

Monitoring Inclusive Practices

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Portugal has adopted in July 2018, a Decree-Law on Inclusive Education (Decree-Law, 54/2018). The Portuguese Ministry of Education has requested technical support to the European Commission to monitor the implementation of such an important legislation. The European Agency has been in charge for building a monitoring system. Why a monitoring system? What is the benefit? How to be used?

A monitoring system is a well- known instrument to provide information on progress achieved regarding implementation of policies and/or practices. UNESCO as well as UNICEF are engaging countries to develop such a system to identify progress in several areas of education, namely addressed to the most vulnerable learners. Educational researchers are also paying attention to use monitoring applied to identify learners' progress. Several examples of its use can be found at the Teach Hub, namely addressed to professionals from education.

Therefore, monitoring is a systematic analysis through information collected to identify changes over a period. Information collected will aim to answer questions such as: how a policy or a practice is progressing towards the expected goals?; how well are we doing?; what might need to be modified or reinforced?

Monitoring can provide deciders and stakeholders regular feedback on implementation of policies and practices, to identify progress; to prevent impasses or to move backwards.

The Agency uses a standards-based model when monitoring or evaluating inclusive education policies. This model makes possible to compare existing educational policies and/or practices with desired standards for education. It is important to underline that standards

correspond to aspirational statements for the education system. Stakeholders will be fully involved to identify the standards to be considered through a reflection process: what do we wish to achieve with our educational system?

As far as Portugal is concerned, six standards have been identified: *Sharing inclusive values and principles; availability and accessibility of resources; schools organisation and autonomous management of support; respect and consideration of learners' and families' voices; effective provision of training and professional development; ensuring success and certification.*

The six standards are accompanied by a number of indicators. They indicate what needs to be measured more precisely for each standard. Eleven indicators have been identified focused upon the existence and performance of required mechanisms and provisions per standard. They respond to the question: what inputs and processes do we want to 'measure' in each standard?

The complete and detailed list of indicators can be found in the final report of the activity. Just a few examples will be mentioned here: *Inclusive education and quality of education are understood by all stakeholders as inter-related; mechanisms are in place to ensure that all stakeholders are informed about the values and principles of inclusive education; required resources are provided and applied to support inclusive education, in accordance with schools' needs.*

Nineteen questions have been selected to validate the standards and the indicators. These questions have been adapted according to the working instrument used for their validation: individual interviews addressed to deciders and representatives from civil society; survey addressed to professionals from the field; field work (visits to school clusters; focus groups with professionals, support services, families, and learners).

As a result, the monitoring system reflects, at the present time, the level of implementation of the identified standards, corresponding to key areas of the law (54/2018). Standards can be *fully implemented*, when they are fully embedded, established, and sustainable in policy and practice. They can be *partly implemented*, when policy and/or practice are moving

toward implementation but are not fully embedded or sustainable. Standards are *not yet implemented* when policy and/or practice require major development and attention.

Almost all standards in Portugal are considered as partly implemented, meaning that they require additional development. This should be interpreted as a very positive result for Portugal. It indicates that work is underway and should form a good basis for future improvement.

The activity results show that decision-makers, as well as practitioners involved in the activity, were well-informed about the Law, were aware of its purpose, are fully involved in its implementation, and are aware of the benefits as well as the challenges to be faced at practical level. The Portuguese Ministry of Education deserves a positive recognition for putting in place such an ambitious and visionary law.

The monitoring system allows the measurement of how far the decree has been implemented, which areas look like the strong ones and which areas deserve more attention.

The monitoring system can be used to compare, after a period, the implementation of the law with current results; if progress has been consolidated or is almost achieved, as well as if there are still areas deserving special attention.

References

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www.stjornarradid.is/library (External Audit of the Icelandic system for Inclusive education, 2017).

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