Climbing the Stairs together towards Equality

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" *Education offers children a way out of poverty. Its professionals – more than doctors, social workers or welfare officers - are at the heart of children's daily lives…Their efforts are known to be enhanced when other services and professionals collaborate with them to help children leap exclusion hurdles and focus again on their learning… "Joined-up" multi-service synergies in education are easier to achieve if backed by "joined-up" national policies…one thing we do know is that this complex phenomenon requires a sophisticated response"*

- EDWARDS, A. & P. DOWNES (2013: 35)

STAIRS Project

- The STAIRS (Stakeholders Together Adapting Ideas to Readjust Local Systems to Promote Inclusive Education) project aims to support national, regional and local stakeholders who are working to promote inclusive education and training through a process of learning and adapting multi-agency initiatives based in other European countries

- Six EU Countries – Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Czechia, Portugal and Ireland
  - Sharing Countries – Ireland & Portugal
  - Learning Countries – Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia & Czechia

- Started early-2019 and will conclude this year
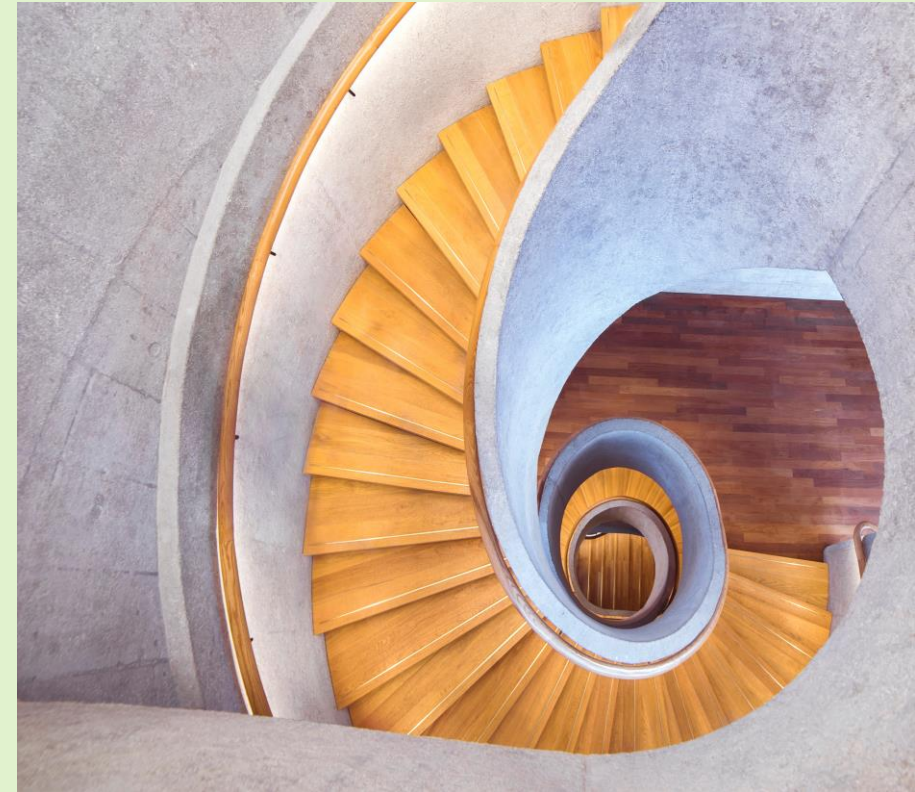
STAIRS Aims and Objectives

- Document good practice exemplars that are particularly based on multi-agency collaboration

- Identify initiatives that fit selected target groups the best and which lend themselves to be adapted in another country (preschool to adult education)

- Document the planning that underpins the process of adapting an initiative, taking into consideration different policy, education and national contexts -> **Design National Adaption Guidelines**

- Document how to manage mindset change -> **Change Management Toolkit**

- Upscaling project results to other countries in Europe -> **European Adaption Guidelines**

Design a **MOOC** to assist educators and policy makers to gain insight into the types of multi-agency collaboration that best promotes and sustains social and education inclusion for all citizens.

Country Contexts
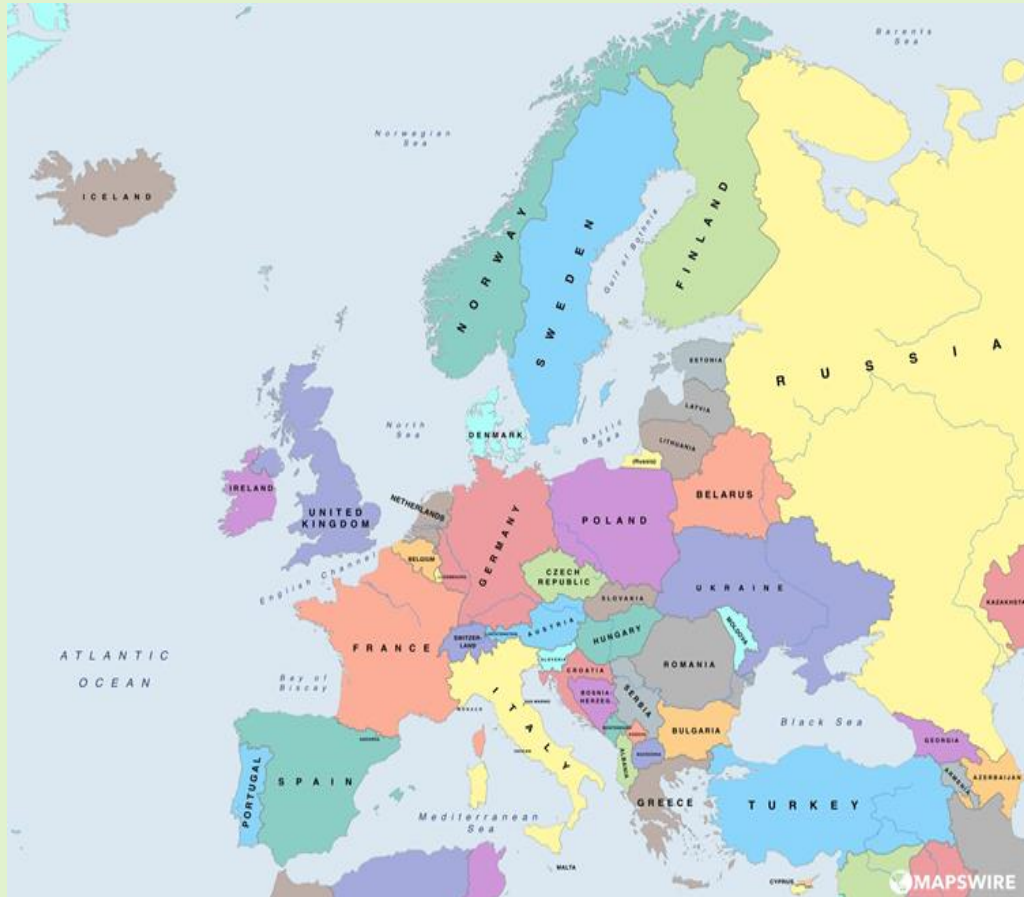
Reviewed: participation rates in education, school completion, selectivity and segregation, inclusive approach & teacher education (training) programmes

Hungary – teacher education & CPD, stereotyping & prejudice esp. Roma, school completion and attitude towards inclusion

Croatia – lack of cooperation between primary and post-primary, teacher stereotypes, curriculum issues esp. differentiation, insufficient SNA, equipment & schools not adapted for children who have SE or movement issues.

Slovenia – SES and school completion, segregated (SES & SE ->vocational)

Czechia – segregation, inclusion not understood, teachers – lack education and skills, lack of public awareness, parents & teacher in mainstream reluctance re inclusion

Each country selected its particular Learning Need (focus) – VET, SEN, Early school leavers etc.

Sharing Countries identified a number of potential initiatives

Education and Active Inclusion Measures

Broad definition of inclusion – socio-economic, ethnic (Roma), early school leavers & children with SE

Active Inclusion measures

Individualised approaches – where sectors work together to tackle the disadvantages faced by particular learners (or groups) – multi-professional teams based in and around schools who work with learners identified as being "at risk"

Wider, ecological approaches – where sectors work together to tackle the social and economic issues in localities which give rise to disadvantage - area-based interventions

Policy approaches – where national or regional governments facilitates cross-sectoral work at local level and bring national policies in different sectors into alignment – e.g. developing policies to promote educational inclusion as part of a wide-ranging policy effort to tackle social exclusion

Also assessed measures that supported: Prevention, Intervention and Early Intervention

Defining & Selecting Good Practice Initiatives

Developed Good Practice Grid based on 40 criteria (questions) based around five broad areas :

- Policy (Policy underpinning the initiative – including the historical foundation) context of the initiative;

- Funding (how the initiative is funded and sustained funding);

- Schools and other educational institutional involvement;

- Practitioners – history of working together, communication, management of project/initiative (internal organisation);

- Collaboration - openness and opportunities for agencies to come together to share good practice (level of flexibility);

- Professional Development- opportunities for teachers etc. to gain new skills, knowledge or dispositions and/or avail of CPD from the initiative.

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Applying the Grid - Assessing Adaptability

Grid was applied to a range of Initiatives

Ireland: YouthReach, DEIS, Limerick DEIS Primary Schools' Literacy Initiative, TED & Inclusion model

Portugal: TEIP, EduGep Project, IVET model and Inclusion model

Case Study Reports: Produced for each individual initiative – context & history, description, targeted group, funding, external (independent) evaluation, impact-key indicators, lessons learnt and resources required

Aim: provide as much information to assess suitability for adaption

And a cumulative grid to use when you have completed an in-depth survey of multiple indicators for the targeted project

Weighing up the good practice: … project: – (name)

After studying the project assess to what extent evidence of these queries are present

Question	lots	some	none
1. A shared mission – particularly in relation to equity and equality (and commitment to inclusive practice). Including an understanding of the difference between the two and how this can set patterns			
2. History of working together – ethos of collaboration			
3. Focus on desired outcomes			
4. What or who their target/s were			
5. What timescale was planned			
6. Funding and resources available			
7. If funding is granted then look for a built-in undertaking that this will be continued for a long enough period sufficient to ascertain the effectiveness of the programme in achieving the desired outcomes			
8. If funding is granted for a pilot programme, look for assurances that if successful it will be rolled out to a wider area with funding and support continued			
9. Clear division of responsibilities – i.e. agencies collaborated but had clarity around their remit (within the multi-agency structure) and reporting lines			
10. Clear lines of communication and overall management			
11. Support for the programme from policy makers; leaders of the various agencies; managers at all levels; personnel involved and necessary for support			
12. Was there any evidence of networks they already belonged to; of cooperation going on within the agencies as well as between them and their joint effective use			
13. How the development was envisaged – an introduction – pilot plan - phased development – revision – quality control/evaluation; built-in opportunities for change			
14. Fitness of purpose of planned programme with participative approach and built-in opportunities for collaboration and revision			
15. Support and further knowledge-gaining opportunities, for whom and created by whom? Evidence of participatory working			
16. Clear, stated and shared values, arrived at collectively: without this foundation element there will be no firm base to build, the ethos emerges from the values held.			
17. Focus on and establish ways of ascertaining suitability of approach and content for the ultimate beneficiaries (for instance if school-based, children, educators, parents, community etc.)			
18. Learning patterns – seen as linear (developing from step by step on a steady journey upwards to their goal – climbing a ladder). Incremental – (in steps but not always to the same extent on every front – like a wave on the shore)			
19. Built-in permission to fail and try again – evaluation mechanism			
20. Autonomy and control mechanisms – top-down; bottom up; a mixture (dependent on context and you may wish to look for examples that would best suit your own context)			
21. That all involved were willing to re-examine their past or present values, attitudes and practices (like sovereignty in their classroom to the exclusion of others 'interfering' or even 'observing')			
22. Full use of the opportunities given for information and knowledge gathering and sharing by information technology			
23. Who or what were the agents of change			
24. Opportunities for agencies to come together and discuss issues			
25. Opportunities to share good practice			

Learning from Good Practice Initiatives – the process

- Online study visits organized in Ireland (November) and Portugal in late 2020 (December)

- Learning Country Representation –regional policy makers & government officials, school leaders, academics & other educational personnel (career guidance)

- Week long study visit -> formal presentations, Q&A sessions, Country consultations & a number of reflection tasks (learning diary) & formal evaluation

- Sharing countries - Presentations from key personnel involved in the different initiatives (DES representation, DEIS school principals, Limerick & Clare ETB CEO, YouthReach manager, TEIP regional heads, Head of EduGep and Portuguese Head of Inclusion etc.

- Learning Countries – used the Good Practice Grid to assess suitability of initiative to their own context

- Difficulties – online and inability to visit sites and especially to speak with students and teachers, and personnel working in Bedford Row family project (one of the identified areas within TED)

Reflections on the key Initiatives

- Flexibility within the system – DEIS/TEIP and autonomy
- Learner-centredness and an approach where "everyone really means everyone"; "In the morning, the sun rises for everyone"
- Respect for cultural diversity;
- Partnership between the whole school community;
- Networking of school leaders and teachers;
- Dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders;
- Cooperation & promotion of active (authentic) dialogue with families;
- Decisions around the negotiating table, involving all stakeholders;
- A holistic approach to children's development;
- Ethos of high expectations of students;
- Pedagogical approaches based on children's strengths;
- Reflective classroom practice;
- Shared leadership within and between institutions.

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National Adaption Guidelines

- Period of consultation and reflection after Study Visit – selection of initiatives

- Good Practice Grid was useful to assess:
  ◦ What have you found that was directly useful to you and could be broadly replicated
  ◦ What, though with difficulty, could be adapted or expanded to suit your needs and how
  ◦ What, though of interest, would be unworkable within your contextual needs and why

- Each Country developed their National Adaption Report based on a set of adaption guidelines

Some Examples from NAP

- Cultural and Context Issues – history of working together and mindset required to change attitudes towards Inclusion and Diversity
  - Change Management ToolKit
- Some adaptions require legislative change
- National centralized education system not flexible enough nor effective in responding to issues
- Lack of good quality, available, systematic and free CPD for stakeholders including teacher
- Lack of programmes for parents - infrastructure
- Insufficient funding to support families requiring support
- Lack of permanent financial support to sustain programmes such as TEIP or DEIS
- Building cooperation between public and private organization (kept quite separate - EduGep (e.g. State sanctions textbooks etc. in Hungary)

STAIRS Outputs

Change management Toolkit – we developed a system for managing change and designed activities to facilitate mindset change

European Adaption Guidelines – building on the lessons we have learned – suggestions and tips -> European level methodology for adaptation; self-evaluation tool and templates for needs analysis and case studies; suggestions re conditions of applicability of good practices

MOOC – Enable learners to explore how the STAIRS project designed activities to support the development of country adaption plans. Document the kinds of policy changes, adjustments, modifications that have to be made to ensure education initiatives can be replicated as smoothly as possible in other European countries. Six Modules (& Introduction) -> aimed at policy makers

1. Policy Development, Policy makers and funding	4. Vocational Education & Training & Early School Leaving
2. Schools & Practitioners – Making Schools Inclusive Environments	5. Multi-agency Collaboration
3 Special Education, Inclusion and School Transitions.	6. Adapting Good Practice & Change Management

Change Management ToolKit

Strategies, Tactics and Incidents
- Managing concerns
- Managing communication
- Managing the change process – planning, professional learning, checking progress, continuous assistance, leadership and change facilitators

To Initiate Change
- Direct the rider / Motivating the elephant / Shape the path

Tools
- Applying soft systems methodology to change management
- Communications plan
- Empathy map
- Case for change
- Compelling vision interview
- Change readiness assessment
- Behaviour change plan
- Manage personal transitions (resistance)
- Feedback strategy overview and options
- Success Matrix overview

Lessons from the Project

- The most important common message from the STAIRS project is that measures for inclusive and open-minded education need to be embedded in a comprehensive and learner-centered vision of education focusing on the development of the learner's full potential (social, emotional, academic etc.) This requires a multi-level (policy, political, professional) commitment that ensures adequate and sustainable funding, builds on professional dialogue, learning collaboration between institutions and professionals, and multi-faceted evaluation of interventions.

- Context is a really important issue

- Flexibility embedded in system -> top down and bottom up flexibility ->autonomy at the local school level

- Teaching profession and professional development – very little CPD opportunities, outdated teaching methods etc.

- History of working together (either with organisations or between organisations) - willingness to take risks and make change happen

- Attitude towards diversity and inclusion – still high level of segregation and exclusionary attitudes

Lessons from the Project

- Adaption requires a long lead in – need to fully understand the initiative -> especially the historical development -> DEIS or TEIP

- Trust needs to be developed amongst the stakeholders and commitment to the adaption (outside one's affiliation)

- Small steps may yield gains that enable buy-in -> adapt elements of HSCL for instance

- Adaptions more successful if other similar initiative in place --- e.g. a network of teachers

- All stakeholders need to be involved and consulted -> teachers & students etc.

- Funding has to be allocated to the adaption process (and a long term view taken)