



# NATIONAL SUMMARY OF STUDY VISITS HUNGARY

## 1. LESSONS ACQUIRED RELATED TO EXPERTS' INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS

The professional competence of three Hungarian experts – complementing each other – covers the fundamental areas of STAIRS project. We have work experiences relating to inclusion both in field of education of children with special needs and sociocultural disadvantaged background. All of us took part in a number of education researches, international projects and clearly understand what policy reform and adaptation process means in practice.

For various reasons, all of us were primarily focusing on specific aspects of good practices. We were eager to know how policy initiatives are functioning in schools' everyday life. We wished to receive impression about the processes at local level, talk with principals or teachers and see approaches which can stimulate our mind and release creative energies.

On the other hand, we planned to focus on the separable components of comprehensive long-term projects. We were especially open for acquiring parts of complex good practices which can function successfully at institutional level based first and foremost on principals' and teachers' engagement and responsibility without standing in need of extra governmental funds.

Related to the policy level, we wanted to learn about the aspects as follows:

- What conditions are needed to sustain the operation of strategic initiatives to reduce sociocultural disadvantages and maintain an education system which is for all children indeed within their age groups regardless of social and cultural background or types of abilities?
- How can the universal framework of top-down expectations and local level flexibility be matched in the implementation process to meet the particular needs of individual schools and communities?

According to our individual learning diaries, we received a number of inspiring ideas to think over and considered the possibilities of incorporating them into our own practice and/or sharing them with Hungarian practitioners in trainings, presentations or publications.

## 2. SUMMARISING LESSONS LEARNT AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Irish and Portuguese partners presented good practices based on pedagogical changes which had started around 2000 in many parts of Europe according to processes driven by Declaration of Salamanca (1994) and the educational strategy of Lisbon process (since 2000). Both countries have been moving into the same direction following fairly similar approaches and – as their presentations confirmed it – they have already achieved remarkable success on their journeys.



## 2.1. The system of inclusive education

The system is not exactly the same in two countries, but it seems to be getting closer to each other by the end of second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and their principles and values are rather similar.

### a) Ireland

The country has a mixed system in which different forms live side by side. A lot of children with SEN attend mainstream classes, but there are special classes in regular schools and special schools as well. At primary level, the parents of children with SEN would happily choose inclusive forms. Meanwhile, they often prefer special schools at post primary level because the teacher/pupil ratio is smaller and each pupil can get more personal attention.

The key pillars of realising inclusive policy in practice are to support (1) acquiring the best possible academic performance with transition from primary to secondary level and (2) to develop social, emotional and behavioural competence – both in circle of pupil with SEN and disadvantaged background. The levels of the continuum of support of inclusion are built up like a pyramid in mainstream schools:

- a) Whole-school and classroom level support for all – using a general preventive and proactive approach (at the base of the pyramid).
- b) School support for some relating to groups and/or individuals with special needs (in the middle).
- c) School support+ for a few to provide individualised and specialized help for most needy pupils (at the top).

There are no separate routes for becoming special education teachers in Ireland within initial teacher training, but students have to learn two compulsory modules linked to the methodology of supporting pupils with special needs. Practitioners will have the opportunity to return into higher education and be trained for SEN specialists in post graduate forms, focusing on practical issues and financed by the government. Professionals acquiring the new knowledge can work in schools playing the roles as follows (since 2017):

- Special education teachers (SET) – they work together with class teachers if there are any SEN pupils in class.
- Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) – they give personalized help for children with serious physical and/or educational needs.
- Professional support teachers (PST) – they are experts from outside and work occasionally for schools to help teachers if necessary.

The Irish model is not based on diagnoses. Schools have to identify pupils' abilities and learning needs, and find out what kind of support is necessary. This means serious responsibility and requires proper competences. Schools and mainstream teachers are therefore supported by centrally funded CPDs and receive good quality materials to assess special needs and teach pupils in an inclusive way. Schools receive extra funding after pupils with SEN depending on the seriousness of their disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Team-teaching and dedicated time for designing differentiation and making individualized learning plans are also incorporated in the new model.

### b) Portugal

The country has managed a comprehensive school system for a couple of decades which involves inclusive initiatives as well within an ongoing development process. The main challenges they have been facing are as follows:

1. Effective access – to prevent high dropout rates. (During the former 20 years this rate has declined from 45% to 12%.)



2. Access to the conditions of learning – by developing basic skills. (Portugal was below the average of OECD level in 2000 in PISA and surpassed it both in literacy and numeracy in 2015.)
3. Access to the same school – this means in practice that disadvantaged pupils get extra support (meals, equipment, guidance and financial support – granted to 35% of all pupils), and the great majority of pupils with SEN attend mainstream schools, too. The compulsory education takes 12 years for all students between the age of 6 and 18.
4. Access to the same curricula – the new national curriculum is same for all (since 2018) but schools can freely design 25% of their local curriculum.
5. Respect for different abilities, cultures and interests by using differentiated learning and teaching methods.

The main changes brought in by the new (so called inclusion) law of 2018:

- The regulation does not use the expression of special education, it uses inclusive education instead.
- There is a multidisciplinary support team in every school which coordinates all the efforts on inclusion.
- The measures of inclusion in schools are prepared like a pyramid – just like in Ireland. (98% of pupils with special needs attend regular public schools.)
- Diagnosis is important but focus is on students' needs perceived by local professionals which must be the starting point of support – just like in Ireland.
- There are new resource centres all around the country based on former special schools. Nevertheless, students do not visit the centres, but professionals go to schools to give them support. (There were about 7000 special teachers in the segregated system working for regular schools or resource centres at present.)

The Portuguese partners identified the following aspects to help implementation of inclusion:

1. Developing an inclusive policy for all.
2. Flexibility of curriculum which makes it possible to differentiate in teaching and learning process.
3. Initial and in-service training must prepare all the teachers to reflect their own activities.
4. Inclusion is not possible without permanent collaboration between teachers, schools, families and supporters.
5. Inclusion is not a project. It is a fundamental value of education which must operate continually in order to find the best solutions in changing situations.

## **2.2. National programmes of inclusive education**

### **a) Ireland – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)**

The programme which has been functioning since early 2000 was built upon several successful smaller projects from earlier and also based on research findings, evaluation and feedbacks from schools. It operates in the most disadvantaged areas of the country and the number of DEIS schools is about 690. The teacher/pupil ratio is less than in the other schools, and they receive ring-fenced funding to help children. The development at DEIS schools focuses on designing child-centred curricula, improving pupils' basic skills, family involvement and engagement, teacher commitment and training and strengthening school management. The schools have to make three year plans with the following aspects: Literacy. Numeracy. Attendance. Retention. Transitions. Partnership with parents. Partnership with others within the community. They have a number of programme-components some of which are compulsory (e.g. literacy and numeracy) and others are free to choose. DEIS grants are based on levels of disadvantage and enrolments. The major field of their benefits: school meals



programme, school completion programme (targeted support for children being at risk of early school leaving), access to Home School Community Liaison Scheme (having a full time HSCL coordinator), literacy and numeracy support in various forms. Teachers have a lot of trainings and many of them take part in postgraduate programmes to become dedicated special education teachers.

#### **b) Portugal – Educational territory of priority intervention programme (TEIP)**

It is also a complex programme launched in 1996 and runs its third version, updating to inclusive education law in 2018. TEIP is currently implemented in 137 school clusters and ungrouped schools located in disadvantaged territories (covering 17% of all schools). TEIP schools are diverse – the patterns of support are not exactly the same in rural or urban areas, ethnically homogenous or highly multicultural communities. There are various projects financed by the government, for example: Mentoring projects – giving educational support. Psychology and vocational guidance service – developing personal, social and emotional skills, providing vocational guidance and career orientation advice. School clubs – different opportunities for pupils to take part in various extracurricular activities. Workshops and events involving families, etc. Portuguese schools – not only supported by TEIP – are rather well equipped and the major part of financial support is devoted to human resources (extra teachers in classrooms, assistants, psychologists, social workers, cultural mentors). The programme also finances non-teaching hours for teachers to attend meetings, design differentiated lesson-plans etc.

#### **c) The most important common features of the two national programmes**

- They are complex, long-term overarching programmes financed in a predictable manner by the governments.
- They successfully combine top down and bottom up approaches – providing a well-designed framework, using transparent criteria for selection and evaluation; and enabling schools to be flexible, autonomous and creative, based on the confidence of teachers' and school leaders' professionalism.
- The programmes concern about children with SEN and disadvantaged background in a common framework; the support is based on assessing children's needs at schools rather than diagnoses given by outside experts; and the support is identified as an instrument for promoting mobility, equity and inclusiveness at social level.
- A learner centred and holistic approach characterises both programmes – besides developing cognitive skills, they pay close attention to children's personal, practical, emotional and social development often using artistic and sport activities for this purpose.
- Schools are considered as integral parts of local communities. They often operate as cultural and community centres with a number of functions out of narrow education.
- The whole school approach are common feature as well – the members of the staffs cooperate with each other, parents and the wider community.
- The schools use personalized learning-planning and such methods which help differentiation in classrooms (e.g. team-teaching).
- Both programmes work in partnership with all the relevant stakeholders, and multi-agency work is typical within the schools and communities.
- They have particularly close contacts with parents – involving families into several activities.
- Every information relating to programmes are public, easily available and understandable.
- The school self-assessment and the external evaluation by inspectorate work together.
- Powerful professional networks operate within both programmes often being in close connection with initial teachers training institutions.



## Reflections

*The Irish education system was similar to ours (competitive, with middle-class interests prevailing, subject-based, academic performance in the centre) until 1960 when the first serious reform started. The demolition of the old system began with the systematic endeavour of the government and continues up to the present creating a much more holistic and inclusive system. Reflective policymaking was an important part of the reform, while decision makers accepted and applied the researchers' and experts' views of barriers. For example: inadequate understanding of how children learn and develop, stop focusing on a 'one size fits all' education system, create the conditions of the smaller teacher/pupil ratio, combat against exclusion, infuse more financial and other resources into the system. They used modern policy approaches: smaller pilot programs before wider implementation, targeted support meeting local needs, high degree of autonomy in school implementation, ongoing support and feedback, strict and multi-criteria assessment. The reforms have been gradually built for decades and changes are evidence-based in line with reflections and systematic evaluations.*

*There was a lot of governmental and community initiatives, development programmes and strategic plans in the last 30 years which focused on inclusion in Hungary as well. The most unfortunate difference is that Hungarian initiatives could never function as long-term, cross-government programmes. Today, the greatest barrier of any change that there is neither appropriate political will nor social support, but there are some other significant obstacles, too.*

*The lack of readiness to collaborate and work in partnership with stakeholders, and deficit of trust in each other. Our largest effort to shift the Hungarian education system towards inclusion was going on two separate routes without overlapping: "Inclusion of children with SEN" was for children with "special needs" and "Integrated Pedagogical System" for "disadvantaged" pupils. Both teams developed trainings and materials, looked for good practices and worked with schools in two different projects in parallel without any cooperation. After the project period was over, the leader agencies existed no longer, the networks were parted, and the encouraging initial outcomes was beginning to erode.*

*Paradoxically, it may also work as a barrier, that there is a well-functioning segregated special school system in Hungary and a prestigious initial training for special education teachers separated from mainstream teachers' education. It focuses on children with special needs identified by diagnoses and pays hardly any attention for those being "only" disadvantaged.*

*The logic of development is completely different. Hungarian programmes usually use a central approach and subsidies to school level are minimal. While in the DEIS or TEIP programmes both evaluation areas and indicators are concrete and the inspectors discuss them with schools visited, there are hardly defined measurable indicators in Hungary and there is no tradition of school level assessment. Indicators in our projects actually concern about the implementation and not those items that could be significant at the macro-level of social inclusion.*

*Generally speaking, we have already had a rhetoric shift towards inclusion but it has not brought any social changes yet. The expressions of "gipsy" and "disabled" has been cleared away from our dictionary, we use the concept "equity" instead of "equality", we distinguish between integration and inclusion, but the real breakthrough – primarily in heads and hearts – has not happened.*

### **2.3. Smaller projects linked to comprehensive inclusive programmes**

#### **Bridge back to school (Ireland)**



The designer team developed a booklet during COVID pandemic for autistic children to help them return to school after lockdown. It provides practical proposals and strategies. It is gender neutral, with ages unidentified, a useful tool for autistic students, their parents and teachers as well. The key areas addressed are as follows: Transitioning back to school. Executive functioning. Communication and social skills. Self-regulation – sensory and emotional. Motor skills. Self-care. The key question of the initiative: How can the strengths of pupils be found related to the fields above?

#### Reflexion

*It would be worth to translate this booklet into Hungarian, and the structure seems to be a good model for creating similar guidelines relating to other areas of SEN.*

#### **Limerick DEIS Primary Schools' Literacy Initiative** (Ireland)

The project was carried out between 2011 and 2020 to support local DEIS schools, co-financed by several sources and professionally guided by experts of MIC. The initiative focused on schools' capacity building and achieving self-sustaining improvement of pupils' literacy outcomes. A *Balanced Literacy Framework* was designed to support reflective classroom practice. Literacy teams were formed (4-8 persons/school) which created a network at city level and the members took part in trainings. CPD providers used a mixed form to support the acquisition of new knowledge with traditional lectures (theory), modelling, practice, giving feedback and coaching as well. The team-members had dedicated time to work together. They prepared oral language plans for their own schools based on local needs and assisted to put the plans into practice at the level of all classes. As a next step, strategies were developed and implemented across every schools. The project was successful and the partners realised that the process could be transferable to the area of numeracy as well.

#### Reflection

*Most of the children attending DEIS schools in Ireland are at high risk of dropouts due to their chronic level of literacy and oral language. There is a very similar situation in Hungary in case of pupils with disadvantaged family background. Special attention should therefore be devoted to deeper understanding of this project.*

#### **Transforming Education through Dialogue** (TED) (Ireland)

This is a long-term umbrella project of MIC, established in 1998. It seeks to improve educational outcomes through dialogues and collaboration. The small sized central staff of TED works with DEIS schools and their communities, while several professional networks help their activities. It develops in an organic way relating to actual needs and opportunities and operates in close partnership with parents and all relevant stakeholders.

#### Reflection

*We can find quite a lot of projects in Hungary with similar goals, but there is a remarkable difference in comparison with TED. In Ireland, initial teacher training institutions have played a significant role in educational innovation for a long time working in close connections with professional networks, individual schools and practitioners.*

#### **Linking education with museology** (Portugal)

We received basic information about socio-museology which is a bottom up approach of museology in connection with smaller and local museums. It basically focuses on the issues of globalisation, reciprocity of knowledge, citizenship, diversity and critical thinking. We had a glimpse on three projects sponsored by UNESCO. The main goals of them were to develop personal and socio-emotional skills of





students working in heterogeneous groups, reinforce their identities and bring their cultural heritage closer to each other.

### Reflection

Socio-museology is quite a new concept in Hungary, but it could be a good start for dialogues about ethnic and cultural diversity being the first steps on the way to develop inclusive education. It would be worth to understand this idea deeper, and local authorities or smaller museums might be partners in similar projects.

### **EDUGEP – Civil society support to public education system (Portugal)**

EDUGEP is a private company which offers different types of programmes for education: short-term and longer VET courses and the following services for public schools: (a) Curriculum enrichment activities mainly in the field of arts, sports, ICT and languages. (b) Family support which allows parents to leave children in school before and after school schedules. (c) Family support combined with animation activities, which is an extended variation of the previous form. These activities are contracted tasks financed by the government that can be tendered for by any company. Firm and schools make common decisions about the content of activities.

### Reflection

*This kind of provisions are more or less similar to optional afternoon school sessions in Hungary named “club/extracurricular activities ≈ szakkör” and “day-care ≈ napközi”.*

## **2.4. Vocational training initiatives related to inclusion**

Ireland and Portugal have a different system of VET, but both countries intend to connect it by supporting young people with SEN and disadvantaged family background.

**In Ireland** vocational training takes place in FET (Further Education Training) relating to 31 skill clusters. The system offers a broad variety of life-long education options to anyone over 16 years. There are regional authorities (Education and Training Board) which are responsible for FET, and they had more the 425 thousand learners in 2019.

The **Youthreach** (YR) programme is an integral part of FET as a second chance provision. Its target group are young people aged 15-20, from economically disadvantaged and socially vulnerable environment who became alienated from formal systems and face risking long-term unemployment. The objectives of the programme: to develop personal (emotional and intellectual) and social skills, to strengthen self-esteem, independence, personal autonomy, active citizenship and patterns of LLL. It contains high expectations and offers a fresh start in circumstances where everybody is treated with mutual respect and dignity. Key content areas: academic curriculum, vocational training, work experience.

### Reflection

*There was an equivalent initiative in Hungary, named “Springboard” (= Dobbantó). It was a definitely successful project but did not receive governmental support for years. It came back in the picture just before the start of COVID pandemic but the programme is now at a standstill.*

**In Portugal** IVET (Initial Vocational Education Training) is part of compulsory and comprehensive education as a learning pathway at upper secondary level. Its curricula combine theoretical and



practical education. Final exams prove to be difficult but after taking them students can continue their studies in higher education as well. It can be considered as a success of inclusion that these courses exist within compulsory education. Nevertheless, choosing an IVET course has always been a chance for young people from working class families and with disadvantaged background.

### Reflection

*We have a completely different and permanently changing system of VET in Hungary, which is not attractive for most of the young people. Disadvantaged learners with poor academic performance and low basic skills are overrepresented in this type of schools which are actually a dead-end street for most of the young people. Only a few of them can acquire secondary final exams or higher education diplomas and a small proportion can get really good jobs.*

## **3. PRELIMINARY IDEAS FOR ADAPTATION**

Large and complex nationwide inclusive programmes can never be easily adapted, but it is completely impossible without a long-term political will overarching election cycles which is not given in Hungary at the moment. *Recommendations* can however be formulated based upon common features of DEIS and TEIP programmes listed above and on aspects relating to the implementation process proposed by Portugal partners – focusing for example on the followings:

- Combining top down and bottom up approach in development, giving autonomy and flexibility at ground level within a well-designed common framework.
- Using a mezo level (local authorities and professional networks) in the implementation process to put the concepts effectively into day to day practice.
- Involving all the relevant stakeholders into planning and delivering development programmes. And so on.

Certain smaller projects (For example: Limerick’s Literacy Initiative, socio-museology projects, separable components from DEIS, TED, TEIP etc.) *could be adapted* at community, school cluster or institutional level. We could support this activity by selecting the proper elements, providing detailed descriptions about the original models and guidelines for adaptations to Hungarian users.

Values, key messages and methods identified by our partners as fundamental conditions of successful inclusive practice, can also be promoted *to incorporate them gradually into pedagogical practice* in Hungary. We could support this ambitious process by collecting, interpreting and presenting the ideas picked out from Irish and Portuguese good practices for Hungarian principals and teachers in materials which can be offered for initial teacher training and CPDs. The most highlighted ideas – among others – would definitely contain the followings: learner-centred and “all means all” approach, respect for cultural diversity, whole school approach, principals and teachers networking, dialogue and collaboration, working in partnership with families, making decisions around the table, holistic approach, ethos of high expectations, strength-based approach, reflective classroom practice, shared leadership, and so on.

Last but not least: Hungary is extremely lacking a calm and smart, *forward-looking social and professional dialogue* about a number of fundamental questions on education to which we have received a lot of inputs, and which would be useful to promote as a part of the project.