Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion

Phase 1 Final Summary Report

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR INCLUSION

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TPL4I

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Contents

Introduction

With more diverse learner groups than ever before, teachers' crucial role and their need for professional learning for inclusion are broadly recognised. Teachers, researchers and policy-makers at local, regional, national, European and international levels increasingly discuss the continuum of teacher professional learning (TPL) opportunities to prepare all teachers and other staff to include all learners.

Policy development for TPL for inclusion is important for inclusive education. Inclusive education ensures that 'all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers' (European Agency, 2015, p. 1). TPL for inclusion is an integral part of developing inclusive education systems.

The **Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion** (TPL4I) project focuses on all policies that affect TPL for inclusive education. Phase 1 of TPL4I aimed to identify the essential policy elements to ensure that all teachers, at each stage of their career, are prepared for inclusive education. Phase 2 will highlight one single element and connect it to other projects by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency). This report summarises the outcomes of TPL4I phase 1.

First, it sets out the elements of a policy framework for TPL for inclusion. Based on a **literature review** of international policy and research (European Agency, 2019a), the TPL4I team developed a **policy self-review tool** (European Agency, 2019b). The tool aims to help policy-makers record and evaluate national/regional policy on TPL for inclusion in three areas:

- Policy vision and main principles
- Goals and continuum of support
- Capacity building, funding and monitoring.

Second, this report describes the key issues found across 26 European countries within the identified policy elements. A synthesis of all findings (European Agency, 2020b) points to the main challenges for policy-makers and providers of TPL for inclusion.

Third, the report relates the findings to previous Agency work, embedding it in a comprehensive systems approach.

Finally, it suggests a broader use of the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (European Agency, 2012). Phase 2 of TPL4I will explore this further.

Essential policy elements for teacher professional learning for inclusion

Research papers and international and European-level policy documents point to key issues in the field of TPL policies that aim to support equity and inclusion (European Agency, 2019a). There is a particular need to address **all teachers'** concerns for inclusive practice.

The continuum of TPL opportunities ranges from initial teacher education to induction, continuing professional development and the professional learning of teacher educators. In TPL for inclusion, specialist and support staff working with teachers in inclusive education are part of the continuum. Policy must, therefore, ensure that all staff, including specialists and school leaders, engage in career-long competence development for inclusion.

Equally, policy must promote a deeper understanding of diversity, emphasising TPL for **equity and inclusion**. Collaborative practice is crucial to develop various paths for TPL for inclusion and give all staff opportunities for reflection and professional learning in inclusive education.

Based on these findings, the TPL4I Policy Self-Review Tool is a comprehensive resource for policy reflection and development in TPL for inclusion. It sets out the following key areas and essential policy elements:

Vision and main principles:

- **a clear policy vision for TPL on equity and inclusion**, to ensure that all teachers have career-long professional learning opportunities on inclusive education principles, their pedagogical responsibility for all learners and their contribution to and collaboration in inclusive education;

- **guiding principles for TPL for inclusion policy**, to ensure that TPL is a prerequisite for inclusive education and contains the principles and practice of inclusive education, in initial teacher education and TPL for beginning, experienced and specialist teachers and for teacher educators.

Goals and continuum of support:

- **goals for TPL for inclusion policy** cover issues that contribute to the understanding and implementation of inclusive education: qualifications, competence areas, pedagogies for inclusion, dialogue about inclusion, and alignment of TPL with national, regional and local-level policy goals and system requirements for an inclusive education system;

- **a continuum of support for all teachers**, offering diverse professional learning opportunities for inclusive education across all levels where teachers work, including leadership competences, and supporting schools and higher education institutions to develop strategic plans and collaboration in TPL for inclusion.

Capacity building, funding and monitoring:

- **capacity-building** strategies, mechanisms, guidelines, competences and incentives for all teachers: strategies to support schools or higher education institutions to build strong leadership teams, develop specialist teachers' role as a resource for mainstream schools or promote inclusive education pedagogies, or guidelines on quality assessment to plan TPL for inclusion;

- **adequate and cost-effective funding mechanisms**: financial incentives, flexible resourcing mechanisms and systematic data collection on expenditure;

- **monitoring the implementation of TPL for inclusion** through a comprehensive accountability framework, mechanisms to address inequalities in access and mechanisms to support ownership of review and improvement processes (European Agency, 2019b).

Trends and key issues in national/regional teacher professional learning for inclusion policies

Twenty-six countries[1] participated in a TPL for inclusion policy-mapping activity. In collaboration with the Agency's representatives from those countries, the TPL4I team completed 26 national/regional **policy mapping grids** (European Agency, 2020a), using the policy self-review tool (European Agency, 2019b).

The grids illustrate national/regional TPL for inclusion policies. Analysis of the completed grids enables policy-makers and other stakeholders to identify policy areas that countries currently address, according to international policy recommendations and research evidence, and those that future policy development should consider.

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[1] Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland) and United Kingdom (Wales).

Analysis of the grids revealed the following trends (European Agency, 2020b):

There are international recommendations for comprehensive TPL for inclusion policies based on the concept of equity. Despite this, in national/regional policies, inclusion is understood as the need for separate policies for some groups of learners, such as those with special educational needs. **Separate educational policies for specific target groups often lead to separate or specific paths in TPL**. Therefore, how far the principle of equity underpins TPL paths is debatable.

The extent to which inclusive education is part of the TPL policy continuum varies across countries. Moreover, **in many countries there are gaps between the different phases of the TPL continuum**, particularly in induction for beginning teachers and professional development for teacher educators, including school leaders. The range of policies in initial teacher education and continuing professional development suggests that inclusive education is sometimes a component of TPL policies. However, in many cases, **TPL opportunities cover learners categorised as having special educational needs without a clear view of competences for inclusion**.

The implementation of TPL for inclusion reflects a **range of collaborative strategies and approaches for capacity building**. However, these do not always promote collaboration between all teachers or between teachers with different roles (e.g. mainstream class teachers and specialist teachers). While general TPL funding mechanisms cover TPL for inclusion, data on expenditure on TPL for inclusion is lacking. Monitoring relies on school quality assessment processes. However, there is a lack of collaboration between diverse stakeholders – such as ministries, local authorities, universities and other agencies or networks – to strengthen TPL for inclusion policy.

Considering these findings, the **main recommendations for policy-makers** are to:

- **develop a policy vision for career-long TPL for inclusion**, engaging all teachers – including specialist staff – in TPL for inclusion and enabling them to meet all learners' needs, rather than focusing on the needs of particular groups of learners;

- **review policy goals for TPL for all teachers** and, in particular, offer guidelines and strategies that consider the competence areas needed for inclusive education;

- **emphasise collaboration among all stakeholders** involved in TPL for inclusion.

The role of teacher professional learning for inclusion in inclusive education systems

Additionally, the findings were connected with the Agency's ecosystem model of inclusive education systems (European Agency, 2017a; 2017b). The ecosystem model explains how different structures, processes and outcomes of inclusive policies and practice, at different system levels, interact with each other and impact on learners.

A specific policy field that aims to support inclusive education, such as TPL for inclusion, is considered a 'slice' of inclusive education systems development. In this way, the identified challenges in the field can be situated across the ecosystem model. This makes it possible to understand how individual, school and external factors, such as the community and national or regional policy frameworks, influence a learner's development in the education system.

The Agency has used this approach to explain policy development's impact on learner outcomes in several projects:

- **Inclusive Early Childhood Education** (European Agency, 2017a)
- **Raising the Achievement of All Learners in Inclusive Education** (European Agency, 2017b)
- **Supporting Inclusive School Leadership** (European Agency, 2019c)
- **Preventing School Failure** (European Agency, 2019d).

Using this approach with TPL for inclusion policy, the following challenges occur across the ecosystem:

At the **national/regional level**, TPL policies reflect the existing education policies. These promote the rights of particular groups of learners, instead of promoting equal opportunities for all learners and inclusive education principles. TPL policies must focus on meeting all learners' needs. Moreover, these policies need to bridge the gaps between different TPL phases.

At the **community level**, collaboration between school-based teachers and teacher educators in universities and colleges offers a wide range of TPL for inclusion opportunities. Collaboration between schools and local authorities needs an alignment of policy vision, school strategic plans and teachers' TPL for inclusion needs.

At the **school level**, policies for beginning and experienced teachers and for other staff with different qualifications and roles must support collaborative TPL opportunities, including for teacher educators, such as mentoring teachers and school leaders.

At the **individual level**, teachers need policies that offer the core values and competences to meet all learners' needs, ensure the availability of TPL for inclusion opportunities and enable teachers to follow flexible and adaptable TPL for inclusion paths.

A profile of inclusive teachers to cover the teacher professional learning continuum

The above findings were linked to the core values and competences of the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (European Agency, 2012). The *Profile* was designed for policy development in initial teacher education. The TPL4I findings stress the need for collaborative TPL for inclusion across the professional continuum of teachers and specialist staff. The findings therefore suggest that applying the *Profile*:

- can cover the continuum of TPL for inclusion opportunities, across teachers' careers and beyond the teacher profession, including specialists' and teacher educators' professional learning. All teachers must be prepared for inclusive education throughout the TPL for inclusion continuum and through collaborative learning for all, rather than offering different professional learning opportunities leading to different professional qualifications.

- must inform policy discussions on the core values underpinning TPL for inclusion opportunities. All phases of the TPL for inclusion continuum must have core values that clearly focus on valuing learner diversity, supporting all learners, working with others and engaging in TPL for inclusion activities. Applying the *Profile'*s core values and competences to all phases of the TPL for inclusion continuum would help countries bridge the gaps in policy for capacity building.

- must inform policy discussions on the essential competences for all professionals working in inclusive settings. The quality of the educational opportunities needed for inclusive education depends on the quality of teachers' knowledge, attitudes and skills, which gradually develop throughout their careers. Without a sufficient continuum of TPL for inclusion opportunities, teachers will not be equipped to design and provide quality education for all learners.

- can instigate funding mechanisms for TPL for inclusion (i.e. funding at national, regional and local level) and monitoring procedures to meet the core value of personal professional development.

These findings justify the *Profile'*s use across the continuum of TPL for inclusion. Phase 2 of TPL4I will address this.

Above all, to reach all learners and guarantee high-quality education for all, inclusive education must include all teachers: student teachers, beginning teachers, experienced teachers, specialist teachers and other support staff, and teacher educators. Use of the *Profile* will offer a vision and areas of competence for further policy development in TPL for inclusion.

Concluding remarks

The TPL4I project covers a key topic of policy development that is widely acknowledged as a prerequisite for inclusive education. Teachers and other staff involved in inclusive practice, as well as all stakeholders involved in inclusive education development at different system levels, must have access to a coherent and continuous range of professional learning opportunities to offer schools for all.

The analysis of country self-reviews on the key policy elements of TPL for inclusion found that:

- Policy support for TPL for inclusion is not evenly distributed along the continuum of career-long learning for all staff involved in inclusive education.
- A shared vision of equity is needed to underpin all TPL for inclusion and bridge the gaps on various diversity issues.
- Collaborative approaches across school level and with other agents, e.g. at community or national/regional level, show various opportunities for TPL for inclusion. However, more cross-sectoral and career-long co-operation is needed.

Most importantly, to strengthen teachers' and schools' commitment and self-efficacy in inclusive education, **teacher competence frameworks for inclusion are a key element of the policy framework for TPL for inclusion**.

This final finding calls for action to encourage and support policy development across countries.

Based on the recognition of shared values and competence areas for inclusion, the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (European Agency, 2012) may offer the competence framework needed to reach a wider professional audience. The aim is to prepare all teachers and their colleagues for inclusive education and ensure their commitment to continuous learning in the field.

Phase 2 of TPL4I will further explore the use of the *Profile* to consider inclusive learning and equity in education across all TPL for inclusion opportunities. As such, and underlining

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations, 2015), inclusive education policies are encouraged to broaden the message from 'All means all' (UNESCO, 2020) to 'all means all means all teachers'. This is a reminder of the competence areas all professionals in the field must pursue.

Project outputs

The TPL4I phase 1 activities resulted in the **TPL4I Literature Review** (European Agency, 2019a), the **TPL4I Policy Self-Review Tool** (European Agency, 2019b), the **TPL4I Policy Mapping Grids** (European Agency, 2020a), the **TPL4I Analysis of Country Policies in Europe** (European Agency, 2020b), the **TPL4I Methodology Report** (European Agency, 2020c) and this **TPL4I Phase 1 Final Summary Report**.

All outputs are available on the TPL4I project web area: **www.european-agency.org/projects/TPL4I.**

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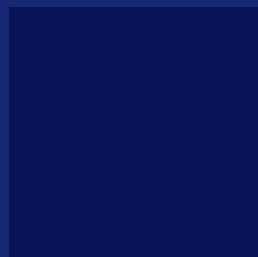**sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld** (Last accessed December 2020)

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