



Stakeholders together adapting ideas to readjust  
local systems to promote inclusive education

# EUROPEAN ADAPTATION GUIDELINES

## MUTUAL LEARNING

Ljubljana, 31.3.2022



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



## 4. GETTING PREPARED FOR STUDY VISITS

The study visits are often limited in terms of duration. Therefore, it is essential that – before the visit – participants be well-prepared and have been familiarised with the good practice initiatives. Consequently, all participants, on both learning and sharing sides, need to be well-prepared and briefed to make the most out of the study visit (learning event).

Taking into consideration the complexity of the contemporary (education) public policies, it is recommended that in the learning countries, national teams be established that are comprised of project partner members and external experts on a given topic to participate in the learning event. This approach enriches the mutual learning experience by allowing multiple viewpoints and perspectives. Four elements are required to prepare the learning countries' national teams for a successful study visit. First, possessing information about good practices is essential (i.e. studying the good practice case studies). Second, being provided with different documents to be used during the study visits to track and document the learning experience. Third, organising national team preparation meeting(s) is an appropriate organisational form for reaching the aforementioned aims. Finally, the **Matrix of Challenges, Mutual Learning, and Evidence-based Local Values in National Context According to the Country Report** tool can be used to prepare national teams (i.e. to provide a visualisation of how the available good practices correspond to the learning needs).

To get sharing countries prepared for the study visit, they need to be aware of the learning needs of the learning countries and what answers learning actors will be looking for at the learning event. Based on the understanding of learning needs, content from the sharing countries can be tailored to meet the needs of the learning partners.

Quick tips on how to organise national team preparation meetings for learning countries:

- All project partner team members and external experts should take part in the preparation period.
- The main aims of the preparation meetings are to reach a common understanding of the goals of the study visits, to define everyone's role in the mutual learning process, to explain the learning needs, and to establish what the team wants to achieve in the learning process.
- It is recommended to structure the meetings in a presentation format followed by a Q&A session.

#### Quick tips on how to fill in the Matrix of Challenges:

- Analyse the good practice case studies before starting the Matrix of Challenges.
- Assess how good practices could answer the defined learning needs.
- The STAIRS GRID is a useful document to assist in this phase. It can help create a blueprint for questions to ask in areas into which more insight is required, for instance:
  - What have you found that is directly useful for you and could be broadly replicated in your country?
  - What could be adapted or expanded to suit your needs, and how?
  - What, though interesting, would be unworkable within your learning needs, and why?
- Acknowledge and make note of initiatives (if available) in your national context that aim to address similar learning needs.
- Match as many good practices to a learning need as possible.
- Interpret the Matrix of Challenges by checking the matches between learning needs and good practices. If a good practice is matched to a learning need, then that practice could be useful for the learning country and is of particular interest at the learning event.

#### Quick tips on how to get sharing countries prepared:

- Familiarise yourselves with the learning needs of the learning countries.
- Think of preliminary answers to learning countries.
- Once the case studies have been selected, contact key persons working within the initiative to facilitate presentations.
- A briefing document about the aims and objectives of the study visit needs to be devised and sent to key persons involved in the initiative, requesting their participation in the study visit. This document should outline the aims and objectives of the study visit, the expected outcomes, and what is required from their participation. They should also be briefed about the knowledge and expertise of the visiting partners (policy makers, teachers, teacher educators, etc.)

#### Supporting materials:

- [Users' guide to prepare for a study visit and the adaptation process in the field of social inclusion](#) (Includes: Matrix of Challenges, Mutual Learning, and Evidence-based Local Values in National Context According to the Country Report)

### EXAMPLE: Matrix of Challenges of Hungary

The Matrix of Challenges enables learning countries to match their learning needs with good practices from sharing countries. Specifically, it provides a representation of the possible connection between a learning need and a good practice. Additionally, the Matrix of Challenges provides an overview of national policies, initiatives, or projects related to a learning need that is already in place in a learning country.

Figure 1: Hungary's learning needs and interventions already in place to address them

GENERAL	COUNTRY CONTEXT	
CHALLENGES	MUTUAL LEARNING	EVIDENCE-BASED VALUES
SYSTEMIC LEGISLATION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>longitudinal development</li> </ul>	models for high-quality education for all	<b>Recording and supporting disadvantaged and multiple disadvantaged families and learners</b> (since 2003), although the covered population narrowed by legislation the number of the target population increases (Varga, 2018), this system provides more or less comparable data for exploring social inclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>adequate interventions</li> </ul>	models for efficient systemic interventions	<b>National Competence Test</b> (since 2001): in the field of literacy and mathematics all 6 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup> , and 10 <sup>th</sup> grades (between 2004 and 2013, 4 <sup>th</sup> graders included), this system provides comparable data in the fields of these key competences, for exploring the differences of accessing to key competences.

Figure 1 shows how Hungary already has some initiatives concerning longitudinal development and adequate interventions related to systematic legislation in place.

Figure 2: Match between Hungary's learning needs and a good practice

MATRIX FOR MATCHING MUTUAL LEARNING NEEDS AND OFFERS			
GENERAL	COUNTRY CONTEXT: SHARING COUNTRY: IRELAND LEARNING COUNTRY: HUNGARY		
CHALLENGES	MUTUAL LEARNING	EVIDENCE-BASED VALUES	MATCH
SOCIAL DIMENSION			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>adequate policies</li> </ul>	Hungary	Limerick DEIS Primary Schools' Literacy Initiative	√
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>poverty and discrimination</li> </ul>	Hungary	Limerick DEIS Primary Schools' Literacy Initiative	√

Figure 2 shows Hungary has recognised that the Limerick DEIS Primary Schools' Literacy Initiative could be beneficial in terms of addressing their learning needs of establishing adequate policies and focusing on facing poverty and discrimination.

## 5. PLANING STUDY VISIT(S)

As a study visit (learning event) is both a sharing and a learning experience, planning both aspects is needed to ensure all participants get the most out of the learning event and that the goals of the learning event are achieved.

Planning the learning aspects is recommended to be focused on two elements: pre-visit communication and establishing a learning content management system (LCMS). First, the pre-visit communication with participants should include a Technical Guide for the study visit with tips on how to participate in the study visit actively. The technical guide should reflect on the format of the study visit (e.g. online or in-person). Second, using a Learning Content Management System (LCMS), such as **Canvas**, enables the organisation to launch an introductory online learning course before the study visit takes place. It is recommended to use a closed LCMS (i.e. access open only to national team members) so participants can have a safe and closed space to interact virtually. In the LCMS, participants can introduce themselves, communicate and interact with one another, engage in discussions and complete the aforementioned preparatory online course. All national team members must take part in the activities to become fully able to exploit the learning event.

Careful planning of the sharing aspects is strongly recommended. One of the most important elements is the identification of key people that share knowledge, skills, and expertise with the learning countries. They need to have a thorough knowledge of the initiative, from its initial inception to its current operation. They must be willing to share both the positive and challenging elements of the initiative, as well as reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, and possible areas for development in the future. This will then enable the learning partners to assess and evaluate potential adaptation issues.

Quick tips on how to organise study visits:

- Ideally, a range of key people working within the initiative could be invited to co-present on the good practice. This will provide an opportunity to assess and evaluate the good practice from several fronts (policy & funding level, management, and implementation level, i.e. a state department representative, a school leader, and a teacher).
- Where possible, it is recommended that the learning partners get the opportunity to visit the initiative in operation and speak with the end-user such as students, adult learners.
- Follow-up meetings need to be organised in the weeks leading up to the study visit, to ensure presenters are fully briefed and have appropriate material developed for the study visit.

- The development of the study visit itinerary needs to be drawn up in the weeks leading up to the study visit. The lead partner needs to be consulted in this process.
- Developing a sharing, open and honest dialogue amongst all participants is important, and several icebreakers are recommended for the first session.
- It is recommended that arrangements are put in place for recording the case study presentations to enable learning partners to listen back to the presentations.
- Self-evaluation questionnaires and learning diaries need to be devised to enable participants to record any mindset change, preliminary ideas for implementation, etc.

#### Quick tips on how to plan study visits:

- Careful and thorough preparation is needed for both sharing and learning partners, both should consult the leading partner in this process.
- The introductory online learning course should be structured so it gives participants all the necessary information and knowledge for the study visit (modules can include: introduction to the adaptation process; getting to know the participants; learning needs of learning countries; good practice GRID, good practice case studies; getting familiar with the documents used at the study visits).
- Plan a preparation period in the weeks leading up to the study visit in which participants prepare using the LCMS online course.
- Sharing partners should enable and encourage the experts who will be presenting the good practice initiative at the study visit to engage with the LCMS online course. This will provide them with in-depth insight into the overall aims and objectives of the project and consult all background material. This will also allow all partners to interact informally, before the study visit.
- Sharing partners should keep in touch with the expert presenters to resolve and answer any queries leading up to the study visit. It is essential that they are knowledgeable and fully briefed about the learning partners and their specific requirements.
- Sharing partners should review the expert formal presentations to ensure they are appropriate, detailed, and challenging for the learning partners.
- Sharing partner, in consultation with the lead partner, should aim to organise the study visit that is appropriately balanced between formal presentations, Q&A sessions, individual country consultations, and social events.
- Sharing partners should develop several ice-breaking and warming-up activities that are based on the aims and objectives of the study visit, also, enable partners to get to know one another in a fun way.

#### **Supporting materials:**

- Canvas – is a Learning Content Management System (LCMS)

## Example: Establishing a Learning Content Management System (LCMS) as part of the planning of the study visits

A CANVAS online course has been prepared in the STAIRS to guide national teams through the preparation and planning for the study visits. It is intended to be used individually, but it can also include group work.

Figure 3: Introductory page of the CANVAS online course for the STAIRS

The screenshot shows the introductory page of the STAIRS CANVAS online course. The page has a white background with a green border. At the top left, there is a hamburger menu icon and the text "STAIRS". Below this, there is a navigation menu with the following items: "Home" (highlighted in orange), "Announcements", "Discussions", "People", "Pages", "Files", "Assignments", "Grades" (with a red circle containing the number 2), "Syllabus", "Quizzes", "Modules", and "Badges". The main content area is titled "STAIRS - Study visits in Europe". Below the title, there is a welcome message: "Welcome to the online learning course of STAIRS". This is followed by a paragraph: "This CANVAS online learning course intends to support the preparation of experts to the study visits to Limerick (Ireland) and Lisbon (Portugal) and also the adaptation phase in the framework of the STAIRS (Stakeholder Together Adapting Ideas to Readjust Local Systems to Promote Inclusive Education) project." Below this, another paragraph states: "National teams are invited to use the Canvas Learning Content Management System (LCMS) which is a dedicated and safe online space for preparing individually or in group work for the study visit. Follow the instructions and complete tasks step by step. Here you find the [modules](#)." At the bottom of the page, there are logos for "Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union", the European Union flag, the STAIRS logo, and the "TEMPUS PUBLIC FOUNDATION" logo.

Figure 4: Examples of modules available on the STAIRS CANVAS online course

	Getting to know the participants of the study visit
	Map of participants
	Getting familiar with the national learning needs as specified in the Country Reports
	Getting familiar with good practices of host countries
	Identifying the examining areas - filling in the Matrix of Challenges and Mutual Learning
	Getting familiar with the documents to be prepared
	Share and discuss your questions with the other participants

## 6. IMPLEMENTING STUDY VISIT(S)

Study visits represent the main learning activity of the adaptation process in which national teams gather to participate. The purpose of this learning event is to facilitate mutual learning, e.g. sharing and learning from good practices in which all participants learn individually according to their own and recognised country's learning needs. Additionally, study visits enable participants to interact and discuss ideas with other participants.

The activeness of sharing (hosting) and learning actors must be at the highest level. Additionally, sharing actors must present good practices clearly to provide learners with a basic overview. However, sharing actors need to be well prepared for in-depth questions of the learning actors as the goal is to give them enough information for addressing gaps in their knowledge related to a learning need.

Learning actors structure their learning process by creating **Learning Diaries** documenting all relevant experiences by taking notes, and under special permits taking pictures or videos, as well as completing a **Self-Reflection Questionnaire**. These documents provide structure to scaffold the learning experience. Finally, if study visits are online, presentations of good practices should be recorded to enable participants to reengage with the learning process at a later stage.

Important parts of study visits are social events that create space for networking and learning informally. Social events can also be organised in case of online study visits. An online social event could be organised around a music session or an intriguing lesson on the host country's culture and language. This contributes to building a sense of community amongst the visiting and hosting partners.

The learning process does not end with the culmination of the study visits. Following the study visits, it is necessary to gather all completed learning materials (e.g. self-reflection questionnaires, learning diaries and study visit evaluations, etc.) in an LCMS to be used for further learning. Keep in mind that the mentioned learning materials could be confidential documentation in terms of the project and could not be directly shared outside the partnership. An LCMS facilitates this process, allowing at the same time everyone to access all documents in their learning process at any given time. It also enables stakeholders to interact after the study visits.



### Quick tips on how to implement study visits:

- Good practices should be presented broadly to provide an overview, while the Q&A sessions give participants a chance to ask for specific details concerning the good practice that matches their learning needs.
- It is recommended that at the learning event, the good practice initiatives are organised and introduced in a presentation & discussion format (45 minutes for a presentation and 45 minutes for Q&A discussion sessions).
- Frequent short breaks (5 to 10 minutes) are needed between activities in the learning event to assure the well-being of participants and enable social interaction. Breaks can also be considered as short networking opportunities to learn about a specific good practice informally, to clarify any issue, or indeed, ask a more specific country-level query.
- Bear in mind that virtual meetings can be straining for participants therefore it is preferred to think about the well-being of attendees. You can use wellness guides for online meetings or healthy meeting checklists. See examples below<sup>1</sup> or create your guide.
- If the study visit is an online event, the hosting partner must allocate technical support to the event, in the weeks leading up to the event and during the event. This includes scheduling the online meetings and being on standby to resolve technical issues.
- Technical support should include the development of a technical manual on accessing the meetings and login details. This is particularly important when partners are not familiar with the online platform being used. Ideally, a pre-study visit meeting should be organised by the host partner to test the online platform and ensure visiting partners be introduced to the platform, and answer any queries or concerns.
- It is important, especially if the study visit is online, that participants are fully briefed about the protocol regarding participation and online etiquette such as the procedure for asking questions, making comments, and turning the camera on/off.
- Organising a social event for all participants (e.g. guided tour of the host city and dinner) can be a boost to networking and social interactions.
- In the case of online implementation, established tools such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom can be used. The learning event can be made interactive by using breakout rooms or tools such as Padlet, Mentimeter, or Google Slides. It is important to allocate a moderator who is in charge of recording the sessions, and who will also monitor any questions posed in the chat function.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ideas for wellness guides can be found on the following links:

<https://ucdavis.app.box.com/s/5xlvef03nzcwxj4uhggdzcsdm8wiplbx> ; <https://www.wsps.ca/resource-hub/articles/10-best-practices-for-productive-low-stress-virtual-meetings>

- Plan how an LCMS can be used following the event of the study visit (e.g. as a repository for additional resources).
- Discussions about the good practice presentation can continue online within the LCMS.

### Supporting materials:

- [Self-Reflection Questionnaire](#)
- [Learning Diary Template](#)
- Padlet, Mentimeter, Google Slides

### Example: Structuring a study visit

In the STAIRS, both the Irish and the Portuguese study visits have been implemented online with organised presentations of good practices, followed by Q&A sessions with the presenters, and work done in groups to discuss each good practice amongst participants.

Figure 5: *Part of the Agenda of the Irish study visit in the STAIRS*

Wednesday 4 November	
9:00 am	Welcome
9:15 am	<b>Transforming Education Through Dialogue (TED) Project</b> <b>Presenter:</b> Dr Ann Higgins, TED Coordinator, MIC <b>Facilitator:</b> Angie Canny (MIC, Ireland)
9:45 am	Discussion [Four country breakout room consultation - Hungary, Croatia, Czechia, Slovenia]
10:00 am	Whole Group Q&A with Dr Ann Higgins <b>Facilitator:</b> Angie Canny (MIC, Ireland)
10:45 am	Coffee
11:00 am	<b>YouthReach &amp; Education Training Board</b> <b>Presenter:</b> Paul Patton, Director of Further Education & Training, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board <b>Facilitator:</b> Angie Canny (MIC, Ireland)
11:30 am	Discussion [Four country breakout room consultation - Hungary, Croatia, Czechia, Slovenia]
11:45 am	Whole Group Q&A with Paul Patton