the changing role of specialist provision (European Agency, 2022b).

First online meeting

The CROSP project's peer-learning process continued through an online meeting, enabling participants to progress with the framework for developing the tool.

The CROSP tool aims to enable participants to develop a continuum of support for assisting the implementation of inclusive education. Online meetings served to **prepare the discussions for the second thematic workshop**. The online discussions were dedicated to the project's guiding principles, focusing on two main themes:

1. Re-orientation of special schools as resource centres
2. In-school provision and external support for mainstream settings.

The discussions targeted the different forms and roles of specialist provision that are relevant for countries, although they may be applied differently depending on the countries' stages of development.

Second round of workshops (2021)

The second round of workshops identified policy strategies/priorities and key actions for change to be embedded in the CROSP self-review tool. It also focused on the tool's design and dissemination (see Annex 2 for more details).

This meeting followed the same dialogic structure as the first thematic workshop, where all participants were assigned a role, engaged in a collaborative review and continued the peer-learning process.

Participants presented their own 'stories', experiences and journeys and discussed the following key question for each guiding principle:

> How can we translate the six agreed guiding principles (the **'why'**) into policy priorities/strategies (the **'what'**) and then into actions (the **'how'**)?
>
> - What are the enabling/success factors in this process?
> - What are the main challenges encountered in this process?
> - What are the main lessons learnt and plans for further development?

Second online meeting

In the second online meeting, participants gave feedback and shared their experiences of piloting the draft self-review tool at national level. This meeting also served to **prepare the discussions for the CROSP conference**.

CROSP conference

The CROSP project concluded with a conference held in Athens, Greece, on 18 May 2022. The conference aimed to enhance peer learning, focusing on the exchange of experiences among representatives from 31 countries. All country representatives engaged in an

informal peer-learning exercise where they reflected on using the CROSP tool at national, regional and/or local level.

Formative evaluation of the peer-learning approach

The CROSP project not only had a content objective with regard to the changing role of special provision, but also pursued the goal of methodically developing the peer-learning approach. Although this approach is well-established (see the Country Policy Review and Analysis and Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems activities), it requires specific adaptations for different contexts to have an optimal effect. Therefore, the implementation of the peer-learning approach in CROSP underwent formative evaluation (European Agency, 2022b).

The evaluation was designed to collect relevant information on the effectiveness of the chosen framework and procedures for peer learning and provide it to the CROSP team in a timely manner. The examination of the results and their discussion within the CROSP team led to immediate adjustments to subsequent project activities. Their effectiveness was evaluated (also comparatively). The chosen evaluation approach led to improved project management and contributed to continuous improvement.

The formative evaluation assessed whether peer engagements allowed for learning outcomes that can help countries (policy-makers, practitioners) achieve changes in the process of implementing specialist provision's new role in supporting inclusive education. It focused on:

- the benefit for countries and for the Agency;
- the appropriateness of the working procedures;
- means and strategies for implementing the peer-learning process, their strengths, weaknesses and ways forward.

The specific formative evaluation used in the CROSP project paid particular attention to further developing the peer-learning approach, with the longer-term goal of using it in future Agency projects.

The CROSP project lent itself to this further development, as its recurring exchange meetings allowed for the testing of different approaches with a survey on the respective effects. For example, based on the evaluation of the first workshop, there were changes to the workshop format. The evaluation of the second workshop then assessed the effectiveness of these changes. Likewise, the experience gained through implementing the first online meeting resulted in changes to the concept for the second online meeting; the formative evaluation showed the extent to which these changes led to improvements.

Similarly, during the CROSP conference – the last major project activity – participants gave positive feedback on its interactive nature and the alternatives to plenary formats. At the same time, the participants' answers and reactions during the conference showed a desire for greater freedom. For more information, see the CROSP formative evaluation report (European Agency, 2022b).

FINDINGS OF THE THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

During the thematic workshops, country representatives discussed effective national/regional/local policies and strategies, as well as common and country-specific challenges and possible ways forward to enable the change process.

The main findings of the overall discussions covered the following areas:

1. Changing mindsets and developing shared guiding principles
2. Supporting co-operation and creating networks
3. Professional training on inclusion
4. Whole-school approach and inclusive school leadership
5. Stakeholders' involvement
6. Monitoring and evaluation.

The following sections discuss these topic areas in more detail.

1. Changing mindsets and developing shared guiding principles

Countries agreed that legislation for inclusive education is important, but not always sufficient. Concrete policies and actions are needed in relation to changing attitudes and mindsets and promoting a right-based approach for the education of all learners. In all thematic workshops, participants highlighted the need to shift from a medical to a social approach to teaching and learning. This shift is considered essential to enable specialist provision to focus on barriers to teaching and learning and to support the development of a whole-school approach.

Countries also noted that funding and resources should be distinguished. Funding is still related to labelling, but there is a need to move away from the medical model. They suggested shifting from input-based funding (i.e. resources allocated to individual learners in need of intensive additional support) to throughput-based funding (i.e. resources

allocated to schools for vulnerable learners and not only for learners with special educational needs).

Participants asserted the importance of framing co-operation through mechanisms that influence attitudes and values. They agreed that it is always challenging to change established traditions. If a policy is poorly implemented, it has a negative impact on people's mindsets. For example, if mainstream schools fail to provide appropriate support and services, families may not support the idea of changing the role of specialist provision. Therefore, on-going multi-stakeholder dialogue on quality education for all is essential, to reach a consensus on the main guiding principles that should underpin education policy and reforms.

2. Supporting co-operation and creating networks

Participating countries emphasised the need to overcome gaps in co-operation that result from differences in language between stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision. A major first step towards reaching a common understanding is to build trust among stakeholders and establish a common language around inclusive education between different sectors. Previous Agency work has also highlighted these findings (European Agency, 2013; 2016a; 2016b; 2017a; 2017b).

Countries also emphasised network governance to support the shift in the role of specialist provision. This might include:

- co-operation among different ministries;
- the school co-operating with the education authorities, universities and practitioners;
- the education authorities co-operating with the family environment, in a family-centred approach;
- the school co-operating with different community services (i.e. guidance and service networks) that support inclusive education;
- the school co-operating with the social and health sectors.

Countries noted the importance of identifying different types of services and professionals, who can act as 'enablers'. This may include, for example, dedicated professionals responsible for liaising with support centres. Countries also noted the potential of local networks that can produce information, training, webinars, consultation, operating models and methods, research, literature and evidence-based materials to support different stakeholders.

3. Professional training on inclusion

Professionals from both mainstream and specialist provision need to be empowered to focus on developing accessible learning environments. A shared approach to inclusive education between stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision could be promoted through:

- new joint courses on inclusive education;

- networks and co-creation of processes;
- new tools and good practice guidelines to support stakeholders in their daily practice.

Many countries also highlighted that transferring specialists' knowledge can enable professionals in the mainstream sector to act inclusively. They emphasised the importance of co-teaching, multi-professional co-operation, data analysis to identify good practices, and school leaders' involvement.

Countries highlighted the importance of training in the field of inclusive education. Initial teacher education and in-service training could include inclusive education courses for both mainstream and specialist professionals, focusing on diversity issues. This reinforces a recurring finding from previous Agency work (European Agency, 2015b; 2019b).

4. Whole-school approach and inclusive school leadership

Countries discussed the issue of school autonomy and building the capacity of leadership teams. They emphasised the need to shift from support for the learner to support for the whole school in targeting barriers to teaching and learning. Participating countries connected the changing role of specialist provision with a school-development approach aiming to provide all learners with equal opportunities in terms of access, participation and achievement. This includes school autonomy to build the capacity of leadership teams and tools to develop inclusive school leadership; these are important components that relevant Agency work has recently stressed (European Agency, 2019c).

Here, the role of professionals from specialist provision is key in supporting mainstream schools to manage diversity and act as learning organisations that target barriers to teaching and learning.

Countries noted that reforms in this area can be challenging. However, they identified the following concrete success factors:

- Intensive communication between educational institutions
- Mutual values among various schools and inclusive institutions/resource centres
- Multi-disciplinary teams of professionals learning from each other
- Professional guidelines for inclusive leadership.

5. Stakeholders' involvement

Countries insisted on the need to listen to learners and families and to include their voices in the learning process. They outlined some key concepts in relation to stakeholder involvement:

- Learners are the main actors in the learning and teaching process.
- Families are a key resource in promoting learners' educational success.
- The learning and teaching process is optimised when families, schools and communities collaborate.

Countries agreed that COVID-19 has been a challenge, but also an opportunity to encourage stakeholders' involvement. In many countries, training courses on digital resources for families and learners were developed during the COVID pandemic, and could be continued.

Participants noted the challenge of maintaining levels of involvement, especially those of families. Their involvement tends to be high in pre-primary and primary levels and lower in secondary level. Therefore, generating an authentic educational community and a sense of belonging at all levels is essential. Countries emphasised the potential of bringing together the voices of different groups of stakeholders to 'think together' and to ensure agreement in the community and the wider society.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

Countries highlighted the importance of comprehensive monitoring systems. While countries may use different types of monitoring, they agree that more systematic use is needed. According to participants, quality assurance mechanisms should go beyond control and be an incentive to identify progress, indicators and standards to change mindsets. Quality assurance should focus on both specialist and mainstream provision and should give inspectors a different role, to act as 'advisors' and as enablers of improvement. Countries also noted that monitoring criteria and indicators should focus on the enabling effect of support provided. Moreover, they should be framed by an evidence-based policy, combining evaluation and research.

In short, they noted four key aspects of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system:

- Coherence of the sub-systems of monitoring (e.g. between self-evaluation and external evaluation)
- Agreement on meaningful indicators to monitor key education information, including the quality of teaching and learning, the risk of low achievement, and educational institutions' progress regarding strategic objectives.
- Several key stakeholders' increased knowledge and skills in data analysis and use, including families and learners themselves.
- Addressing issues of data management and use, including matters of privacy, ethics, and risk mitigation.

ANALYSIS OF THE THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

Further analysis of the thematic workshops' findings revealed several **guiding principles**, **policy priorities** and **strategies**, as well as **key actions** supporting the re-orientation of the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education.

The findings were organised into a wider framework including all the essential elements for the change process. This framework also built upon earlier research and previous Agency activities showing important factors and mechanisms behind the transformation of education systems.

Development of the CROSP framework

The first round of CROSP thematic workshops resulted in an **initial mapping of the policies/strategies**. The mapping was based on a grounded analysis (using a constructivist grounded theory approach) of the CROSP data sources, namely: the thematic workshop report, data from the 13 country questionnaires and input received prior to the workshops.

It used the following analytical steps:

1. After scrutinising the thematic workshop report, key data was identified and organised in an initial list. This included the main policies/strategies discussed for each issue (governance, funding, capacity building and quality assurance).
2. The data was further coded as: policy priorities; policies/strategies; critical factors/key drivers; methodological tools; policy actions ('**initial coding**'[1]).

[1] 'Initial coding' 'categorises and assigns meaning to the data, comparing incident-to-incident, labelling beginning patterns and beginning to look for comparisons between the codes' (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019, p. 5).

3. Based on their re-occurrence, the initial codes were merged into three main codes/themes: policy priorities, policies/strategies and key actions.
4. Data from the three main themes was mapped in a matrix according to the macro level, meso level and micro level (organisational level, staff level, learner/family level) ('**focused coding**'[2]).
5. Information from the country questionnaires was later added to the matrix data table ('**theoretical coding**'[3]).
6. Based on the data patterns identified in the matrix, some broad categories were produced.

These broad categories constituted the **draft guiding principles** of the CROSP framework. The agency of the CROSP participants (Project Advisory Group members, country representatives) was considered key in co-constructing the guiding principles. As such, these draft guiding principles formed the basis for the subsequent discussions in the online meeting and in the second round of thematic workshops.

The final CROSP framework included:

- **guiding principles**;
- **policy priorities** and **strategies**;
- **key actions**.

These are described in more detail below.

Guiding principles

Guiding principles are overarching principles that underpin the implementation of policies and strategies and stakeholders' ability to implement inclusive education on a daily basis.

They can be seen as **umbrella themes** closely linked to the changing role of specialist provision. They provide stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision with a shared vision of the role of specialist provision, thus supporting co-operation.

Six mutually complementary guiding principles constitute the overall CROSP framework:

Guiding principle 1: Developing a shared commitment to inclusive education

All stakeholders should develop common values and a shared commitment to providing all learners with high-quality learning opportunities in mainstream settings. Specialist provision for learners who need support should build upon a socio-pedagogical approach, not a medical one.

[2] 'Focused coding' builds on the initial coding phase. Intermediate/focused coding 'begins to transform basic data into more abstract concepts allowing the theory to emerge from the data' (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 5).

[3] 'Theoretical coding' is where 'additional information is sought to saturate categories under development. The analysis identifies relationships, highlights gaps in the existing data set and may reveal insight into what is not yet known' (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 5).

Guiding principle 2: Promoting knowledge exchange and acquiring inclusive competences through co-operation and networking

Decision-makers and education professionals from both the mainstream and specialist sectors should exchange knowledge through collaboration at all educational levels, as well as local/regional/national levels.

Guiding principle 3: Providing continuous professional learning on inclusion

Continuous learning opportunities should be provided to all staff from specialist and mainstream provision, including those with leadership roles (i.e. aiming to instil inclusive skills and competences).

Guiding principle 4: Supporting inclusive school leadership and management

A universal design approach to teaching and learning should act as a resource and underpin the work of professionals with leadership roles from both the mainstream and specialist sectors.

Guiding principle 5: Encouraging stakeholders' active involvement

Families, learners and other community stakeholders should be supported to participate actively in the learning and teaching process.

Guiding principle 6: Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation

All staff from specialist and mainstream provision should work towards a whole-school approach focusing on barriers to and facilitators of teaching and learning.

It is worth noting that the CROSP guiding principles align with the Agency's recent Key Principles that support policy development and implementation in line with a broader view of inclusion (European Agency, 2021). Specifically:

Guiding principle 1, 'Shared commitment to inclusive education', is connected to the Agency's overarching key principle: 'Within legislation and policy, there must be a clear concept of equitable high-quality inclusive education, agreed with stakeholders' (ibid., p. 12). It is also directly linked to the call for operational strategies 'to develop specialist provision to support all learners and increase the capacity of mainstream schools' (ibid., p. 24).

Guiding principle 2, 'Knowledge exchange through co-operation and networking', reiterates the Agency's call for effective structures and processes 'to enable collaboration and effective communication at all levels' (ibid., p. 20) and 'to facilitate co-operation between schools, parents and members of the community' (ibid., p. 22).

Guiding principle 3, 'Continuous professional learning on inclusion', is linked to the stated requirement for a 'continuum of teacher professional learning … that develops areas of [inclusive] competence in all teachers' (ibid., p. 17).

Guiding principle 4, 'Supporting inclusive school leadership and management', is connected to the operational element that highlights 'school leaders' role in addressing inequity and building community in a culture where diversity is valued' (ibid., p. 25).

Guiding principle 5, 'Encouraging stakeholders' active involvement', is linked to the Agency's call for effective governance plans that trust local stakeholders 'to act in learners' best interests and to collaborate for the benefit of all' (ibid., p. 15).

Guiding principle 6, 'Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation', is directly linked to the general principle of 'quality assurance and accountability' and the specific focus on data/information collection 'as an evidence base to develop inclusive educational policy' (ibid., p. 23).

It becomes clear that the CROSP work provides additional evidence for the Agency's Key Principles, placing particular emphasis and a stronger focus on the six main thematic areas:

Figure 4. The CROSP guiding principles

Policy priorities and strategies

Each guiding principle is connected to policy priorities and strategies that countries identified as effective practices during the workshops.

Policy priorities and strategies refer to the **long-term aims** for policies to pursue regarding the changing role of specialist provision.

Each guiding principle comprises some main policy priorities and strategies that support the changing role of specialist provision and complement each other. Countries see these policy priorities and strategies as fundamental for meeting the values expressed in the guiding principles.

Key actions

Each policy priority and strategy can be broken down into key actions, as **examples of effective implementation** of the associated policies and strategies. These cover issues of **funding**, **governance**, **capacity building** and **quality assurance** that enable stakeholders to implement the policies and strategies they refer to.

Each policy priority and strategy consists of a few key actions that complement each other by considering:

- What should be done
- How it should be done
- How to check effectiveness.

As Figure 5 shows, each guiding principle refers to several policy priorities and strategies and to several key actions, to be considered holistically.

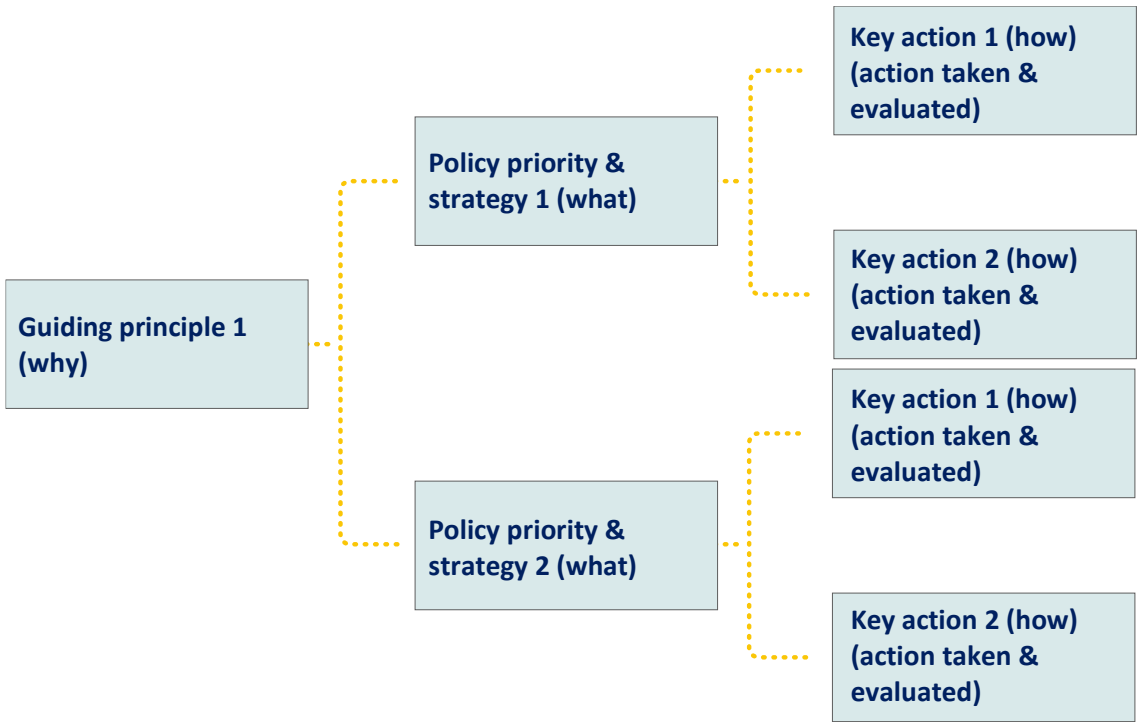


Figure 5. Connections between guiding principles, policy priorities/strategies and key actions

A ROADMAP FOR CHANGING THE ROLE OF SPECIALIST PROVISION

The CROSP framework was the basis for developing a **roadmap for changing the role of specialist provision**. This roadmap provides a holistic overview of policy priorities and strategies as well as the major steps or milestones for effective implementation.

It particularly aims to:

- help countries to assess/monitor their own situations by identifying strengths and weaknesses and where they are in their journeys towards changing the role of specialist provision;
- support countries to define policy areas that need further development and next steps to be taken, along with the responsibilities of all stakeholders.

Overall, this roadmap connects the 6 guiding principles with 17 policy priorities and strategies, along with some examples of effective implementation (i.e. 51 indicative key actions that the countries identified). The CROSP self-review tool includes these in the form of self-reflective questions (European Agency, 2022a).

The main guiding principles, policy priorities/strategies and some indicative key actions are presented below.

Guiding principle 1: Developing a shared commitment to inclusive education

Policy priority/strategy 1.1: There is a shared commitment to inclusive education supported by a political will to encourage long-term change

Example of effective implementation: Setting up cross-ministerial bodies supporting long-term change towards inclusive education

Policy priority/strategy 1.2: National policies include a shared commitment to inclusive education supported by a human rights-based approach

Example of effective implementation: Developing indicators showing evidence of implementation of the socio-pedagogical approach

Policy priority/strategy 1.3: There are policies and strategies in place promoting a common understanding of inclusive education between the mainstream and specialist sectors

Example of effective implementation: Setting up collaborative dialogue arenas for stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision

Guiding principle 2: Promoting knowledge exchange and acquiring inclusive competences through co-operation and networking

Policy priority/strategy 2.1: Policies and strategies support knowledge-sharing through the development of professional learning communities

Example of effective implementation: Clearly defining all stakeholders' complementary tasks and roles

Policy priority/strategy 2.2: The transformation of special schools into resource centres ensures knowledge exchange between professionals in the specialist and mainstream sectors

Example of effective implementation: Developing measures that encourage professionals from specialist provision to share their knowledge and competences in mainstream settings

Policy priority/strategy 2.3: Provision of continuum of support by professionals allows mainstream professionals, families and learners to acquire inclusive competences

Example of effective implementation: Developing indicators to assess the quality of the continuum of support provided

Guiding principle 3: Providing continuous professional learning on inclusion

Policy priority/strategy 3.1: Professional learning opportunities promote a common language on inclusion for all learners

Example of effective implementation: Developing measures to ensure joint training/courses for professionals from the mainstream and specialist sectors

Policy priority/strategy 3.2: Professionals from the mainstream and specialist sectors are equipped with appropriate competences/skills, qualifications and tools to work with diverse groups

Example of effective implementation: Embedding inclusive pedagogy principles in the professional learning of beginning and experienced teachers from both the mainstream and specialist sectors

Policy priority/strategy 3.3: Linking professional learning opportunities for teachers from the mainstream and specialist sectors

Example of effective implementation: Developing programmes to build bridges between specialist provision and mainstream education

Guiding principle 4: Supporting inclusive school leadership and management

Policy priority/strategy 4.1: School leaders promote an inclusive vision, including mutual values, a common language and understanding, and a holistic approach

Example of effective implementation: Developing leaders' training programmes based on a whole-school approach

Policy priority/strategy 4.2: Ensuring capabilities and confidence of school leadership from both the mainstream and specialist sectors to support inclusive education

Example of effective implementation: Providing leadership teams with the necessary level of autonomy to implement inclusive education

Policy priority/strategy 4.3: School leadership and management support inclusive education through collaboration

Example of effective implementation: School leadership and management promoting continuous collaboration and communication between schools, community services, training providers, etc.

Guiding principle 5: Encouraging stakeholders' active involvement

Policy priority/strategy 5.1: There are comprehensive national policies and strategies in place that have been developed following a broad consultation with all stakeholders, with clear political vision and will

Example of effective implementation: Ensuring the same level of involvement by all stakeholders across all educational levels

Policy priority/strategy 5.2: Policy ensures that learners and families are the main actors and are considered a key resource in the learning and teaching process

Example of effective implementation: Providing equitable participation opportunities for all families/learners from different backgrounds in both the mainstream and specialist sectors (e.g. families and learners participating in designing individual education plans)

Guiding principle 6: Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation

Policy priority/strategy 6.1: There are national indicators of quality inclusive education that consider local variation, the diversity of learners' needs and the role of specialist provision

Example of effective implementation: Developing a systematic means of data collection for inclusive education purposes

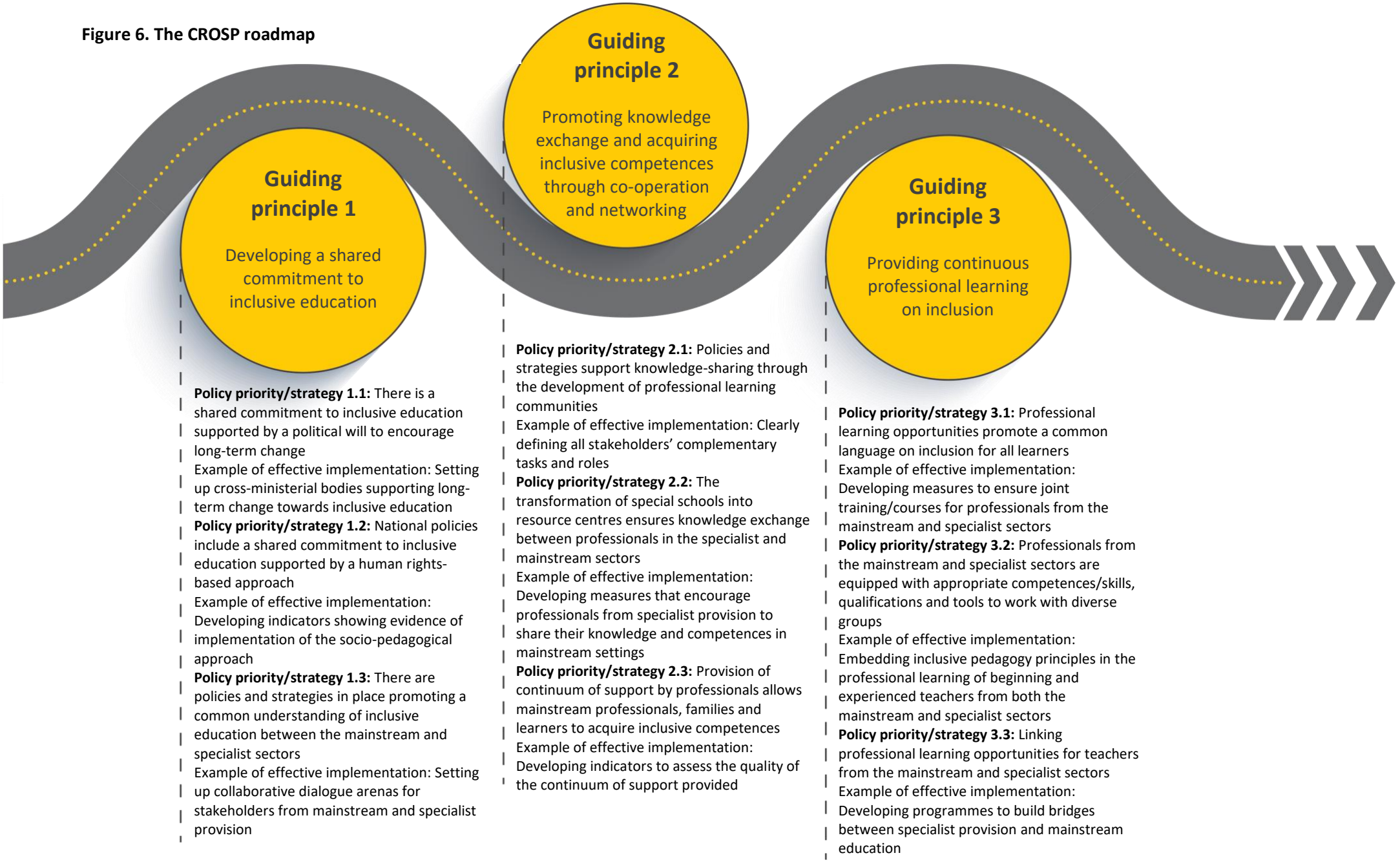
Policy priority/strategy 6.2: There are co-operative structures/processes in place for monitoring and evaluation

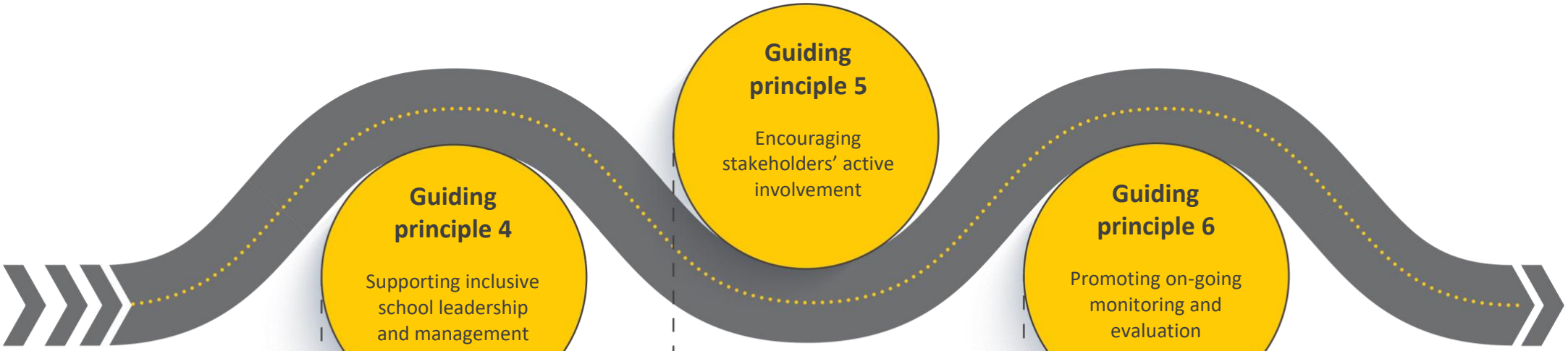
Example of effective implementation: Promoting effective co-operation between the school and the education authorities and universities for data monitoring and use

Policy priority/strategy 6.3: There is a comprehensive system for monitoring how specialist provision supports the mainstream sector in implementing inclusive education (covering the sub-systems of internal and external evaluation)

Example of effective implementation: Developing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that focus on barriers to and facilitators of teaching and learning

Figure 6. The CROSP roadmap





Guiding principle 4

Supporting inclusive school leadership and management

Policy priority/strategy 4.1: School leaders promote an inclusive vision, including mutual values, a common language and understanding, and a holistic approach
Example of effective implementation: Developing leaders' training programmes based on a whole-school approach
Policy priority/strategy 4.2: Ensuring capabilities and confidence of school leadership from both the mainstream and specialist sectors to support inclusive education
Example of effective implementation: Providing leadership teams with the necessary level of autonomy to implement inclusive education
Policy priority/strategy 4.3: School leadership and management support inclusive education through collaboration
Example of effective implementation: School leadership and management promoting continuous collaboration and communication between schools, community services, training providers, etc.

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Guiding principle 6

Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation

Policy priority/strategy 6.1: There are national indicators of quality inclusive education that consider local variation, the diversity of learners' needs and the role of specialist provision
Example of effective implementation: Developing a systematic means of data collection for inclusive education purposes
Policy priority/strategy 6.2: There are co-operative structures/processes in place for monitoring and evaluation
Example of effective implementation: Promoting effective co-operation between the school and the educational authorities and universities for data monitoring and use
Policy priority/strategy 6.3: There is a comprehensive system for monitoring how specialist provision supports the mainstream sector in implementing inclusive education (covering the sub-systems of internal and external evaluation)
Example of effective implementation: Developing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that focus on barriers to and facilitators of teaching and learning

The CROSP self-review tool

The tool's aims

The CROSP self-review tool (European Agency, 2022a) aims to improve the development of inclusive education systems. It builds upon the strengths and weaknesses of the support that specialist provision provides to mainstream schools for implementing inclusive education for all learners.

The tool is for policy-makers at national/regional/local level, as well as decision-makers and professionals at school level. It aims to enable them to reflect and develop a continuum of support for inclusive education by:

- supporting them to map where they are in their journeys towards changing the role of specialist provision, through in-depth self-reflective questions;
- identifying next steps for changing the role of specialist provision;
- encouraging quality development of the changing role of specialist provision to support inclusive education.

The tool's development

The CROSP team undertook a **five-step analysis** of the thematic workshops. This process led to the development of the draft tool.

The process was in line with the steps in the project methodological framework:

- Step 1: Initial mapping of the policies/strategies (see the section on 'Development of the CROSP framework' for more details)
- Step 2: Exploring the tool's content
- Step 3: Using the online platform for further reflection/analysis
- Step 4: Drafting the tool
- Step 5: Piloting.

CROSP team members worked in pairs on two policy priorities/strategies and key actions, using the two thematic workshop reports and flip chart data from the online platform and from the second round of thematic workshops.

The whole team then collectively reviewed each item of the tool developed by each pair ('member checking').

Piloting process

Eight participating countries (Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Germany, Malta, Portugal, Sweden) piloted the tool. The piloting had two aims:

1. To test whether the tool fits the task of a policy-maker, i.e. assess its usability

2. To test the tool's use in a workshop with practitioners.

The process of collecting feedback started with a dedicated meeting with the Project Advisory Group and ended with the CROSP conference (June 2022).

The respective country representatives held workshops with colleagues/policy-makers from the ministries of education and/or involved practitioners.

In the workshops, participants collected feedback (suggestions for rephrasing, adding/deleting items) on specific questions. Practitioners from the mainstream and the specialist sectors (from education, health and welfare) were also involved in the process.

In the piloting discussions, participants responded to the following general questions:

- Is the tool's purpose clear?
- To what extent is the tool easy to use?
- To what extent is it meaningful/relevant to you?
- To what extent could it support discussions at national level?
- To what extent does it provide useful information towards the changing role of specialist provision?
- To what extent does it meet the intended aims?

The tool was adjusted and improved according to the feedback received.

The tool's content

The tool invites policy-makers to respond to a set of reflective questions that are based on specific policy priorities/strategies, as well as key actions needed to support the changing role of specialist provision.

It comprises a set of questions that a multi-disciplinary team should answer. The team should include policy-makers and/or other professionals from mainstream and specialist provision. The tool can serve to support national-level discussions on the changing role of specialist provision to support inclusive education.

Each question can be mapped into a four-level scale of implementation:

0. **Not yet** – Key policies and actions are not being considered yet
1. **Planned** – There is a plan/idea, but implementation has not started yet
2. **Partially in place** – Implementation has started, but needs greater coverage and higher quality
3. **In place** – Implementation is of high quality, widespread and consistent.

The **Comments** column is for any evaluative comment that refers to the quality of implementation of the key policies and actions or any other evidence available (including any information around monitoring and evaluation, evidence-based data, etc.).

Discussion of the responses: After collectively answering the set of questions, the national team engages in a discussion, aiming to identify necessary policy priorities/strategies/key

actions that are in place, might be missing and/or need improvement and further development.

How to use the tool

The CROSP tool can be used as a resource for initiating or continuing an on-going process of supporting the changing role of specialist provision.

It may be seen by countries as a stimulus to collectively define shared values, common language, strategies and actions, expected outcomes, and implementation plans. The tool enables cross-national co-operation, with different countries acting as 'critical friends' to each other. It also supports a collective capacity-building process by permitting knowledge transfer among users to collectively solve problems, and connecting quality assurance with capacity-building issues (develop training opportunities, skills and capacities required, etc.)

The tool is an **open-source document**. Countries can build upon it to validate it and adapt it to their national contexts. It is important to treat the tool as an evolving instrument. Countries are encouraged to:

- translate the issues, definitions and items into national educational realities;
- co-operate and form networks in practice at cross-ministerial, cross-territorial and cross-professional level;
- use the tool as a means to ensure stakeholders' engagement in the changing role of specialist provision.

FINAL REMARKS

The CROSP project's overall aim was to identify and analyse challenges and opportunities within countries' policy and practice that influence the re-organisation and reform of specialist provision towards inclusive education for all learners. The project provided the background knowledge and suggested an overarching framework towards this goal.

Phase 1 mapped past and current trends and situations in countries in relation to specialist provision, as well as perceived future trends (i.e. desk research).

Phase 2 identified effective policies and strategies for improving the changing role of specialist provision in implementing inclusive education. It particularly responded to the following questions:

- Which policies and strategies can be developed to support the transformation of specialist provision into a resource for mainstream (funding, capacity building, governance and quality assurance)?
- How can co-operation mechanisms between the specialist and mainstream sectors that enable school stakeholders to implement inclusive education be promoted?
- Which skills and methodologies are required for specialist provision to be a resource?

The roadmap that was developed includes an indicative **list of effective policies, strategies and co-operation mechanisms, as well as methodologies and concrete actions** that are considered essential for initiating or continuing the on-going process of changing the role of specialist provision. It is recognised that each country's journey towards re-organising specialist provision may follow a different path. However, all countries should consider it a **phased, on-going process that follows the same principles** and the same key goal of providing high-quality education to all learners.

It is hoped that the CROSP self-review tool (European Agency, 2022a) – the project's main output – will be further adapted and validated for use in national contexts and will help countries in their efforts to develop more inclusive education systems.

ANNEX 1: BACKGROUND NOTE FOR THE FIRST ROUND OF THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

Introduction

This questionnaire provides a framework for all countries to contribute meaningfully to the first round of thematic workshops for phase 2 of the CROSP project.

Countries are asked to prepare for the first round of workshops by providing updated information in response to a set of questions. These questions relate to the four main issues that phase 1 identified as vital in changing the role of specialist provision to a resource for supporting mainstream education. Specifically, they arise from the main points countries raised during the CROSP scoping meeting in November 2019.

Questions will be answered by **policy-makers**, with input from **local stakeholders** involved in the practical implementation of the changing role of specialist provision. Countries are asked to discuss common and country-specific challenges, failures, experiences and possible areas for improvement. Countries are also asked to provide any available evidence on the effectiveness and the efficiency of any national/regional/local policies and strategies discussed.

Terminology

Specialist provision

In this project, specialist provision covers different types of specialist provision services, specifically:

- in-school provision, which ensures assistance to learners who are in mainstream classrooms, or partially out of mainstream classrooms (special classes, units, programmes, inclusion classes and parallel support, i.e. one-to-one provision by specialised staff);
- external provision to schools aiming to empower them to act inclusively (resource centres, networks of special schools, networks of mainstream and special schools);
- external provision to schools through individualised support for learners enrolled in mainstream settings (physiotherapists, speech therapists) with the support of education, health or welfare authorities;
- external provision to learners, such as special schools dedicated to learners requiring intensive support, under the responsibility of education, health or welfare authorities.

Stakeholders

The term 'stakeholders' refers to policy-makers, education professionals, school leaders, learners/peers, families and the community.

Issues

Phase 1 identified four main issues/focus areas: governance, funding, capacity building, quality assurance. These are important topics or policy dimensions to be considered for changing the role of specialist provision in supporting inclusive education.

Critical factors

The four issues are linked to a number of critical factors that determine the changing role of specialist provision. For example, the level of school autonomy is a critical factor that directly and significantly affects the way schools use specialist services.

Key drivers

The factors are, in turn, linked to key drivers for changing the role of specialist provision to support inclusive education. For example, a school's organisational flexibility is a key driver for improving the way specialists collaborate with mainstream teachers.

Questions

Thematic area: Governance

In this project, governance mechanisms refer to the structures and processes that are designed to ensure the education system's accountability, transparency and responsiveness. These can include, for example, building networks within and outside schools, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, assessment approaches (pedagogical versus diagnostic model of assessment), etc.

The phase 1 outcomes indicated that countries connect governance issues with the ability of professionals from specialist provision to:

- commit to inclusive education;
- support co-operation at all levels (cross-sectoral, cross-professional, inter-ministerial, etc.);
- provide flexible and supportive advice, guidance and support services (CROSP phase 1 synthesis report (European Agency, 2019a)).

Three specific questions to be answered before the first workshop will address these dimensions:

Question 1: How do governance mechanisms encourage specialist provision to support inclusive education? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds several critical factors that countries emphasised during the scoping meeting. In particular, countries stressed the need for:

- the legal framework to support the commitment of stakeholders (school leaders, professionals from specialist provision, etc.) to promote the transformation process through policy clarity and adjusting to schools' needs;
- existing governance mechanisms to support autonomy and flexibility of both mainstream and specialist provision, to set up networks facilitating the transition from specialist to mainstream provision;
- existing steering and guidance mechanisms to reduce territorial disparities;
- existing governance mechanisms to support different groups of stakeholders and promote adequate support structures.

Question 2: How do governance mechanisms support co-operation among stakeholders from specialist and mainstream provision (i.e. policy-makers, professionals, learners, peers, family, community)? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds several critical factors that countries emphasised during the scoping meeting. In particular:

- the ability of governance mechanisms to clearly define roles and responsibilities at ministerial level (e.g. inter-ministerial co-operation, co-operation between education, health and social sectors), at regional level and at school level (clarity of teachers', special teachers' and assistants' responsibilities, etc.);
- the ability of governance mechanisms to support horizontal, vertical and cross-professional co-operation, and the involvement of families and community agencies;
- the re-definition of professional domains, responsibilities and mandates of specialist provision professionals and of inspectorates in relation to inclusive education.

Question 3: How do governance mechanisms support the development of attitudes, skills and competences of professionals in specialist provision to support inclusive education? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds several critical factors that countries emphasised during the scoping meeting. In particular:

- the ability of governance mechanisms (i.e. steering, guidance) to ensure professionals' commitment to supporting the system as a whole;
- the ability of governance mechanisms to develop inclusive attitudes, skills and competences among professionals;
- the ability of governance mechanisms (i.e. steering, guidance) to support the efficient management, administrative capacity and cost-effectiveness of specialist provision;
- the ability of governance mechanisms (i.e. steering, guidance) to improve the quality of the support provided.

Thematic area: Funding

In this project, the term 'funding' refers to resource allocation mechanisms (financial, human, technical, etc.) that promote inclusion.

Countries connect funding issues with:

- the resource allocation criteria and their ability to support the changing role of specialist provision;
- the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the support provided;

- the appropriateness of resource allocation mechanisms (CROSP phase 1 synthesis report (European Agency, 2019a)).

Three specific questions to be answered before the first workshop will address these dimensions:

Question 1: How do resource allocation mechanisms encourage services to focus on inclusive education? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds critical factors that countries emphasised relating to the need for:

- equitable distribution of means among territories: enabling stakeholders (municipalities, agencies, mainstream and specialist provision) to take responsibility;
- transparency and clarity in funding (how it is done/who pays for what);
- long-term financing opportunities and unconditional basic facilities;
- ensuring financing is available and ring-fenced for inclusion;
- a shift from labelling-based funding to funding based on early intervention for all that adequately combines reasonable accommodation and universal design issues;
- tools for developing appropriate resource allocation mechanisms focusing on preventive/intervention measures;
- adapting resource allocation mechanisms to stakeholders' needs.

Question 2: How do resource allocation mechanisms enable co-operation between specialist and mainstream provision? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds critical factors that countries emphasised relating to the need for:

- funding mechanisms supporting co-operation and synergies among stakeholders at all levels, which may include flexibility issues, mixed funding, etc.;
- connecting funding of specialist provision with capacity-building issues and assessment procedures focusing on learning;
- funding administrative staff and qualifying for co-ordination tasks.

Question 3: How do resource allocation mechanisms encourage effective and flexible support systems? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds critical factors that countries emphasised relating to the need to:

- support project-based funding;
- encourage autonomy of specialist provision at school or service level;
- encourage resource centres to provide more outreach support to schools;
- improve schools' access to guidance, counselling and other services.

Thematic area: Capacity building

In this project, the term 'capacity building' refers to processes for developing and strengthening professionals' attitudes, skills and abilities. It also considers the support and resources that educational organisations and communities require to develop the necessary working procedures for inclusive education.

Countries connect capacity-building issues with specialist provision's ability to:

- support co-operation among stakeholders;
- support high-quality advice and guidance work;
- strengthen professionals' abilities in their changing role (CROSP phase 1 synthesis report (European Agency, 2019a)).

Three specific questions to be answered before the first workshop will address these dimensions:

Question 1: How do capacity-building mechanisms support co-operation between stakeholders in specialist and mainstream provision? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds the critical factors that countries emphasised relating to the need for:

- knowledge transfer between specialists and mainstream teachers;
- joint training opportunities for all professionals involved (i.e. teachers with other professionals, etc.) to develop shared values, knowledge and experiences.

Question 2: How do capacity-building mechanisms support high-quality advice and guidance services? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds the critical factors that countries emphasised relating to the need to:

- develop effective accessibility planning in mainstream schools;
- strengthen the skills and competences of specialist provision professionals at all levels to increase the accessibility of services and the quality of advice and counselling services focusing on the whole system, and to prevent fear of losing jobs/roles/competences;
- ensure high-quality initial and continuing professional development (CPD) training opportunities for specialist provision professionals focusing on inclusive education (school team training, improving initial training by introducing courses in inclusive education or internship opportunities, encouraging a whole-school approach to CPD).

Question 3: How do capacity-building mechanisms support the development of professionals' attitudes, skills and competences? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question includes critical factors that countries emphasised relating to the need to:

- support school/service leaders and professionals from specialist provision to encourage inclusive leadership;
- develop training courses enabling professionals to change mindsets and attitudes and to focus on early and preventive support.

Thematic area: Quality assurance

In this project, the term 'quality assurance' refers to the policies, procedures and practices designed to achieve, maintain and enhance quality in inclusive education. It also examines how educational organisations account for their activities, accept responsibility for them and share information about their results openly and transparently.

According to the phase 1 outcomes, countries connect quality assurance issues with:

- developing accountable support systems;
- monitoring mechanisms encouraging the development of a whole-school approach;
- supporting specialist provision professionals in their changing role (CROSP phase 1 synthesis report (European Agency, 2019a)).

Three specific questions to be answered before the first workshop will address these dimensions:

Question 1: How do monitoring mechanisms ensure the accountability and efficiency of support systems? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds critical factors that countries emphasised relating to the need to:

- develop specific accountability mechanisms for specialist provision through evidence-based policies (i.e. progress evaluation, efficiency and cost-effectiveness analysis, quality indicators, evaluation criteria);
- ensure that system-/person-/outcome-related evaluation results are communicated back into the loop to make required changes;
- connect funding to the quality of support provided;
- link accountability to the amount of resources;
- develop external evaluation and more national-level research on inclusive education.

Question 2: How do monitoring and support mechanisms encourage the development of a whole-school approach focusing on barriers and facilitators of inclusion? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds the critical factors that countries emphasised relating to the need to:

- develop indicators for monitoring inclusion at all levels;
- improve monitoring processes and achievement progress (academic, social, etc.);
- develop basic criteria for supporting inclusive education in schools;
- assess different stakeholders' contributions to schoolwork.

Question 3: Which quality assurance mechanisms should be developed to support the changing role of professionals in specialist provision? Challenges and areas for improvement.

This question embeds critical factors that countries emphasised relating to the need to:

- develop self-evaluation mechanisms for specialist provision at all levels;
- develop basic criteria for supporting inclusive education in schools;
- use inspections for quality control and quality development, including the use of good practice;
- evaluate support methods for meeting learners' differences;
- evaluate collaboration between professionals.

ANNEX 2: BACKGROUND NOTE FOR THE SECOND ROUND OF THEMATIC WORKSHOPS

Introduction

The peer-learning process of the CROSP project will continue in the second thematic workshop meeting, enabling participants to progress with the framework for developing the tool.

The aim of the CROSP tool is to enable participants to develop a continuum of support for assisting the implementation of inclusive education.

The CROSP tool could have a dual role:

- To provide a roadmap of alternative steps/possibilities for changing the role of specialist provision
- To provide in-depth self-reflective questions helping countries to assess/monitor their own situations.

In line with the methodological framework and the main outcomes of the first thematic workshop, this meeting aims to discuss: How we can translate the six agreed guiding principles – the 'why' → into policy priorities/strategies – the 'what' and then → into actions – the 'how'.

Background

According to the CROSP phase 1 mapping analysis exercise, the term 'specialist provision' includes:

- **in-school provision**, which supports learners who are in mainstream classrooms, or partially out of mainstream classrooms (in special classes, units, programmes, inclusion classes, and parallel support, i.e. one-to-one provision by specialised staff);
- **external support**, where specialised consultancy centres provide external support to mainstream schools and teachers, or health or welfare authorities provide direct support services to learners;
- **special schools**, which educate learners who require intensive support.

In line with the discussion in the first thematic workshop, the CROSP framework for analysis includes the guiding principles, the policy priorities and strategies as well as the key actions that frame the CROSP tool.

Guiding principles

Guiding principles are overarching principles underpinning the implementation of policies and strategies and stakeholders' ability to implement inclusive education on a daily basis.

They can be seen as **umbrella themes** closely linked to the changing role of specialist provision and providing stakeholders from mainstream and specialist provision with a shared vision of the role of specialist provision, thus supporting co-operation.

Initial analysis of the first thematic workshop report identified the following draft guiding principles:

1. **Developing shared values and changing mindsets**: All stakeholders should develop shared values and a shared commitment to providing all learners with high-quality learning opportunities in mainstream settings. Specialist provision provided to learners in need of support should build upon a socio-pedagogical approach, instead of a medical approach. A key role of specialist provision is therefore to promote inclusive education by giving priority to prevention and intervention measures, instead of compensation measures.
2. **Focusing on collaboration and networking**: A key role of specialist provision is to promote knowledge transfer through collaboration among all staff (use of peer learning, co-teaching), as well as co-operation with the wider school.
3. **Investing in professional training on inclusion**: A key role of specialist provision is to provide continuous learning opportunities for all staff, including those with leadership roles.

4. **Supporting inclusive school leadership and management**: A key role of specialist provision is to support a universal design approach to teaching and learning by acting as a resource for stakeholders from mainstream settings, including those with leadership roles.
5. **Encouraging stakeholders' active involvement**: A key role of specialist provision is to enable families and learners to participate actively in the learning and teaching process.
6. **Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation**: A key role of specialist provision is to enable stakeholders from mainstream settings to promote a whole-school approach focusing on barriers and facilitators to teaching and learning.

This meeting will follow the same dialogic structure as the first thematic workshop and all participants will be assigned a role. In line with the methodological framework and the main findings of the first thematic workshop, participants will engage in a collaborative review and continue the peer-learning process.

Participants should come prepared to present their own 'stories', experiences and journeys and discuss the following key question per principle:

How we can translate the six agreed guiding principles – the 'why' – → into policy priorities/strategies – the 'what' – and then → into actions – the 'how'.

- What are the enabling/success factors in this process?
- What are the main challenges encountered in this process?
- What are the main lessons learnt and plans for further development?

Virtual flip chart

How can we translate the guiding principles (why) into policy priorities/strategies (what) and then into actions (how)?

Table 1. Enabling factors and main challenges

Guiding principles	Enabling/success factors	Main challenges
Developing shared values and changing mindsets		
Focusing on collaboration and networking		
Investing in professional training on inclusion		
Supporting inclusive school leadership and management		
Encouraging stakeholders' involvement		
Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation		

Table 2. Lessons learnt and plans for further development

Guiding principles	Lessons learnt	Plans for further development
Developing shared values and changing mindsets		
Focusing on collaboration and networking		
Investing in professional training on inclusion		
Supporting inclusive school leadership and management		
Encouraging stakeholders' involvement		
Promoting on-going monitoring and evaluation		

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