COMBATTING DISPARITIES IN ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL, ITALY AND SPAIN

TSI2022-EUROCH-IBA (101100120)

Deliverable 3.1

Report on stakeholder consultation meetings in three project countries

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The project is funded by the European Union through the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, in co-operation with the European Commission

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List of abbreviations

Agency	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
CPD	Continuing professional development
DG REFORM	The Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support
DoA	Description of the Action
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PLA	Peer Learning Activity
SC	Project Steering Committee
SPSM	The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools
TSI	Technical Support Instrument

INTRODUCTION

This document constitutes the report on the Deliverable 3.1 Stakeholder consultation meetings in three project countries, to discuss ways of improving the functioning of the systems, to share experience and shape the proposed recommendations.

The report has been prepared by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (hereafter the Agency) in the framework of the implementation of the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) EUROCH project, funded by the European Union through the TSI and implemented by the Agency, in co-operation with the European Commission Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM).

The TSI EUROCH project aims to support Italy, Portugal and Spain in their on-going efforts to improve their inclusive education systems and practices. A key focus is consistency in policy implementation at national and regional level to ensure high quality inclusive education across each country. The project aims to bring about sustainable change to strengthen both the design and capacity within country systems.

The project has drawn on comprehensive stakeholder engagement to discuss ways to improve inclusive practice, to share experiences and shape recommendations through a combination of online and in person meetings and peer learning activities.

The methodology for this Project was built on five distinct but linked phases, each one in relation to, and based upon the cumulative findings and outcomes from the previous phases. Phase 1 concluded with two country reports for Italy and Spain, as well as a report on and overview of inclusive education and examples of practice from the three Nordic countries, Finland, Norway and Sweden, prepared by the Nordic experts. Findings from these reports indicated a number of gaps and challenges, in addition to areas of strength, in each country.

Phase 2 aimed to *engage closely with stakeholders* within and across the three countries, at local, regional and national levels, to enable dialogue on aspects of inclusive education, share knowledge and experience among peers, and facilitate the improvement of inclusive education, particularly in relation to the aspects identified in Phase 1. During Phase 1, the stated priorities for each country were combined to form six overarching topics, as the basis for stakeholder participation:

1. Inclusive Education Mandate: Governance, funding and resourcing
2. Deepening knowledge of inclusive education
3. Monitoring and evaluation
4. Standards, indicators and guidelines
5. Teacher education for all
6. School level responses.

From the outset, this work has had the clear intention of building capacity within each region and country, in response to their own priorities, by bringing together stakeholders from many levels and areas of education, to share knowledge and experience and work in

a collaborative way, exploring challenges and strengths through different perspectives. In addition, the stakeholder engagement phase aimed to build capacity around inclusive education more broadly, on a more international scale by sharing the know-how and expertise of the Nordic countries (Finland, Norway and Sweden).

As a result, this report aims to provide an overview of completed stakeholder participation activities and presents findings which emerged from the analysis from each of the three countries, in terms of strengths, gaps and challenges. Key takeaway points from each country are included, and a final section (see section 'Findings, gaps, challenges and strengths') brings together some findings which are common to all three countries. Recommendations and suggested new measures and action points are developed in Deliverable D4.1.

The target audience for this report is project countries and policy-makers at all levels, as well as those who have participated as stakeholders in stakeholder engagement activities.

Findings from the analysis of the qualitative data collected from the stakeholder participation will inform the next steps in the overall aims of the project:

- To identify areas where there are gaps in, or between, policy and practice.
- To identify areas where challenges remain to the implementation of inclusive education policies.
- To identify examples where policy and practice have been effective in addressing challenges and gaps.
- To inform recommendations and new measures.

Meeting agendas are presented as Annexes to this report.

METHODOLOGY FOR STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Country priorities and Phase 2 discussion topics

Each of the three countries identified their own key priority areas, to be used as a focus for Phase 2 of the TSI. There were six priority areas for Italy and Spain, and three for Portugal (drawn from their earlier SRSP work and OECD Report recommendations). The country priorities were incorporated into the six themes or main topics for online and in-person discussion, in the following way:

Stage 1: Independent analysis by:

- the three Nordic policy experts, as a group
- the research advisor
- the Agency researcher.

Results indicated a high level of agreement and overlap between the three sets of analysis. It was noted that no priorities explicitly included the voices of families or learners.

Stage 2: Collaborative secondary analysis:

The five people who were involved in Stage 1 analysis, discussed the emerging and overlapping topics, and collaborated to develop six main broad areas, which included all priorities. These main areas were further defined by a number of sub-topics (see section 'Main topics', below). The six main areas also incorporated the challenges and gaps which had emerged from the Country reports.

Selection of regions

All three countries indicated that there are regional disparities in the provision and delivery of aspects of inclusive education and that these create disparities and inequalities within the education system. For this reason, each country was asked to select five regions, using a purposeful sampling method, to ensure geographical representation in each country. There was a change to the planned number of regions initially allocated to each country (i.e. four regions in Italy and Spain and five regions in Portugal), in accordance with a request and justification from Italy and Spain after the kick-off meeting to work with stakeholders in five regions. This change was then accepted by the project Steering Committee (SC). Where possible, the selected regions were to be located in different geographical areas of each country, to include urban/semiurban, rural and island territories. Further considerations within these broad parameters were the levels of relative prosperity or poverty within a region, or significant social issues, such as large immigrant populations.

Representatives from all regions in the three countries were invited to the online stakeholder meetings. One in-person meeting took place in each of the regions nominated by the three countries, for representatives from that region only.

Table 1. Regions per country

Italy	Portugal	Spain
Veneto	Norte	Aragón
Emilia Romagna	Centro	Navarra
Lazio	Lisboa	Extremadura
Campania	Algarve	Galicia
Sicily	Alentejo	Canarias

Selection of stakeholders

Extensive stakeholder participation is essential to gain rich qualitative data about the implementation and effects of inclusive education policy decisions, from a range of perspectives. For this reason, representation from a number of groups was requested at regional level, within each of the three countries, to include decision-makers, education professionals (head teachers, teachers), support services, learners, families, NGOs and representatives of disadvantaged groups such as refugees, Roma, etc. Each region was asked to invite no more than 15 representatives, distributed across the different groups. Within these parameters, each country was free to decide whom to nominate to take part in the working groups and peer learning activities, and to encourage nominated participants to remain for the duration of the activities. The information on participant breakdown was provided by the Ministries of Education of the three participating countries prior to the organisation of the working groups.

In all, a total of 188 stakeholders, across all three countries, took part in in-person and online stakeholder consultation meetings. Table 2 below indicates the breakdown of these.

Participating in the online working group discussions, the peer learning activities and the in-person working groups were 73 stakeholders from Spain, 56 stakeholders from Portugal and 59 stakeholders from Italy.

Table 2. Breakdown of stakeholder representation

Representation	Totals
Family associations	36
School/education professionals	89
Educational support	23
Association representatives	29

Policymakers	11
Total	188

Role of the experts from Nordic countries

At each event, one of the three Nordic policy experts gave a presentation on aspects of Nordic education policy and practice, in relation to the topic under discussion. It had been planned at the project proposal phase that each Nordic expert would be 'paired' with either Italy, Portugal or Spain, based on their individual previous engagement with one of the countries, on similarities at system level, or in challenges. Thus, for example, Finland and Spain both have regional differences, which they wished to narrow. In addition, Finland has been developing cooperation and networks of different actors for several years. This experience was in line with one of the national priorities indicated to Spain: *Developing networks and collaboration mechanisms between educational centres at all levels*.

The Nordic expert from Sweden had extensive experience of working with Italy. Italy wished to collaborate with Sweden to share know-how and experience on how to promote inclusive quality practice in different regions across the country. Norway has long experience in inclusive practices and Portugal wanted to share lessons learned with regional stakeholders in relation to the country priority areas. In addition, Norway has participated in the recent SRSP Portugal project and is familiar with the education system in Portugal.

Each Nordic expert attended a bi-lateral meeting with one country during the kick-off meeting in Madrid. However, shortly after the kick-off meeting in Madrid, it was decided that all three Nordic countries would work together to support the project countries. This was both a methodological decision and an expedient one. The Nordic experts wrote and shared a report to indicate that co-operation between and across countries is in line with the design and aims of a multi-country project of this type. As the project developed, it was expedient to bring their combined expertise to the topics addressed by all three Project countries, to overcome practical and funding issues around travelling and attending multiple meetings. This approach gave opportunities for wider knowledge exchange and peer learning beyond the three countries of the project. In one online peer learning activity (PLA 2), two members of the wider Agency team also presented on topics in relation to their area of expertise on the theory of monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Activity background

Stakeholder activities in this phase included online and in-person working groups and peer learning activities (PLA) within and between countries, at national, regional and local levels, and for some participants, a study visit to Sweden. Each meeting focused on developing a shared conceptual understanding of one or two common themes/areas of challenge, alongside a range of activities in relation to learning, sharing knowledge and experience through hands-on activities, presentations, visits or open discussions. Trilingual interpretation was provided in all working group meetings and peer learning activities, to enable dialogue among the participants from project countries.

There were three distinct stakeholder activities and peer-learning opportunities during this phase:

- Online meetings and working groups with all three countries
- In-person regional meetings in the nominated five regions of each of the three countries
- A study visit to Sweden.

Meetings

For each event, an introduction to the topic was prepared in advance by the Agency team and the Research Advisor, and translated for stakeholders, giving some points for reflection and preparation before the event to foster more depth of discussion. This was sent with the approval of the relevant Ministry of Education to all participants, members of DG REFORM, and country Ministry members for the participating countries.

Each in-person and online meeting or working group focused on developing a shared conceptual understanding of one or two common themes/areas of challenge, and offered opportunities for learning and knowledge exchange, through discussion and presentations by experts. The study visit also incorporated a school visit, to the presentations and discussions.

Trilingual interpretation was provided in all working group meetings and peer learning activities, to enable dialogue among the participants from project countries. An engagement strategy was used to meet the needs of participants in breakout room discussions as well as plenary sessions, which were used to debrief the outcomes of the smaller group sessions.

In-person meetings in Spain and Portugal were organised in a hybrid format, to facilitate input of the Nordic country policy experts as well as the DG REFORM officers' presence and introductory remarks, while those in Italy were organised with no hybrid facilities. This was decided following some technical issues in earlier meetings, which hindered to some extent the online participation of the country policy experts, as well as DG REFORM officers.

Countries were invited to arrange their own local events, following the main activities, to extend the range and influence of the knowledge exchange to include more stakeholders in a multiplier effect. However, no country undertook this work in a formal way, but may have arranged to disseminate information locally on an informal basis. These events are beyond the scope of this data collection.

Through the range of participatory events, stakeholders were given opportunities to meet and discuss with their peers locally, regionally and nationally, and also – and uniquely – internationally in joint online meetings with participants from all three countries. In addition, each country was able to decide whether the breakout discussion groups should be made up from representatives of individual groups (such as education professionals, decision-makers or families) or to mix representatives from several groups in a meeting. The composition of participant groups at each activity was therefore slightly different in the three countries and may have had an influence of the nature of the discussions.

Study visit

The study visit took place in Stockholm, Sweden, on 27–29 May 2024. Following the multi-country online events and the in-person regional events, where stakeholders with concrete practical experience in the field of education have been able to share knowledge and exchange ideas around inclusive education, the study visit was planned to give an additional dimension to knowledge exchange and building potential networking opportunities beyond the project. The visit was aimed to be of most use to policy and decision makers at national and regional levels, giving insight to a range of issues around policy and implementation into practice in a Nordic country. The purpose of this visit was to learn how Sweden responds to diversity at school and classroom level, through presentations, school visits and in-depth discussions.

Prior to the event, study visit participants were invited to discuss how they intended to share the reflections and the outcomes of the study visit and relevant materials with their communities, networks and regions.

In addition, the Swedish experts shared their PowerPoint presentations and summative reflections with the participants and invited them for follow-up networking/discussions. The study visit participants were provided with a 'Guide to Swedish Education' to use in their own context and share with other education stakeholders in their regions/countries.

A more in-depth report of the Study Visit, together with participant feedback and reflections on all aspects of the study visit are available in (MS3). The report was shared with the project Steering Committee members.

Main topics of the online and in-person meetings

The fieldwork was based on the six common themes with a number of sub-topics, which had emerged from the analysis of the country priorities and reports in Phase 1. The six common themes/areas of challenge formed the basis of the working group discussions for all three countries, but with additional individualised focus for each country on themes identified through each country report. Some topics were combined in one event, and

there were also some differences in each, to incorporate individual country priorities or additional requests.

1. Inclusive education mandate: Governance, funding and resourcing

- Systemic change: aligning services, removing inequities and disparities.
- Quality and Equity across the system: territorial and group differences.
- Resources; allocation of funds.

2. Deepening the knowledge of Inclusive Education

- Working towards implementing the shared vision for inclusive education at all levels.
- Systemic change: capacity building and collaboration across all sectors of the system.
- Leadership at all levels; training to increase knowledge, skills and understanding of inclusive education.

3. Monitoring and evaluation: standards, indicators and guidelines

- Systemic change: standards and indicators at all levels.
- Monitoring, evaluation; guidelines and accountability.

4. Specialists and support in inclusive systems and classrooms

- Support teachers and resources for support.
- Resources; roles of support teachers; development of inclusive classrooms.

5. Teacher education for all

- Services, training and support for teachers.
- Teacher education in inclusive education; support teachers; resourcing.

6. School-level responses

- Development of tools to increase capacity for change at school level; ability to respond quickly.
- Capacity in schools; training for knowledge and skills development and exchanges; collaboration; resources and funding to enable flexibility.

Outline of participatory activities

Prior to each of the working group meetings, an introduction to the topic was prepared in advance by the Agency team and the Research Advisor, and translated for stakeholders, giving some points and questions for reflection and preparation, to foster more depth of discussion. This was sent with the approval of the relevant Ministry of Education to all participants, members of DG REFORM, and country Ministry members for the participating countries, for translation and dissemination to prospective meeting participants. This was to ensure conceptual clarity of the topic and guidelines for

reflection, as preparation to enable all stakeholders to access the topic and participate as fully as possible in the discussions

At each event, one of the three Nordic policy experts gave a presentation on aspects of Nordic education policy and practice, in relation to the topic under discussion.

This gave opportunities for wider knowledge exchange and peer learning beyond the three countries of the project. In one online peer learning activity (PLA 2), two members of the wider Agency team also presented on topics in relation to their area of expertise on the theory of monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Following the presentations, participants were assigned to breakout groups. For single country events, the choices for unified or mixed groups were made at the discretion of each country, but at events for all three countries, the Agency team assigned representation from all fifteen regions and all three countries in each group. On occasion, some countries re-arranged their representation in the groups, where, for example, not all regions were represented, due to an unforeseen absence.

Representatives of DG REFORM, the Agency team and the Education Ministries of the participating countries also attended the meetings and breakout groups as observers. The Nordic experts attended and responded to questions from the participants following their presentations.

Discussion moderators followed a pre-arranged script, which incorporated the main points in relation to the prepared topic and some suggestions for prompts, but which also allowed for a free discussion among the participants. Participants gave examples of practice from their own contexts and were encouraged to share knowledge and experience with others in similar roles, from other regions in their own country, or internationally, depending on the event.

Rapporteurs from each country or region were asked to volunteer to write brief notes on the main discussion points, and these were then shared back to other group at the final plenary session to ensure transparency in the data collection and reporting process. Sessions were recorded for the purposes of notetaking, and the Agency provided notetakers for all sessions. Members of DG REFORM also took notes at some events and shared these with the Agency team.

Participants were given online feedback forms after all events, to enable the Agency team to make changes to the preparatory material, as well as to the content and process of the meetings and activities, for monitoring and evaluation purposes. The agenda of the first online working group discussion with Portuguese stakeholders can be found as Annex 1. The subsequent working group meeting agendas were prepared in a similar way but modified to meet the purposes and needs of each thematic session and project country context. Annex 2 presents the agenda for the first online peer learning activity (PLA1).

Participants of the study visit were provided with an agenda (Annex 3), as well as a guide to the Swedish education system that included links and materials for further use by the participants in their own context and to share with other education stakeholders in their regions/countries. *The guide is available upon request*.

The Swedish delegation hosting the study visit consisted of nine experts from the National Agency for Special Needs Education (SPSM), schools and academic institutions such as

Gothenburg University and Karolinska Institute. Two participants from DG REFORM, two participants from the Agency team and eight participants from the three project countries (stakeholders and Ministry representatives) attended the visit in Sweden.

Overview of stakeholder meetings

An overview of the stakeholder meetings is given in the tables and lists below, including the number of events and the topic followed per working group meeting and per country.

Table 2. Topics of online stakeholder working group meetings for each country (9 events)

Working Group	Italy	Portugal	Spain
WG1	Inclusive Teacher Education	Inclusive Teacher Education	Inclusive Teacher Education
WG2	Developing networks and collaboration to strengthen inclusive education	Developing networks and collaboration to strengthen inclusive education	Developing networks and collaboration mechanisms between educational centres at all levels Collaboration with families/community settings
WG3	**PLA event (see below)**	**PLA event (see below)**	**PLA event (see below)**
WG4	School-level responses: Theme 1: The role of assistants and non-teaching staff in promoting inclusive practice. Theme 2: Addressing regional inequalities in relation to inclusive practice at school and service delivery level.	Roadmaps for inclusive education: The draft outline of an Action Plan/Roadmap, with specific measures to be developed.	Outline for individual action plan for inclusive education. The draft outline for an Action Plan/Roadmap, with specific measures to be developed.

Topics of in-person stakeholder meetings held in five regions in each country (15 events)

WG3: Portugal and Spain

School Level Responses

- Development of tools to increase capacity for change at school level; ability to respond quickly.
- Capacity in schools; training for knowledge and skills development and exchanges; collaboration; resources and funding to enable flexibility.

Sub-topics Portugal

- Promoting school-level responses to learner diversity.

Sub-topics Spain

- Participation of all those involved in the educational response to vulnerable learners.

WG 3: Italy

Responses to diversity at school and classroom level

- Theme 1: School-based strategies.
- Theme 2: Classroom strategies and practices.
- Theme 3: Resource management.

Topics of stakeholder peer-learning activities (PLA) held online with all three countries: Italy, Portugal, Spain (2 events)

***PLA 1**: Response to diversity at school and classroom levels*

- Theme 1: Meeting the needs of teachers and learners: suggest whole school policies.
- Theme 2: More efficient use of existing human, financial and technical resources.
- Theme 3: Building teacher capacity within and across schools.
- Theme 4: Building capacity in the classroom.
- Theme 5: Success factors that have been used effectively in school.

***PLA 2**: Monitoring and Evaluation*

- Theme 1: Sharing of Inclusive values and principles.
- Theme 2: Efficient use of existing human, financial and technical resources.

In-person study visit to Sweden for selected stakeholders from all three countries: Italy, Portugal, Spain (1 event)

- Theme 1: Networking and collaboration related to school-level inclusive education capacity development.
- Theme 2: Teacher education. Professional programmes and Practice Schools: challenges, strategies and outcomes.
- Theme 3: System for monitoring, evaluation and improvement: challenges, strategies and results.

Implementation schedule (chronological order)

This stakeholder data collection was organised in the period from 10 May 2023 in line with the Description of Action for this project (DoA), with implementation up to 16 May 2024. The set-up and organisation of regional WGs in Italy was delayed due to the absence of the Italian Ministry representatives in the Steering Committee.

Table 3. Implementation schedule

Date	Country	Online/in-person	Type of meeting
10 May 2023	Spain	Online	Working Group
17 May 2023	Portugal	Online	Working Group
28 June 2023	Spain	Online	Working Group
4 July 2023	Portugal	Online	Working Group
25–29 September 2023	Spain	In person	Working Group
2–4 October 2023	Portugal	In person	Working Group
16–19 October 2023	Spain	In person	Working Group
23–26 October 2023	Portugal	In person	Working Group
13 November 2023	All	Online	Peer Learning Activity
29 January 2024	Italy	Online	Working Group
19 February 2024	Spain	Online	Working Group
21 February 2024	Portugal	Online	Working Group
26 February 2024	Italy	Online	Working Group
26 March 2024	Italy	Online	Working Group
30 April 2024	All	Online	Peer Learning Activity
6–16 May 2024	Italy	In person	Working Group

Feedback from participants

In selected online and in-person working group meetings, as well as in one PLA, feedback forms were distributed aiming to evaluate with a two-fold purpose:

- to improve the way the Agency team organises and carries out stakeholder engagement activities;
- to record any important aspects of collaborative working with peers from other countries and other systems.

The organisational aspects covered issues such as rating of the preparation material, the overall satisfaction with the meeting set-up, the quality of simultaneous interpretation provided, and the opportunity to share views and be listened to during the meetings. The response level was varied, depending on the participant number per meeting, but also depending on the technical difficulties faced during the on-site meetings. Generally, participation was high at all events, and the feedback from participants was very positive in terms of organisation, preparation, discussion topics and opportunities for participation. The preparation of materials and presentations was ranked as 'medium'. It should be noted that translation and distribution of the preparatory material was organised within each country and some feedback indicated that not all participants received this in a timely manner. The participants expressed their future preference for longer breaks between the online sessions.

The key messages from these forms are the importance of peer learning and networking among the countries, as well as the opportunities given for active participation of the attendees throughout the activities. Moreover, the respondents highlighted the usefulness of the presentation of examples from the Nordic countries, and the witnessing of different structures and addressing of different barriers in inclusive education.

Among areas of improvement were the receipt of meeting material from the Ministries in a non-timely manner, and the short length of breaks, especially in the online meetings.

COLLECTED STAKEHOLDER DATA ANALYSIS

Aims of the analysis of phase two

The main aim of this phase was to enable dialogue on all aspects of inclusive education, and to give opportunities for peer-learning, sharing knowledge and experience, locally within regions, nationally and internationally across the three countries.

There are five aims from analysis of the qualitative data from this Phase:

1. To identify areas where there are gaps in, or between, policy and practice
2. To identify areas where challenges remain to the implementation of inclusive education policies
3. To identify examples of policy and practice that have been effective in addressing challenges and gaps
4. To inform recommendations and new measures to be included in an Action Plan for each country
5. To find common areas of challenge across the three countries, to inform recommendations.

Data collection

Data collection for analysis from this Phase was drawn from three main source areas, at national, regional and at individual stakeholder level.

1. Findings from the Country Reports for each of the three countries.
2. Identified priority areas for each of the three countries.
3. Qualitative data from the stakeholder working groups, peer learning/knowledge exchange sessions and study visit.

Findings in relation to national data emerged mainly from the meetings with stakeholders where all regions were represented. Findings in relation to regional data emerged mainly from the in-person regional meetings. Information about individual stakeholders' area of professional or personal activity, or representation, was not always available at meetings, and in some cases cannot be taken as representative of a regional/group finding.

Data were collected for each priority and topic area to identify the following:

- Gaps in policy and practice
- Challenges in the implementation of inclusive education policies.

Examples of where policy or practice are being effective in addressing challenges or gaps, nationally, regionally or at school levels.

- For the purposes of the analysis of the findings, the following broad definitions were used:
- **Gap**: Aspect of policy, or the implementation of policy into practice which is incomplete or not evident at national, regional, local or school levels.

- **Challenge**: Issue or difficulty identified by stakeholders, in relation to any aspect of policy or practice at national, regional, local or school levels.
- **Effective**: Policy and aspects of policy, or practice which enable sustained change and improvement to take place, and/or address challenges and gaps at national, regional, local or school levels.

The analysis of qualitative data focused on two main questions:

1.What is working well?

This question is to Identify effective policy or practice and possible areas of strength. Secondary questions focus on identifying details of aspects and examples of policies and policy implementation, which are effective in some respects, and which might be shared more widely. This might also identify areas of 'silo' thinking.

2. What is not working well?

This question is to identify gaps and/or challenges and barriers. Secondary questions focus on addressing gaps, and on possible outcomes of the challenges.

Limitation

Each country was free to decide whom to nominate to take part in the working groups and peer learning activities, and to encourage nominated participants to remain for the duration of the activities. However, in the case of Italy and Portugal, while there was regional representation, not all stakeholder groups were represented in all meetings. This is a limitation in the data collection, as the voices of some groups of stakeholders are not included.

Key take-aways from the stakeholder consultation meetings

This section presents the key take-aways from the online, face-to-face and PLA meetings, with all three countries. The information here is concerned with an overview of the topics discussed, issues raised and views expressed by those participating in meetings. Detailed findings from the analysis of all data from the Phase, in relation to strengths, gaps and challenges follow this section.

Italy

Stakeholder discussions were centred around issues of disability, as this informs Italy's approaches to inclusive education. Topics were discussed through the perspective of disability, with only infrequent mention of learners vulnerable to exclusion from other circumstances.

Governance and Financing

- Some participants recognised the need for a common vision of inclusive education, agreed across system levels. It was also stated that such a vision should support a move away from labels for learners (e.g. medical terms) to develop provision able to respond to a wide range of additional support needs.

- The need for more effective (and less bureaucratic) monitoring and evaluation of learner progress and outcomes was raised. Such a framework could also consider effective use of resources.

School Autonomy

- While many key policy decisions regarding education are made centrally, participants saw the opportunities presented where schools are given some flexibility to make decisions locally – for example adaptations to the curriculum to meet local needs and make best use of staff experience/expertise, autonomy to work with other schools, community partners etc.
- Some participants suggested that schools/teachers should be able to make decisions regarding accreditation of learning for some learners, for example learners with disabilities not able to take part in national examinations.

Teacher Education

- While centralised training initiatives are welcome by some participants, these need to align with a broader view of inclusive education. Others expressed the view that there should be some flexibility for local approaches according to school population and staff skills and gaps in experience/expertise.
- Many people expressed the view that longer term contracts for teachers would enable staff to be trained to meet school/learner needs within an overall plan. The issue of recognition/remuneration was raised for teachers developing their knowledge/skills/experience.

Communication and Autonomy Assistants (staff assigned as support to individual learners with identified additional needs)

- The need for more clarity about the roles of various non-teaching staff was raised along with the need for increased training and development opportunities to enable staff to work effectively to support teachers (rather than being placed 1:1 with learners).

Regional Inequality

Stakeholders felt that formal/informal networks should be developed to enable regions to exchange practice and increase consistency.

Some participants expressed the view that inequality could be addressed through coherent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with greater learner/family participation.

Portugal

The stakeholder discussions covered various aspects of inclusive education in Portugal, focusing on teacher education, professional learning, collaboration, and resource management.

Key recurring themes include:

- Enhancement of Initial Teacher Training:

  - The need to further integrate inclusive education into university curricula to equip teachers with skills to support diverse student needs.
  - The need for a comprehensive approach to inclusive education for teachers, including mental health and socio-cultural integration.

- Mentorship and Collaboration:
  - The absence of formal mentorship programmes for new teachers and the need for collaborative efforts among teachers, multidisciplinary teams, and school authorities.
  - The importance of informal mentorship by experienced teachers and the importance of formalising these practices.

- Ongoing Professional Development:
  - The importance of continuous learning for teachers about legislation, inclusive education frameworks, monitoring and evaluation techniques/tools, and participatory teaching methods.
  - Identification of challenges such as inconvenient scheduling and limited coordination time, proposing more practical and compulsory training programmes.

- Professional Development and Legal Constraints:
  - Emphasis on the need for continuous professional development, balancing training with existing workloads, and addressing cultural diversity.
  - The challenges of navigating the changing legal framework of Law 54/2018 and its implementation and ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

- Resource Management and Evaluation:
  - The need for efficient resource management, addressing challenges related to funding, bureaucratic hurdles, and limited human resources.
  - Emphasis on the role of monitoring and evaluation in improving resource allocation and educational outcomes.

- School-level Strategies and Classroom Practices:
  - Focus on collaborative classroom practices, the role of multidisciplinary teams, and the adaptation of assessment tools to diverse learning needs.
  - Recommendation for smaller classes, co-teaching, and mentorship programmes to support inclusive education.

- Parental and Community Involvement:
  - Call for stronger collaboration between schools, families, and community actors.

  - Importance of sharing examples of successful partnerships with municipalities, youth associations, and NGOs, particularly during the Covid pandemic.

- Regional Disparities and Challenges:
  - Highlight on geographical, structural, and socio-economic challenges affecting the consistency of inclusive education practices across different regions.
  - Identification of issues such as teacher turnover, funding limitations, and the need for a stable and trained workforce.
- Economic and Social Barriers:
  - High drop-out rates and socio-economic challenges that impact student engagement and learning such as those mentioned in Alentajo.
  - The need to address broader socio-economic issues to improve the implementation of educational programs was briefly mentioned with reference to Algarve and also in peer learning activity (PLA) – only regarding potential impact and need to consider in broader profile of learner needs.

Overall, the discussions highlight the need for a holistic and collaborative approach to inclusive education, addressing gaps in training, resources, and support systems while fostering community involvement and continuous professional development.

Spain

- Teacher Training

There is strong recognition of the need for inclusive education to be a foundational element in both initial and ongoing teacher training. Emphasis on socio-emotional learning is seen as crucial, but more systematic integration and mandatory inclusion trainings are necessary to equip teachers with the skills needed for diverse classrooms.

- Collaboration and Mentorship

Effective collaboration between specialists and generalists, as well as between schools and families, is vital. However, there are significant gaps in mentorship, particularly for early-career teachers, and in engaging families, which need to be addressed to support inclusive education fully.

- Networking and Collaborations

While existing collaboration platforms and international programs offer valuable frameworks and learning opportunities, bureaucratic obstacles (e.g., support applications, resource requests) and sustainability issues hinder the long-term success of these initiatives. More inclusive participation and streamlined processes are required to strengthen these networks.

- School Level Responses

There is a positive culture of cooperation in some regions, with effective classroom strategies and support systems in place. Nonetheless, there is also the need to reduce the bureaucratic effort and to establish more effective lines of communication between stakeholders would support a more inclusive responsiveness of the education system.

FINDINGS, GAPS, CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHS

This section presents the findings for each country, that have emerged from the processes of analysis. Recommendations and suggested new measures to address gaps and challenges, in relation to the priority areas of each country, will be presented in Deliverable 4.1: *A set of recommendations and new measures to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education in Project countries.*

Italy

During the kick-off meeting in October 2022, representatives from the three countries' education ministries discussed their national priorities. In meetings held with the Italian representatives, the following key priorities were identified. These link to recommendations made in the project report on the Italian system (Deliverable 2.2).

Priorities

Strengthen the governance and financing of inclusive education

- Improve resource management for inclusive education and continue efforts to build a coherent funding system to support equity and inclusion.
- Fostering synergies between levels (horizontal and vertical co-ordination).

Strengthen school autonomy

- Develop networks and collaboration mechanisms at all levels.
- Create operationally effective networks that help improve the co-ordination, dissemination and sustainability of the education system.
- Collaboration with families and the third sector.
- Use the grid of case studies and examples of practice below to detect quality in the provision of services for people with disabilities, as well as to disseminate best practices.

The improvement of teacher's competences for inclusive education

- Support inclusive teacher competences by improving initial and in-service teacher training in relation to inclusive education (including on inclusive tools for daily practice).
- Encourage the dissemination of good practices (sustainable and repeatable).
- Use a bottom-up inductive approach for the identification and dissemination of good practice. In addition, use the grid of case studies developed by the Ministry of Education to improve the inclusive skills of teachers.

The role of autonomy and communication assistants and non-teaching staff in promoting inclusive practice

- Improve initial and continuous professional development opportunities for autonomy and communication assistants (knowing that there is currently no homogeneity at national level regarding assistants' competences and qualifications to enter the profession).

Addressing regional inequalities in relation to inclusive practice at school and service delivery level

- How to address regional inequities in relation to:
  - differences in learning outcomes and management of school inclusion;
  - access to disability services (health, welfare, social services, assistance);
  - availability of educational resources.

National level findings

While it is recognised that the information gathered in the stakeholder meetings and peer learning activities is on a small scale, the points below were raised by participants across several meetings. It is not clear however, whether views expressed by individuals at project meetings were from their own individual perspectives or representative of wider groups.

Governance and financing

- Some participants recognised the need for a common vision of inclusive education, agreed across system levels. It was also stated that such a vision should support a move away from labels for learners (e.g. medical terms) to develop provision able to respond to a wide range of additional support needs.
- Participants expressed the view that coordination within system levels - e.g., between different departments/agencies and between system levels should be improved.
- The need for more effective (and less bureaucratic) monitoring and evaluation of learner progress and outcomes was raised. Such a framework could also consider effective use of resources.
- Some participants expressed concern over the sustainability of short-term projects and felt that long term funding is required to facilitate effective planning.

School autonomy

- While many key policy decisions regarding education are made centrally, participants saw the opportunities presented where schools are given some flexibility to make decisions locally – for example adaptations to the curriculum to meet local needs and make best use of staff experience/expertise, autonomy to work with other schools, community partners etc.
- Some participants suggested that schools/teachers should be able to make decisions regarding accreditation of learning for some learners, for example learners with disabilities not able to take part in national examinations.

Teacher education

- While centralised training initiatives are welcome by some participants, these need to align with a broader view of inclusive education. Others expressed the view that there should be some flexibility for local approaches according to school population and staff skills and gaps in experience/expertise.
- Many people expressed the view that longer term contracts for teachers would enable staff to be trained to meet school/learner needs within an overall plan. The issue of recognition/remuneration was raised for teachers developing their knowledge/skills/experience.
- There was concern among stakeholders about the lack of mentoring and support for newly qualified teachers.

Communication assistants

- The need for more clarity about the roles of various non-teaching staff was raised along with the need for increased training and development opportunities to enable staff to work effectively to support teachers (rather than being placed 1:1 with learners).

Regional inequality

- Stakeholders felt that formal/informal networks should be developed to enable regions to exchange practice and increase consistency.
- Some participants expressed the view that inequality could be addressed through coherent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with greater learner/family participation.
- Participants suggested that meetings between regional representatives should be developed to include other disciplines as well as education, aligning communication protocols, planning and reporting of learners' additional support needs.

Gaps (across levels)

- Lack of a common vision for inclusive education that takes account of all learners who may require additional support – beyond medical needs/disabilities.
- Budget necessary to improve accessibility of school buildings and to target resources for specific needs e.g., IT and aids for certain groups (sensory disabilities).
- Lack of long-term funding approaches to enable sustainable development plans at local/school level.
- Need for protocols to improve communication/coordination between Ministries/services – and between national, local and school levels.
- Lack of autonomy for schools to make some decisions at local level, according to need.
- Need for secure teacher contracts (i.e., longer than one year duration) to stabilise staffing in schools, support effective professional development and facilitate planning for local support needs.

- Lack of structure for initial teacher education (ITE) and continuous professional development (CPD) catering for continuity and progression, including mentoring of new teachers and additional training in supporting learners with different requirements.
- Lack of clear roles for teaching and non-teaching assistants and development opportunities to encourage recruitment and retention.
- Involvement of learners and families in schools' decision making and evaluation.
- Need for consistent strategies for monitoring and evaluation of learner progress and outcomes as well as funding allocation, use of resources, teacher and assistant training and development.
- Infra structure to enable networking between schools/services to increase consistency across regions by sharing practice.

Challenges

Key challenges include the development of the following:

- A shared vision of inclusive education, agreed with stakeholders that avoids labels/categories/medical terms and encompasses a broader view.
- Funding for longer term development rather than short term projects.
- A synergy between and across the education system, leading to a more holistic view of provision to support all learners (at kindergarten, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels).
- Resources/time to enable teaching staff and professionals from other disciplines to work together, developing common systems/communication protocols.
- Strong, well-qualified school leaders to increase school autonomy.
- A programme of training/professional development to support inclusive practice by teachers and assistants to further support school autonomy.
- Longer term teacher contracts to stabilise supply and enable more effective planning in schools/local areas.
- Clear roles/use of assistants in schools and strategies to tackle shortages.
- A coherent and non-bureaucratic system for monitoring and evaluation that focuses on system improvement.
- Networks/structures to bring together regions and increase consistency of policy and practice to improve equity regarding access to services/resources.

Strengths

In recent years, legislation has strengthened approaches to inclusive education (e.g. Law 107/2015 - School Reform Act) and Law 79/2022 on teacher education plus work on self-evaluation and data - INVALSI/RAV 2022). While this has led to a number of small-scale initiatives as outlined below, further efforts are required to implement legislation consistently on a whole system basis.

During the project stakeholder activities, Italian participants presented many small-scale initiatives which have potential for scale up. These include support for teachers and learners through:

- The development of school hubs, with a focus on inclusion (Scuole Polo per l'Inclusione) to provide support and consultancy, including staff training and organizational models for inclusion.
- The Fund for asylum, integration and migration (FAMI) in Veneto aims to strengthen school integration, enhance language learning, promote active citizenship, involve families, engage in intercultural activities, and prevent school failure and dropout.
- Mamma Lingua (Treviso) addresses cultural barriers to improve integration of learners with migrant background.
- The Abramo project (Campania) supports learners from the Roma community.
- LIS/LIST (Italian sign language/ Italian tactile language) regional training plan aims to promote social inclusion of deaf, deafblind, or hearing-impaired individuals by improving their communication skills. They achieve this by developing teacher competences.
- Avanguardie Educative is an action research project from the National Institute of Documentation and Educational Research (Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa). It aims to support innovation in schools, promoting interdisciplinary learning, and flexibility in teaching and organisation of classrooms.
- The University of Turin supports curriculum flexibility. This initiative involves strategies to enable teachers to adapt the basic curriculum to meet a wider range of diverse learner needs.
- Autism Helpdesk provide training for teachers to become support teachers (Veneto).

Other initiatives focus on communication and collaboration:

- Area plans (Piano di Zona) aims for collaboration with the broader educational community and allocation of health and social funds (Emilia-Romagna). The District Area Plans for Health and Social Welfare is an integrated planning tool which sets general and sectoral objectives for local planning, with a view to integrating interventions in different areas. The plans aim to integrate social and health policies and to align them with environmental, urban planning, housing, training, employment and cultural policies, as regulated by Article 29 of Law 2/2003 and subsequent amendments. In 2018, 38 district areas from Emilia-Romagna region prepared, submitted and signed three-year District Area Plans for Health and Social Well-being.
- Development and dissemination of protocols to facilitate inter-institutional communication and good practice exchanges between schools and social services (Emilia Romagna).

- Support to facilitate meetings between regional education offices (Assessorati).
- The 'Social Time Bank' (La Banca del Tempo Sociale) in Veneto is parents' initiative that offers children with autism and disabilities an opportunity to spend time differently with their high school peers while gaining both formative and social experiences.
- Family mediation and integration programs in several municipalities, particularly supporting socio-cultural integration of learners and families from migrant backgrounds, e.g., Provincial Centers for Adult Education (CPIA). CPIA provincial centres are state schools established by the Ministry of Education and Merit. CPIA offer adult education services that target Italian and foreign citizens over the age of 16, as well as young people (Italians and foreigners) who have reached the age of 15 and who are subject to criminal measures by the Judicial Authority. In Veneto, young people (Italians and foreigners) aged 15+ and who are at risk of dropping out of school can also enrol into CPIA activities based on the regional agreement signed by the Veneto Region and the Regional Scholastic Office (USR) for Veneto.
- Collaboration with the Municipality of Treviso for inclusive PCTO (Pathways for Transversal Competencies and Professional Orientation) experiences.

Finally, further initiatives target improvements in teacher education/development of other educational staff, for example:

- The Bianchi reform of 2022 increased academic credits for pedagogical disciplines and technologies with a focus on inclusion, active learning methodologies and new teaching methods.
- In Emilia-Romagna, initiatives have focused on developing/expanding a role of the tutor. The tutor's profile exists since the mid-90s as regulated by the Provincial Programme Agreements. A young person between the age of 18 and 25, who has a strong motivation to help and motivate peers in difficulty by entering into and building further mutually trusted friendly relationships, can become a tutor. The tutor intervenes to help students, as established by Law 104. They can also help students with learning disabilities or those who are emotionally and/or socially disadvantaged within their school. The tutor provides support in the school as well as in extracurricular activities.
- Territorial support centres (CTS) across the country provide training in supportive technologies.

Portugal

In meetings held with the Portuguese representatives, the key priorities of the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science were identified. These clearly link to recommendations made by the OECD in their recent Review of Inclusive Education in Portugal (2022). This project will support the development of these recommendations and propose measures to serve as the basis for a strategic action plan.

Priorities

Strengthening the governance and financing of inclusive education

- How to improve the management of resources for inclusive education and continue efforts to build a coherent funding system to support equity and inclusion.
- How to foster synergies between levels (horizontal and vertical co-ordination).
- How to rally all relevant stakeholders (including the broader school community, and local authorities).
- How to strengthen the management of system-level monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education.

Developing capacity for diversity, equity and inclusion in education

- How to identify and build on good practices to promote collaboration and capacity building to address all dimensions (ethnic groups, national minorities and indigenous people, migration, gender, special education needs, giftedness, gender identity and sexual orientation) of diversity.
- How to improve training in inclusion for all educational professionals (updated and relevant training).

Promoting school-level responses to student diversity

- How to formulate clear guidance on the use of support resources within schools and communities.
- How to strengthen strategies for monitoring and evaluating inclusive education practices at the local and school levels.
- How to use and further elaborate the proposals in the document '*Implementation of the law of Inclusive Education at school level: moving forward. Some reflections and proposals for further training actions*'. This document summarises the findings from the various stakeholder activities and also builds on the work carried out for the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) project on *Design of a system to monitor the implementation of the law on inclusive education in Portugal* in 2020-2022. This was prepared for and discussed with the directors and co-ordinators of the multi-disciplinary teams in the 16 school clusters, in the frame of the SRSP project, with the aim to create a practical tool to 'monitor' how schools are implementing inclusive education. The document is based on the monitoring system and results from fieldwork conducted in the school clusters.
- How to move beyond academic attainment as the sole measure of performance at school. What is school success?

National level findings

While the information gathered in the stakeholder meetings and peer learning activities is necessarily on a small scale, the points below were raised by participants across several

meetings/activities. It is not clear however, whether views expressed by individuals were their own individual perspectives or those representative of wider groups which may have been based on team consultation before the stakeholder meetings.

Governance and financing

Participants expressed concern over a policy/practice gap and suggested that shared values on inclusion should be strengthened. Terminology around inclusive education should be clarified as a basis for securing wide agreement around a broader view of inclusive education, moving away from an association primarily with SEN/disability.

Decree-Law No 54/2018 presents inclusive education in the context of ensuring that all learners have access to the necessary support to reach their learning and development potential. It emphasises the principles of equity, allowing all learners to access the curriculum and achieve success. The law modifies the legal framework for inclusive education, extending certain adaptations and supports defined in earlier decrees. The practice level understanding of this does not always align.

Participants stated that a consistent approach to monitoring and evaluation was needed across regions, moving away from short term projects to consistent evaluation of a long-term strategy. Many participants also saw the need to place less emphasis on academic outcomes (e.g. national examinations) and use a wider range of assessment information to monitor learner progress and school success.

Regarding finance, it was felt that funding more systematic collaboration could increase consistency across municipalities/regions.

Developing capacity

Participants recognised the need for a more effective method of identifying teacher training needs to support diversity and inclusion (e.g., use of universal, selective, additional support measures).

They felt that teachers should be engaged in appropriate training opportunities to build knowledge, skills, confidence (in initial teacher education/continuous professional development) including mentoring (e.g., Teach for Portugal – this programme recruits and trains young graduates and professionals from diverse fields to work as teachers. These teachers commit to teaching for two years in low-income communities. Mentorship plays a critical role in supporting the newly recruited teachers' professional and personal development. Each teacher is paired with a mentor who provides guidance throughout their two-year teaching commitment.). Funding should be available to create time, with some autonomy to meet local needs. Due to an ageing workforce, some people suggested that there should be a focus on teacher recruitment and retention and that a reduction in workload issues could support this.

Stakeholders at the meetings suggested that efforts should be made to strengthen ways of sharing effective/innovative practice within and between schools/clusters, municipalities and between schools and others in the community in particular universities/training centres.

Participants recognised the importance of strong leadership and the need for training/development opportunities at school/local level.

School level responses

- Participants discussed the benefits of stakeholder involvement in schools – parents, learners, multi-disciplinary teams etc which could help to identify learners needs in a timely way and potentially reduce bureaucracy.
- People felt that school culture could be improved by a move from high stakes culture, where consequences are tied to standardised testing and academic achievement as the primary indicators of success, to a culture of mutual support and the development of monitoring and evaluation that offered support for such an approach. Stakeholders stated that it is imperative to work collaboratively between teachers, multidisciplinary teams, specialised technicians, parents, education officers, directorates of schools/groups and guardianship. They also stated the need for more practical guidance and training.
- The issue of management of resources was raised, together with the need for longer term planning and more school financial autonomy to increase the stability of staffing. The key issues mentioned were 'not enough teachers coming into the system, while many teachers are reaching retirement age'. Stakeholders did not propose solutions to this, other than to indicate the need to ensure sufficient time for teachers to build networks and partnerships.

Regional Level Findings

Differences in organisation and monitoring/evaluation processes across regions leads to a lack of consistency in both policy implementation and outcomes. Regional disparities hinder the uniform application of policies and support mechanisms, leading to potential inequalities across the country.

Information from stakeholder in regional meetings activities is similar to many national level findings. While there is a lack of secure evidence from project activities, key messages are consistent with the findings of the SRSP project in Portugal in 2020-2022.

Participants identified a lack of opportunities/time for structured cooperation leading to a disconnect between regions. This impacted on professional development, monitoring and evaluation, staff allocation, parent/family/community involvement (particularly in disadvantaged areas) and inputs from multi-disciplinary teams. It was also noted that some school clusters in disadvantaged areas, where supported by TEIP, were able to develop better involvement with families and the community.

Strong leadership would be required to address such issues, together with a long-term plan for resourcing to ensure effective communication and coordination between system levels (national/regional/school).

Gaps (across levels)

- Insufficient attention to inclusion, diversity in ITE, CPD (beyond focus on SEN/disability) and lack of formal mentoring programmes in particular for new teachers.
- Retained focus (in some areas of the education system) on compensation rather than prevention where inclusion is heavily linked to SEN/disability.

- Lack of structures and processes at all levels to ensure consistent collaboration between all stakeholder groups – schools, parents, multi - disciplinary teams, community organisations etc.
- Underdeveloped processes/procedures to ensure more stable staffing and recruitment of new entrants to profession to replace aging workforce.
- Need for greater attention to leadership development in schools. Regions and clusters (middle tier), essential for networking between schools/services.
- Lack of funding for inter-school and regional cooperation.
- Shortage of specialist staff e.g. psychologists etc.
- Need for development of school monitoring/evaluation to better target personnel/resources/training – with reduced bureaucracy.

Challenges

Key challenges include the development of:

- A broader view of inclusive education - beyond SEN/disability. This in turn impacts on many other areas e.g. integrating inclusive education into teacher education as a topic (as opposed to focus on inclusive pedagogy for all learners).
- An agreed vision for an education system for all learners, underpinned by consistent values and clear terminology.
- Time and resources for training, engaging teachers in courses that will equip them to meet a wide range of diverse learner needs.
- Structures and processes to support collaboration at all levels including family and community involvement.
- Knowledge/practice sharing through cooperative practice and digital platforms within and across regions.
- A sustainable resourcing model with a long-term plan including staff allocation.
- Flexibility in the curriculum to meet diverse learner needs and capacity in all schools to put in place a range of support strategies to overcome barriers to learning (with an emphasis on intersectionality not 'labelled' groups).
- Recruitment and retention of staff (teaching, non-teaching) including from minority groups (e.g. people with disabilities, from minority ethic and language backgrounds). There was a call for teachers to have more knowledge on inclusion so they can support all learners.
- An effective programme of monitoring and evaluation in schools to produce data that can feed into monitoring/evaluation at regional/national level.

Strengths

There are many strengths in the system, stemming from years of work to move towards a more inclusive and equitable system in Portugal. However, while the new law is in place, full implementation across regions, impacting practice in schools - where inclusion is

ultimately successfully implemented (Carrington et al., 2017; Schuelka, 2018) is inconsistent. The following strengths provide a strong basis for further development of policy and practice.

- New legal framework (Law 54/2018).
- Support to school staff and learners through collaboration in schools and collaboration between professionals around schools – e.g. multi-disciplinary teams, external services.
- Co-operation through school clusters via EMAEI: Equipa Multidisciplinar de Apoio à Educação Inclusiva (Multidisciplinary Team for Inclusive Education Support); GAAF: Gabinete de Apoio ao Aluno e à Família (Student and Family Support Office); DEE: Departamento de Educação Especial (Department of Special Education); SPO: Serviços de Psicologia e Orientação (Psychology and Guidance Services). Within the school clusters there is a permanent work of cooperation between the headquarters school and the other schools of the group, namely the schools of the rural parishes.
- Technical resources provided by the Ministry of Education (computers, routers phones), allowed schools to diversify, customise and individualise pedagogical practices. Digital platforms such as Microsoft Teams which has shared folders for collaborative work with teachers.
- Parent involvement – including in decision making e.g. building on the work of the Association of parents and guardians (Associação de Pais e Encarregados de Educação (APAIS)). APAIS can promote awareness sessions for parents and other educators, playing an active role in fostering partnerships between parents and schools. These sessions aim to engage families in the school community and improve collaboration with teachers, particularly in the context of inclusive education.
- Knowledge hubs in some communities, sharing between municipalities. Stakeholders mentioned some successful attempts to establish 'knowledge hubs' at the community level – for example on topics such as absenteeism, school failure.
- Training initiatives (Continuing Professional Development): e.g. Mentoring for new teachers, Teach for Portugal and partnerships with universities and training centres in some areas. The work developed by bodies such as the Private Institutions of Social Solidarity (IPSS), youth associations, health centres or universities, is also very significant, in that, due to the different added value that these bodies provide, they are always constant partners in the dynamics of the necessary functioning between the school and the families.
- Work by multi-disciplinary teams on needs analysis/reducing barriers/monitoring. This includes a multi-level support model and differentiated pedagogical approaches. The EMAEI Team perform diagnostic evaluation of learners' difficulties and needs, transmit this information to the class council and families, share ways of acting with teachers and jointly seek types of intervention and response to the needs of the students. One stakeholder also described the use of a

multi-level approach, with the application of universal, selective and additional measures in order to respond to the diverse needs of students.

- Growing autonomy in schools, developing a culture that values new ideas and on-going improvement with emphasis on positive relationships and developing learners' sense of belonging.
- Introduction of a range of evaluation measures and an increasing awareness of the need to broaden success criteria for learners, beyond formal examinations. The introduction of a learner profile, recording broader skills and achievements is a further positive development. The use of individual educational programmes adapted to the profile of the learners indicates the use of tailored educational programmes to meet the individual needs and profiles of learners. One stakeholder from the Centro region explained that schools are more and more prepared to tackle diversity.

Spain

The following section summarises the main findings for Spain. It covers the overall findings at national and regional level, including an analysis of gaps, challenges, and areas of strength. It also provides a set of overall recommendations for improvement based on the key priorities identified by the Spanish Government at the beginning of this project.

Priorities

Territorial disparities in inclusive education

- Ensure an inclusive educational response of quality and equity for all learners with specific educational support needs by combatting territorial disparities in access to inclusive education.

Support resources and support teachers in schools

- Optimise the use of support resources and adjust the number of support teachers in schools.

In-service training for teachers

- Improve the in-service training of teachers in relation to the challenges of inclusive education and make a connection with the initial training, which would result in greater involvement.

System capacities

- Increase the development of system capacities: provide tools to carry out changes in daily practices.

Collaboration between educational centres

- Establish collaboration mechanisms between educational centres in an area: networks of centres, sharing resources and good practices, and building relationship with community services.

Evaluation and monitoring

- Establish indicators for the evaluation and monitoring the effectiveness of the measures for the promotion of inclusive education and attention to diversity that are proposed in the new educational law.

National level findings

Territorial disparities

- There are substantial regional differences in terms of regulations that address diversity and inclusion of all learners in schools. This is due to the varying speeds of regulatory development in the different territories. The data from the stakeholder meetings and the country report indicate there is no coherent and harmonised approach to inclusive education across schools and regions, leading to varied practices and outcomes.
- The data from the stakeholder meetings and the country report indicate there is no coherent and harmonised approach to inclusive education across schools and regions, leading to varied practices and outcomes.

Support for teachers in schools and system capacities

- Mentorship programs were seen as pivotal in guiding new teachers through the complexities of inclusive classrooms, facilitating the application of theoretical knowledge into practical teaching strategies.
- Collaboration between different levels of education, such as primary, secondary, and tertiary, was considered important to promote a cohesive approach to inclusive education across educational settings.
- Stakeholders across the regions highlighted the pivotal role of educational centres and collaboration platforms. These collaborative efforts with interested teachers, associations, and parents are integral to creating inclusive school environments because of their focus on training, awareness raising and partnerships.
- Collaboration between educational communities and leveraging positive international experiences were also highlighted as avenues for enriching inclusive education practices and fostering continuous improvement within the education system.

In-service training and continuous professional development for teachers

- There was consensus on the critical need to integrate inclusive education into the foundational training of all teachers at universities to ensure that future educators are equipped with comprehensive knowledge and skills in inclusive practices from the outset of their careers.
- Emphasis was placed on the breadth of training topics (e.g., accommodations for learners with SEN, inclusive pedagogical strategies, socio-emotional development). Integrating inclusive education content directly into academic subjects within teacher education programmes was considered a useful strategy.
- Moreover, the data showed the importance for teachers, including specialists, to pursue education up to Master's level, aiming to deepen their understanding and

proficiency in addressing the diverse needs of learners through inclusive approaches.

- Continuous professional development should be offered in the form of mentorship by teachers with experience with inclusion and it was suggested that online and in-person training on inclusive practices should be made mandatory and involve the entire school community. The issue of teachers not finding time for professional development and the importance of focussing on attitudes toward inclusion was also signalled.

Collaboration

- There was agreement among stakeholders in Spain that initiatives that aim at fostering collaboration with families and community agencies are crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education practices.
- Addressing barriers to family participation, such as language differences and work schedule constraints, by using tailored approaches, was indicated as essential for enhancing engagement in school activities and training sessions aimed at promoting inclusive education.
- The data indicate that leveraging networks for material exchange, sharing experiences, and disseminating good practices in inclusive education further enhances collaboration and supports continuous improvement across educational communities in Spain.

Evaluation and monitoring

- There is a gap between individual-level and school-level monitoring, affecting the comprehensive assessment of inclusive education practices. A coherent and consistent monitoring system at both individual and school levels is lacking.
- Comprehensive and standardised indicators to assess the effectiveness of inclusive education practices across all schools should be developed.
- Issues were raised around the efficient use of resources and the impact on the adoption and implementation of inclusive education principles. Efficient and equitable allocation of resources needs to be tied to appropriate evaluation and monitoring systems.

Regional level findings

The regional level findings represent data from the Autonomous Communities of Aragón, Canarias, Extremadura, Galicia, and Navarra. Even with differing levels of legislation, policy and implementation of inclusive practices, the findings show similar understanding of what is important and of issues that need to be addressed. The extent of the challenges differs across the regions.

Aragón

- In Aragón, intensive efforts are noted in fostering collaboration with families through workshops and effective models that promote inclusive education.
- Diversity attention teams within educational centres play a crucial role in establishing links with other institutions and community organizations. These

teams focus on building relationships based on respect and ensuring accessible communication channels for all stakeholders.
- The region emphasizes the importance of inclusive culture not only within schools but also in engaging all students and families, aiming for holistic support and participation in educational processes.

Canarias

- In the Canary Islands, there is a strong emphasis on collaboration through educational platforms like the Canarian Innova Network, facilitating the sharing of resources and innovative practices among schools.
- Efforts are being made to overcome barriers to diverse parent participation through measures that promote inclusive policies, including a shift towards a Neurodiversity model in education.
- The region emphasizes prior reflection and strategic planning to enhance collaboration effectiveness, ensuring continuous professional development and the integration of inclusive practices in classrooms.

Extremadura

- Extremadura has implemented learning community projects aimed at encouraging active family involvement in educational processes. The TRANSITA Program exemplifies efforts to foster collaboration through driving groups, which facilitate ongoing dialogue and support between schools and families.
- Challenges include engaging families through meaningful activities and setting clear objectives for collaborative work.
- The region places significant emphasis on managing human, financial, and technical resources effectively to support inclusive education practices, underscored by coordinated leadership and continuous training initiatives for educators.

Galicia

- Galicia highlights initiatives such as schools for parents and interactive programs like OBSERVE/ACTION, which involve teaching teams in improving educational practices through collaborative efforts.
- Challenges include transitioning from an expert-driven model to a more collaborative approach that actively involves families and diverse community institutions.
- Workshops and world cafés serve as platforms for effective collaboration, promoting inclusive policies that integrate diverse perspectives and resources within educational settings.

Navarra

- In Navarra, the emphasis is on utilizing teacher mobility programs to expose educators to diverse inclusion approaches and practices.
- A network of centres for coexistence and educational inclusion enhances collaboration beyond the educational system, involving health and social protection services.

- The region emphasizes holistic approaches that address the needs of students within a supportive school community framework, integrating diverse assessments and support services tailored to individual student requirements.

Across these regions there is a shared recognition of the need for **comprehensive school-level responses** to address specific educational needs. Central to these responses is the importance of fostering a sense of belonging within school communities and adopting learner-centric approaches that cater to diverse learning profiles. Different kind of regional centres and networks have been set up in each of the regions to promote **family-school and other partnerships.** Even though those initiatives exist, **fostering meaningful collaboration** remains high on the agenda everywhere.

Challenges such as **curriculum flexibility, teacher autonomy, training and information accessibility** are identified across the regions. Other common issues are **the lack of consistency, systematisation** in the areas of training and support for teachers, as well as in family-school partnerships as in monitoring systems for inclusive education practices. **Strategies for effective resource management** and the **promotion of inclusive cultures** are highlighted as critical components of successful school-based practices.

- Across Aragón, Canarias, Extremadura, Galicia, and Navarra, there is a shared recognition of the need for **comprehensive school-level responses** to address specific educational needs. Central to these responses is the importance of fostering a sense of belonging within school communities and adopting learner-centric approaches that cater to diverse learning profiles.

Gaps (across levels)

- Need for university-level training:

  Inclusive education is not consistently integrated into initial teacher training programmes across Spain and there is insufficient coverage of inclusive education topics.

- Lack of systematic mentorship:

  There is a notable absence of systematic mentorship programmes for early career teachers, particularly in the context of inclusive education.

- Limited collaboration with families:

  Collaboration with families regarding learning options and inclusive practices is not widespread and should be promoted.

  Need for guidance and support from administrators:

- Schools demands guidance and support from central administrations on how to introduce flexible elements into their curricula and educational practices, impacting their ability to adapt to diverse learner needs.

- Ineffective communication and consultation:

  Effective communication and consultation mechanisms between stakeholders need to be promoted. Improved communication channels could enhance collaboration and support inclusive education initiatives.

Challenges

- Resistance to change and lack of incentives:

  Given the possible resistance to change on the part of the teachers, it is necessary to promote and incentivize teacher training in inclusive methodologies to implement the models in practice.

- Voluntary nature of professional development:

  Inclusion modules and training opportunities are often voluntary, leading to uneven participation levels among educators. Making these training programs mandatory could ensure more consistent implementation of inclusive practices.

- Inefficient support systems:

  Cumbersome bureaucratic processes within school systems hinder the timely and effective implementation of responses to learners' diverse needs and also hinder collaboration between schools, families, and communities. Streamlining administrative procedures could improve flexibility and responsiveness.

- Sustainability of collaborations:

  Smaller-scale collaborations often face sustainability issues, relying heavily on the commitment of specific individuals rather than institutional frameworks. This limits the long-term impact and scalability of collaborative efforts.

- Inclusive participation:

  Ensuring inclusive participation in collaboration efforts remains challenging with certain demographics, such as marginalized communities or socio-economically disadvantaged groups, being underrepresented in decision-making processes.

Strengths

- Strong buy-in for inclusion:

  There is a strong consensus among educators and policymakers regarding the importance of the inclusive education model in Spain.

- Improved teacher training:

  There is advocacy for universal access to teacher training in inclusive education, aiming to equip all educators with the necessary skills to support diverse learners effectively.

- Emphasis on socio-emotional development:

  Teacher training programs emphasize the socio-emotional development of learners, recognizing its critical role in inclusive education.

- Importance of support systems:

  There is widespread recognition of the importance of collaboration between specialists (e.g., special education teachers, school counsellors/ advisors) and generalists in promoting inclusive practices.

- Cooperative culture:

Some regions exhibit a cooperative culture within schools, fostering an environment where stakeholders work together to support inclusive practices.

- Flexible teaching methods:

  There is support for the universal organisation of learning and the adoption of flexible teaching methods that cater to diverse learner needs. For example, the principles of universal design for learning approaches are recognised as a basic principle in the LOMLOE (Organic Law Amending the Organic Law of Education).

- Existence of collaboration platforms:

  Collaboration platforms and networks are in place across regions, providing a structured framework for schools, families, and communities to collaborate effectively and support schools in implementing inclusive education initiatives.

- Utilisation of EU programmes:

  Utilisation of teacher mobility programs at the EU level contributes to educators learning different approaches and best practices in inclusive education.

Key points emerging across all three countries

A number of strengths, challenges and gaps common to all three countries, have emerged as findings from the analysis of the stakeholder participation phase. This finding suggests that, even where there are systemic, historical and cultural differences between the education systems in the three countries, there are nevertheless common challenges on the way towards more inclusive education systems which continue to persist. It is clear, however, that recommendations and measures to address these points of commonality must be addressed to each country individually, given the research literature around issues of transferability between systems[1]. The recommendations and suggested new measures are addressed in subsequent documents and activities in this project.

Strengths

All three countries reported areas of strength, in terms of a growing awareness of inclusive education to meet the needs of all learners, rather than a narrower focus on learners with a formal diagnosis of SEN. This was more evident in participants from Portugal and Spain, in terms of practices and attitudes, but recognised as an area for change in Italy. Effective leadership was cited as a strength, in terms of supporting an inclusive environment and ethos in schools, but this would appear to depend on the

[1] European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021. Key Principles – Supporting policy development and implementation for inclusive education. (V. J. Donnelly and A. Watkins, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/key-principles-supporting-policy-development-implementation

Golden, G., 2020. 'Education policy evaluation: Surveying the OECD landscape', OECD Education Working Papers, No. 236. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/9f127490-en

qualities of individuals, rather than on a system of training and development for school leaders.

Gaps and Challenges

The separation of gaps from challenges is not always evident, as the issues caused by gaps, frequently give rise to challenges.

Participants in all three countries identified a number of gaps across different aspects of the education system, and also suggested potential solutions to address some of these. Most notable gaps were in training, leadership, collaboration within and between schools, clusters of schools, and regions; sharing good practice and effective mentoring for staff within schools; effective and systematic use of resources; need for planning; and continuity and collaboration gaps across different aspects of the education system, through multi-disciplinary teams, or between schools, municipalities or regions.

The results and impact of the lack of coherent and systematic monitoring and evaluation processes across many aspects of the education system, at national, regional and school levels, was a recurring theme. Most notably, this was in relation to staff, resource allocation and management, training and support systems. A noted gap was the effective engagement of families and communities in education, which was recognised as important, but emerged as a challenge in practice. In some cases, resourcing was reported as adequate, but lacking in evaluation and equity of use and distribution. More generally, participants indicated there were insufficient resources to meet the needs of schools, on a daily basis, at all levels, in terms of funding, and human resources. It was also suggested that bureaucracy could prove resource intensive, taking time away from teachers' other duties.

A number of challenges emerged across all three countries. These include a lack of effective training for inclusive education, at all stages, to enable staff in schools to meet the needs of diverse learners. This lack of training, and recognition and response to the challenges encountered in schools by staff (teachers, support staff and school leaders), creates further challenges in terms of staff dissatisfaction and drop out, leading to a lack of continuity, which has a further impact on teaching and learning. The lack of effective resources management creates numerous problems across the education system at all levels. Interestingly, the concept of inclusive education continues to be discussed, as many stakeholders in all three countries indicated that there continues to be a lack of clarity amongst those working in schools and across education, as to the exact terms of reference and how these are to be interpreted into practice. This was most discussed during in-person stakeholder meetings.

REFERENCES

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021. Key Principles – Supporting policy development and implementation for inclusive education. (V. J. Donnelly and A. Watkins, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/key-principles-supporting-policy-development-implementation

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ANNEXES

Annex 1. Working Group 1 with Portuguese stakeholders, meeting agenda

Table 4. Working Group 1 with Portuguese stakeholders, meeting agenda

Time	Session	Activities	Zoom Session
09.00–10.00	Plenary (joint meeting) Participants of all 5 regional WGs	• Welcome by the Ministry of Education • Welcome by DG REFORM • Brief overview of the project • Introduction to the Working Group(s) • Introduction to Inclusive Teacher Education • European example on Inclusive Teacher Education • Questions	Link to the plenary
10.00–10.15	Break	Break	Break
10.15–11.45	Parallel regional WGs discussion (in breakout rooms)	• Participants are divided into two breakout rooms to discuss questions related to Inclusive Teacher Education • One representative from each group to be responsible to write down ideas, to report back	Link to Breakout room 1 Norte Region Centro region Lisboa Region Link to Breakout room 2 Algarve Region Alentejo Region

Time	Session	Activities	Zoom Session
11.45–12.00	Break	Break	Break
12.00–13.00	Plenary	• Group reporting • Next steps	Link to the plenary

Annex 2. Online Peer Learning Activity 1, agenda

Table 5. Online Peer Learning Activity 1 agenda

Time	Session	Activities	Comments
10.00–10.30	Plenary session. Moderator: Mary Kyriazopoulou, European Agency	• Welcome – DG REFORM • Introduction to the aim and focus of the meeting – Mary Kyriazopoulou • Introduction to the topic *Responses to learner diversity*, by presenting the summary discussion points of the regional working groups – Gordon Porter, Research Advisor • Questions	-
10.30–10.45	Break	Break	Break

10.45–13.15	Parallel sessions in two Working Groups. Group 1: Diana Murdoch, Eloy Rebollo Piriz, Antonella Mangiarancina (moderators); Half of the participants from the five regions of the three countries. Group 2: Mary Kyriazopoulou, Gareth Hughes (moderators); Half of the participants from the five regions of the three countries.	• Representatives from Aragón, Norte, Emilia-Romagna will give examples related to the first topic in both groups (one representative per region per group, five minutes each) • Representatives from Extremadura, Centro, Veneto will give examples related to the second topic in both groups (one representative per region per group, five minutes each) • Discussion • Short break • Representatives from Canarias, Lisboa, Lazio will give examples related to the third topic in both groups (one representative per region per group, five minutes each) • Representatives from Galicia, Algarve, Campania will give examples related to the fourth topic in both groups (one representative per region per group, five minutes each) • Discussion	Participants from the three countries will be divided in two working groups to share experiences and discuss how they respond to learner diversity at the school/classroom level. Interpretation in Italian, Portuguese, Spanish in both Working Groups.

Time	Session	Activities	Comments
		• Short break • Representatives from Navarra, Alentejo, Sicily will give examples related to the fifth topic in both groups (one representative per region per group, five minutes each) • Discussion	
13.15–13.30	Break	Break	Break
13.30–14.00	Plenary. Moderator – Mary Kyriazopoulou	• Summary of the main points of the discussion in the two groups	-

Annex 3. Study visit Sweden, agenda

Table 6. Study visit Sweden agenda – Day 1, 27 May

Time	Session	Notes
16.00–19.00	• Welcome – Eva Griffith (Head of Advisory support, National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools), Mary Kyriazopoulou (Agency) and Elisa Gomez Aleman (DG REFORM) • Introduction of the participants • Presentation of the focus of the meeting and the school visits • Discussion and agreements on how the study visit information will be collected/recorded and shared widely with the participants from the three project countries (see below) • Presentation by Mary Kyriazopoulou (Agency) and country representatives: ***Challenges and priorities in Italy, Portugal, Spain*** • Presentation by Zoë Leffler and Per Skoglund ***The Swedish system: challenges and strategies from a framework perspective*** • Presentation by Erica Sjöberg and Sarah Neuman, Advisors and Co-ordinators of the programme 'Proactive pupil health work', and Ingrid Hylander, Associate Professor in Education Psychology at the Karolinska Institute: ***Networking and collaboration related to schoollevel inclusive education capacity development****: The collaboration between state support and schools following the research to strengthen a sustainable 'pupil health work' for inclusion* • Preparation for the school visit on 28 May	Room 'Xenon' *Afternoon coffee break served in conference lounge, 16.00*
20.00	*Dinner*	Hotel restaurant 'Lykke' Entrance floor

Table 7. Study visit Sweden agenda – Day 2, 28 May

Time	Session	Location
08.00–09.00	Transport (train) to Focaultgymnasiet, Adapted*, upper secondary high school, Södertälje kommun *Note: *Adapted* is the new term in the Education Act for former 'Särskola' (a special form of school for approximately 1% of the population with intellectual disability)	Meet in the lobby at 08.00
09.00–11.15	• Welcome by local authorities and presentation of the school community - The school direction, form and scale (film: links to the film will be made available) - Challenges and strategies over time to increase the capacity of schools and classrooms to respond to diversity (film over the process: links to the film will be made available) - Co-operation with state support and the school community: What has been improved and what are the results • *Coffee break* • School visit guided by the principal and other staff • Summing up: Questions and reflections	Focaultgymnasiet, Adapted, upper secondary high school, Södertälje kommun
11.45–13.30	*Lunch*	Hotel restaurant 'Lykke' Entrance floor

Time	Session	Location
13.30–18.30	• Reflections from study visit participants after the school visit • Presentation by Dr. Anna Brodin and Per Skoglund: ***Teacher education. Profession programmes and Practice Schools: challenges, strategies and outcome*** - History in Swedish context and description of the current system - Challenges in teacher education? - Current strategies for improvement of teacher education? Practice Schools - A complementary strategy from national agencies: Special pedagogy for learning • Presentation by Tone Engen: ***System for monitoring, evaluation and improvement: challenges, strategies and results*** • Reflections from Day 1 and 2 from the participants from Italy, Portugal and Spain: Individual reflections on their perspectives on: - their own priorities/challenges; - the potential for transfer to their own contexts. • Sarah Neuman and Erica Sjöberg: Preparation for school visit 29 May	Room 'Xenon' *Afternoon coffee break served at 15.15 pm in conference lounge*
19.45	*Dinner*	Urban Deli Sveavägen, meet up at the hotel lobby at 19.45

Table 8. Study visit Sweden agenda – Day 3, 29 May

Time	Session	Location
08.00–08.30	Transport to Lilla Akademien, independent school in Stockholm city centre *Please bring your carry-on luggage and make sure you have checked out.*	Taxi transport, meet in the lobby at 08.00

Time	Session	Location
08.30–10.30	• Welcome by representatives from the local authorities and presentation of the school community: - The school direction, form and scale - Challenges and strategies over time to increase the capacity of schools and classrooms to respond to diversity - Co-operation with state support and the school community: improvements and results • *Coffee break* • School visit guided by the principal • Summing up: Questions and reflections	Lilla Akademien, independent school in Stockholm city centre
10.45–11.30	• Coffee and sandwich break • Reflection on the visit: What is transferable and how might this be achieved?	
11.30	*Departure of participants*	Taxi from the school to Arlanda airport