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

TSI2022-EUROCH-IBA (101100120)

Deliverable 4.3 Final dissemination event

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

CONTENTS

FINAL DISSEMINATION EVENT 19 MARCH 2025

The final dissemination event for TSI EUROCH took place online on 19 March 2025 (see Agenda in the Annex 1). This replaced the previous arrangement for an in-person meeting in Rome.

This technical event presented an overview of the project, outlining the work and activities of the different phases undertaken over the duration of the project, with some consideration of the benefits of participation and potential future steps.

A number of speakers represented the different aspects and perspectives of this multi-country project. These will include contributions from representatives of the European Commission's Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM), Italy, Portugal and Spain, a regional stakeholder from each of these three countries, and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE).

The meeting was open to those who have participated in any stage of the project, including national, regional or municipal policy-makers, school professionals, support staff and experts, and family and community associations. Others who may be interested or involved in the project's overall aim of enabling the three countries to move forwards in their plans to combat disparities in access to inclusive education were also very welcome to join the event.

Participants

The final dissemination event included participants from the Ministry officials in the project countries: Italy, Portugal, and Spain, stakeholder representatives from the regional groups as well as representatives from SG REFORM (European Commission), and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

Notes

Official opening of the TSI EUROCH final dissemination event

The TSI EUROCH final dissemination event was officially opened by Ciresica Feyer from SG REFORM, who provided background on this TSI project as one of the first multi-country projects for SG REFROM.

João Costa, Director of EASNIE, expressed gratitude to participating countries and stakeholders, highlighting shared concerns regarding inclusive education. While there is broad consensus on goals, challenges persist in implementation, monitoring, and resource allocation. He emphasised the importance of collaboration and mutual learning, acknowledging the need for a dynamic approach to revising goals. The project's deliverables build on previous work and will shape future initiatives. The participatory nature of TSI, involving learners, practitioners, and school leaders, was also underscored.

Mónica Domínguez García, Director General of Evaluation and Territorial Cooperation at the Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, commended the collaboration with EASNIE, stressing that this is the time to put the shared vision into practice by embracing classroom diversity.

Project overview and project outcomes

MIM
Ministero dell'Istruzione
e del Merito

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN, FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL Y DEPORTES

REPÚBLICA PORTUGUESA
EDUCAÇÃO, CIÊNCIA E INOVAÇÃO

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Funded by
the European Union

The EASNIE project team provided an overview of the flagship TSI project, which supports the implementation of the European Child Guarantee and enables participating countries to continue improving their education systems and practices. A multidisciplinary team, including Nordic experts and Gordon Porter, built on previous EASNIE projects and SRSP work in Portugal. The bottom-up, participatory methodology allowed for a diverse range of methods, leading to discussions, recommendations, and action plans for future development. Individual country reports were based on national documents, and stakeholder engagement focused on six themes derived from country priorities. Five regions per country were selected to ensure equitable geographic representation, with working groups including 190 stakeholders across 15 regions. However, challenges included underrepresentation of migrant and Roma groups and a larger representation of SEN representatives. A study visit to Sweden provided insights into how the country responds to diversity. The project delivered recommendations, action plans, follow-up reports, and monitoring and evaluation resources. Three webinars, communication outputs, and a final project video were also produced. Key risks included governmental changes in the three countries and within the steering committee, as well as competing national priorities and changes in leadership and analysts in EASNIE. Despite these challenges, the project enabled countries to develop feasible action plans, facilitated collaboration between policymakers and practitioners, encouraged peer learning, introduced new perspectives on common issues, and produced valuable resources and tools. Additionally, it fostered opportunities for future collaborations and networks within and across the three countries.

Teacher support in inclusive schools

Gordon Porter (Canada) Project Research Advisor

Gordon Porter outlined critical elements of teacher support in inclusive schools, emphasising the importance of a strong school support team, including leaders, administrators, guidance staff, and support teachers. He highlighted a shift in the role of support teachers, advocating for them to dedicate the majority of their time to assisting classroom teachers rather than primarily working with learners.

Key actions for support teachers include collaborating and co-planning with classroom educators, reflecting on teaching practices, and meeting with teachers to discuss learner plans. They also play a vital role in school-based support team meetings, coaching and mentoring teachers, co-teaching, and modelling lessons. Additionally, support teachers contribute by conducting formal and informal learner assessments, assisting with individualised education plans (IEPs) and student support plans (SSPs), developing resources for interventions, and facilitating professional learning sessions. Effective collaboration with parents and the coordination of educational assistants further strengthen inclusive practices.

Porter's approach underscores the need for a dynamic, hands-on role for support teachers to enhance classroom inclusion and improve outcomes for all learners.

Stakeholder panel: Reflections on participation and benefits of regional participation in the project

The stakeholder panel provided valuable reflections on the participation and benefits of regional involvement in the TSI project, with regional representatives from Italy, Portugal, and Spain sharing their experiences and insights.

Luana Scarfi, School principal of Veneto region

Luana Scarfi highlighted how regional in-person meetings created opportunities to explore inclusion challenges by facilitating the exchange of approaches between different regional education systems. These discussions allowed participants to better understand national regulations on inclusive schools and how each region supports stakeholders in implementing inclusive practices. Comparing training models for support teaching staff across countries and identifying best practices helped foster constructive dialogue on addressing diverse learner needs.

Scarfi emphasised that the online peer learning events built on these discussions by enabling regional stakeholders to collaborate in advance, share ideas, and prepare materials. The cross-country collaboration model stimulated discussions within and between regions, leading to new ideas for improving education for learners with special needs. She also stressed the importance of continuous improvement and the value of international cooperation in refining inclusive education strategies.

To maximize the project's impact, Scarfi suggested further actions such as organising regional stakeholder meetings to share key takeaways from the webinars, conducting on-site visits by EASNIE representatives to better understand local implementation, and creating a publication summarising experiences and expert recommendations. She also noted the importance of recognising the history of Italy's inclusion laws and the autonomy of individual schools, which personalise inclusion frameworks based on local characteristics.

Marta Gonçalves, Psychologist from the School Cluster S. João do Estoril; Lisboa e Vale do Tejo

Marta Gonçalves reflected on the project's role in broadening perspectives on inclusive education and its implementation in schools. She noted that Portugal has made significant progress in embedding inclusion within national laws, continuously evolving with new knowledge. However, challenges persist, particularly in securing sufficient human resources and ensuring policy continuity amid political changes.

She emphasised the value of Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) in fostering discussions at various levels, allowing participants to share both challenges and successes. The webinars provided strong frameworks for monitoring and evaluation, but time constraints make full implementation difficult.

The collaborative nature of the project encouraged critical thinking and global perspectives, reinforcing Portugal's strengths in inclusive education while identifying areas for further development.

María José Rodríguez Torres, Educational counsellor and Educational Technical advisor for the region of The Canary Islands

María José Rodríguez Torres underscored the TSI project's role in fostering collaboration among schools, families, and the third sector, reinforcing the need to continue

strengthening these connections. While discussions often focus on special educational needs and disabilities, the project highlighted the power of collective efforts in creating more inclusive schools.

She praised the selection of experts and the theoretical foundations provided, particularly through the webinars, which served as valuable resources. The cross-country collaboration model facilitated dialogue across Spain's autonomous communities, enhancing professional development and boosting school inclusion efforts. Working alongside regions such as Aragón, Galicia, Extremadura, and Navarra provided a richer understanding of common challenges and shared solutions.

Spain's coordination efforts, led by the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports, have been demanding but ultimately beneficial. The project allowed Spanish regions to compare tools and strategies with one another and with other countries, generating insights that will inform future practices. Rodríguez Torres highlighted the PROA+ inclusive school programme as a key initiative, expressing a desire to integrate lessons from the TSI project into ongoing training and development efforts.

Country reports: Moving forward from TSI EUROCH

Members of the Steering Committee and Ministry representatives shared reflections on moving forward from the TSI EUROCH project. In Italy, Mariangela Di Gneo highlighted the valuable contributions of experts, which provided opportunities to learn from diverse experiences and competencies. Expert support was crucial in identifying areas for improvement and strengthening collaboration to align educational reforms with national plans. Discussions focused on broadening opportunities across regions and reassessing strengths and weaknesses.

Maria João Horta from Portugal emphasised that inclusion extends beyond schools into society. She reflected on Portugal's journey, from closing special schools in 2008 to introducing a new law in 2018, acknowledging that legislation alone does not ensure smooth implementation or universal understanding. The OECD's 2022 Review of Inclusive Education in Portugal, along with simultaneous SRSP project monitoring efforts, provided insights into both successes and ongoing challenges. Collaboration with countries that prioritise inclusive education has been particularly valuable for continuous reflection at all levels.

Spain's Lucio Calleja Bachiller discussed the country's new law that guarantees inclusive education for all, grounded in equity and diversity to uphold children's rights. However, Spain's decentralised system adds complexity to implementing reforms. Territorial cooperation programmes have played a key role in reducing social inequalities among regions and learners. The TSI project was instrumental in analysing existing tools and legislation, confirming prior concerns and helping to refine strategies. He stressed that teaching is more than imparting knowledge—it involves broader societal impact. Working with other countries, particularly the Nordic countries, has helped Spain enhance its perspective on inclusion. Moving forward, there is a need to evaluate how schools and classrooms are organised to ensure meaningful progress in inclusive education. He highlighted that the Ministry is in a process of developing a national plan on inclusive education, the first draft of which was prepared considering the recommendations from this TSI EUROCH project.

Closing remarks

Elisa Gómez Alemán, representing SG REFORM, delivered the closing remarks, marking the conclusion of this flagship project's collaboration. She highlighted both the similarities and unique differences among the three participating countries, emphasising the importance of policy dialogue at national, regional, and local levels. She expressed appreciation for the fact that, even at this early stage, plans are already in motion to build on the lessons learned throughout the project. Acknowledging that this initiative is just one step in a longer journey, she reinforced the commitment to ongoing progress in inclusive education beyond the project's formal end.

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

7

ANNEXES

Annex 1, Agenda of the final dissemination event

Date: Wednesday, 19 March 2025

Time: 15.00–17.00 CET

Location: The meeting will take place via Zoom. Please access the meeting via this link: [TSI EUROCH: Final dissemination event](#).

Simultaneous interpretation will be from English to Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

Recording: The meeting will be video and audio recorded.

Context

The final dissemination event for TSI EUROCH will take place online. This replaces the previous arrangement for an in-person meeting in Rome.

This technical event will present an overview of the project, outlining the work and activities of the different phases undertaken over the duration of the project, with some consideration of the benefits of participation and potential future steps.

A number of speakers will represent the different aspects and perspectives of this multi-country project. These will include contributions from representatives of the European Commission's Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM), Italy, Portugal and Spain, a regional stakeholder from each of these three countries, and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE).

The meeting is open to those who have participated in any stage of the project, including national, regional or municipal policy-makers, school professionals, support staff and experts, and family and community associations. Others who may be interested or involved in the project's overall aim of enabling the three countries to move forwards in their plans to combat disparities in access to inclusive education are also very welcome to join the event.

Participants

The final dissemination event will include participants from the Ministry officials in the project countries: Italy, Portugal, and Spain, stakeholder representatives from the regional groups as well as representatives from SG REFORM (European Commission), and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

Agenda

Time	Session	Speakers
15.00–15.15	Official opening of the TSI EUROCH final dissemination event	**Ciresica Feyer**, SG REFORM **João Costa**, Director of EASNIE

		Mónica Domínguez García, Director General of Evaluation and Territorial Cooperation, Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
15.15–15.35	Project overview and project outcomes	EASNIE project team
15.35–15.45	Teacher support in inclusive schools	Gordon Porter (Canada) Project Research Advisor
15.45–15.55	*Break*	–
15.55–16.25	**Stakeholder panel**: Reflections on participation and benefits of regional participation in the project	Regional representatives
15.55–16.05	Stakeholder panel (Italy)	Luana Scarfi, School principal of Veneto region
16.05–16.15	Stakeholder panel (Portugal)	Marta Gonçalves, Psychologist from the School Cluster S. João do Estoril; Lisboa e Vale do Tejo
16.15–16.25	Stakeholder panel (Spain)	José Rodríguez Torres, Educational counsellor and Educational Technical advisor for the region of The Canary Islands
16.25–16.55	**Country reports: Moving forward from TSI EUROCH** Italy Portugal Spain	Members of the Steering Committee or other Ministry representatives Mariangela Di Gneo, Ministry Official Maria João Horta, Deputy Director-General for Education Lucio Calleja Bachiller, Deputy Director, Sub-directorate of Territorial Cooperation and Educational Innovation

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

9

| 16.55–17.00 | Closing remarks | Elisa Gómez Alemán, SG REFORM |

Annex 2, Presentation by EASNIE

COMBATTING DISPARITIES IN ACCESS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL, ITALY AND SPAIN (TSI-2022-EUROCH-IBA (101100120))

Project overview

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

Overview of presentation

- Introduction to the project and the team
- Methodology and phases of the project
- Stakeholder engagement preparation
- Stakeholder meetings
- Findings, recommendations and action plans
- Capacity building
- Communication outputs and Final Report
- Realised risks
- Final reflections

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

TSI EUROCH overview

Flagship technical support multi-country project to support implementation of the European Child Guarantee in EU Member States

Aim: To support and enable the three project countries to continue to improve their inclusive education systems and practices, build capacity within the system and make sustainable change

Project duration: 26 months + 4-month extension

Project countries: Italy, Portugal, Spain

Multidisciplinary project team (1)

Three external country experts worked with the Agency team at different points across the project.

- They advised and supported on aspects of the work and interacted with stakeholders in countries.

- Each country had a 'dedicated' expert, with knowledge of that system, as well as of inclusive education systems more broadly:

    - Pirjo Koivula (Finland): **Spain** (supported by Eloy Rebollo Píriz from EASNIE team)
    - Kari Brustad (Norway): **Portugal** (supported by Gareth Hughes from EASNIE team)
    - Per Skoglund (Sweden): **Italy** (supported by Antonella Mangiaracina from EASNIE team)

Multidisciplinary project team (2)

- One external expert, Gordon Porter advised on the overall project and contributed to deliverables

- Agency expertise: Drawing on Agency projects and reports across a range of topics, to inform different aspects of the project.

- Work previously done with Portugal was used to inform different aspects of the project for Spain and Italy (SRSP, OECD).

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Methodology

- This multi-country, multi-stakeholder project is based on a participative methodology:
    - Supports collaborative working
    - Enables stakeholders to be actively engaged
    - Gives ownership of the project to those involved
    - Allows active participation in decision-making
    - Encourages commitment to the implementation of the outcomes
- Based on a widely accepted body of literature around inclusive education.
- The five phases of the project involve a range of different methods

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

MIM
Ministero dell'Istruzione
e del Merito

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA
MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN, FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL Y DEPORTES

REPÚBLICA PORTUGUESA | EDUCAÇÃO, CIÊNCIA E INOVAÇÃO

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Funded by
the European Union

Project phases

Analysis	→	Stakeholder engagement	↔	Recommendations	↔	Supporting monitoring & evaluation	↔	Capacity building
Phase 1		**Phase 2**		**Phase 3**		**Phase 4**		**Phase 5**

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Analysis

- Individual country reports for Italy and Spain
- Aims:
  - To establish a baseline for country strengths, challenges and gaps
  - To identify country priority areas
  - To identify common challenges between the countries

Method:
  - Documentary search
  - Discussions with country representatives for verification
  - Thematic analysis

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

13

Stakeholder engagement preparation

- Established priorities for Italy, Portugal and Spain
- Developed six overall themes from the priorities for stakeholder participation
- Selected 5 regions in each country (15 regions)
- Suggested participant representation for regional working groups in each country (max 15 participants per region)
- Reviewed discussion topics/areas for further development
- Planned online and in-person regional + three country interaction

Six themes – areas of common challenge

Inclusive education mandate: governance, funding & resourcing	Developing a shared vision of inclusive education	Monitoring and evaluation: standards, indicators and guidelines
Specialists & support in inclusive systems and classrooms	Teacher education for all	School-level responses

Selection of regions

🇮🇹 Italy	🇵🇹 Portugal	🇪🇸 Spain
• Veneto • Emilia-Romagna (north) • Lazio (centre) • Campania (south) • Sicily (island)	• Norte region • Alentejo region • Algarve region • Lisboa region • Centro region	• Aragón • Navarra • Extremadura • Galicia • Canary Islands

EUROPEAN AGENCY for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Working group composition

Participants: 11–15 stakeholders

School level — Regional level

2 head teachers (primary, secondary education)	2–3 teachers (including support teachers)	2–3 professionals from support services at school & community level	1 policy-maker at regional level or equivalent	2–3 representatives from family organisations	2–3 representatives of associations (learners with SEN/disability, refugees, Roma)

EUROPEAN AGENCY for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Regional in-person and online meetings

- One in-person meeting was held in each of the 5 regions of each country (15 meetings in all)
- 3 online working group meetings in each country (9 in total)
- Topics discussed:
    - Inclusive teacher education
    - Developing networks and collaboration to strengthen inclusive education
    - School-level responses (Italy); Action plans (Portugal and Spain).

Two online peer-learning activities (PLAs)

Online PLAs aimed to encourage mutual learning, knowledge exchange, shared experience and open discussion around issues and perceived challenges between the three countries.

The topics:

- PLA 1: Response to diversity at school and classroom levels
- PLA 2: Theoretical background to monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

About 300 participants from all three countries attended one or both PLAs.

MIM
Ministero dell'Istruzione
e del Merito

GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO
DE EDUCACIÓN, FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL
Y DEPORTES

REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA | EDUCAÇÃO, CIÊNCIA E INOVAÇÃO

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Funded by
the European Union

Study visit in Sweden (1)

Main aim: Gain understanding of how Sweden responds to diversity at classroom level.

Benefits:

- Possibility to build a network and knowledge transfer at school level
- Facilitating future opportunities to collaborate with Nordic experts/academics
- Opportunities for knowledge exchange

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Study visit in Sweden (2)

Key takeaways (Milestone 3):

- identifying roles
- investing time in effective monitoring
- addressing the gaps between legislation and practice
- ensuring good collaboration.

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

17

Recommendations (D4.1), action plans (D4.2) and follow-up reports (D6.2)

Findings from stakeholder participation were merged with findings from country reports to:

- inform recommendations and suggested measures (D4.1)
- develop an individualised outline action plan for each country (D4.2)
- find common areas of challenge across the three countries

A series of bilateral country meetings led to:

- Agreement on outline action plans in line with country priorities
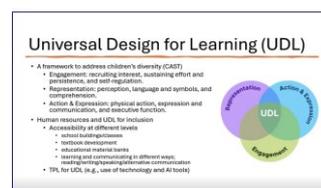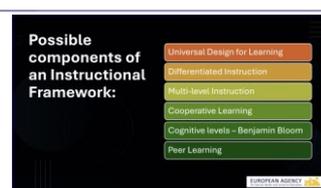- Individualised follow-up reports on the immediate next steps (D6.2)

EUROPEAN AGENCY for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Capacity building on key topics

Supporting monitoring and evaluation (D5.1):

Extensive report, with discussion topics and numerous examples of practice, resources and tools.

Set of 3 webinars (D6.1):

- Webinar 1: Monitoring and evaluation for improvement at system and regional levels
- Webinar 2: Collaborative working and thinking across all levels of the education system
- Webinar 3: Effective strategies for resource allocation and use at school and regional levels

Possible components of an Instructional Framework: Universal Design for Learning; Differentiated Instruction; Multi-level Instruction; Cooperative Learning; Cognitive levels – Benjamin Bloom; Peer Learning

Examples from Jacob's support plan

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Communication outputs and Final Report

- Final project report
- EASNIE website
- News articles
- LinkedIn posts
- Final project video – giving voice to a variety of stakeholders; created with video production company

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Realised risks

Impact of governmental changes in the three countries:

- changes in the Steering Committee over the duration of the project

- changes of country direction in relation to inclusive education

- lack of continuity in the project:
    - delays in decision-making and meeting activities
    - impact on the ownership of the project

Challenges arising from competing individual country contexts and priorities

Changes in leadership and analysts in EASNIE (period of re-organisation of the team)

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Final reflections: Benefits of the project

- Enabling countries to develop a feasible action plan with next steps for immediate implementation

- Bringing together national and regional policy-makers with practitioners to address diversities

- Knowledge and experience exchange and peer learning between the three countries at national/regional/school levels

- New ways of looking at common issues and possible solutions based on wide range of practice in a range of countries

- Resources and tools that can be shared in the regions and beyond

- Potential opportunities for future collaborations and networks within and across three countries

Contact

www.european-agency.org

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
Østre Stationsvej 33, DK-5000 Odense C, Denmark

secretariat@european-agency.org
Tel.: +45 64 41 00 20