Climbing the Stairs to Equality:
European Educational Initiatives to Promote Inclusive Education

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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

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- 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

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- 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.

What do we mean by Inclusion

Informed by Salamanca Statement, Cali Agreement, UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and UNESCO Inclusion Guidelines – human right to education and be educated in an inclusive setting

Ensuring access for all children in an inclusive education setting – feeling of belonging and system that works to include all children – rather than the children fitting the system

Differentiated curriculum and pedagogical approach

Eliminating barriers

Where sectors and individuals worked together to promote an inclusive experience

Where difference is visible, acknowledged & celebrated

Where the emphasis is on ability rather than dis/in ability

Recognition of the intersectionality of exclusion – social class, sen, gender, race and/or ethnicity

Education and Active Inclusion Measures

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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

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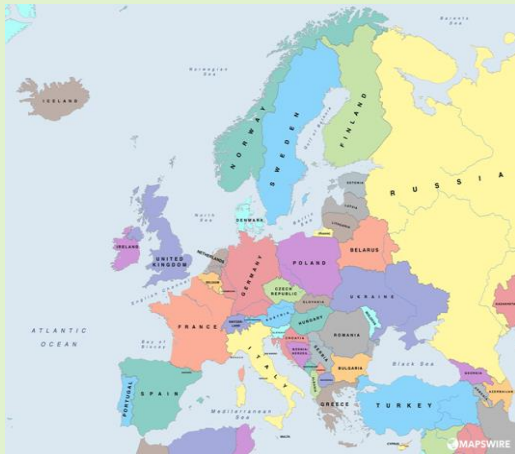
Reviewed: participation rates in education, school completion, selectivity and segregation, inclusive approach & teacher education (training) programmes

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

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.

Applying the Grid - Assessing Adaptability

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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

Study visits in December 2020 (virtual)

Reflections on the key Initiatives

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- *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.*

National Adaption Guidelines

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- 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

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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 teachers

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

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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

Lessons from the Project

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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-> education system, teacher education and location on the inclusion conti

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

Teaching profession and professional development is critical – teachers who embody and promote inclusion in their teaching and interaction, 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

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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

Adaption 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)