Continuity and transitions in learner development

Guiding principles for policy development on learner pathways and transitions in school education

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1. About

ET2020 Working Group on Schools

Under its current mandate, the ET2020 Working Group on Schools\(^1\) examined successful and emerging, or potential new, policy developments in Member States. These concern the governance of school education systems that can support and improve quality, inclusion and innovation. They focused on the capacity for systemic change in the four key interlinked areas: 1) quality assurance for school development; 2) continuity and transitions for learner development; 3) teachers and school leaders; and 4) networks.

Continuity in learner development

Recent research has highlighted that learner pathways can be fragmentated in a number of ways, leading to a risk of underachievement and possible drop-out from school. Transitions between levels and types of schools require consideration as they can be a moment where problems arise but also may reveal symptoms of other issues. Pathways encounter different ways of learning and being and this can be positive for learners, if these pathways are sufficiently flexible and provide appropriate guidance and support. The collaborative work of teachers and school leaders should also be accompanied by appropriate mechanisms for generating and sharing data within and between system levels, and by targeted support to learners with special needs to complement an inclusive approach to support all learners. There is a common challenge for policy makers to find effective and sustainable ways to address these issues.

This report

This report sets out guiding principles, or key policy messages, for policy development within a context of recent research in this area of school education. These principles are further illustrated with examples from countries, as shared and discussed by representatives of European ministries and stakeholder organisations as part of their task as members of the Working Group.

The content comes from a series of meetings held in Brussels, a research (member self-reporting) exercise, and a Peer Learning Activity. The report was compiled and edited by Laurie Day (Ecorys) and Hannah Grainger Clemson (European Commission) in January-March 2017 with review and validation by members. It was subsequently updated on July 2017 and April 2018.

\(^1\) Representatives from all Member States, EFTA and Candidate countries, plus social partners and stakeholder organisations.
2. Guiding Principles

2.1 Values

Even though action to support continuity in learner development can move between more
formal or less formal implementation, and also within and outside the school, a clear vision at
policy level of how that learner development should happen is essential.

The perspective of the Working Group members is that learning is a prerequisite for positive
growth and development at all levels within the system, and that the role of effective school
education systems is to balance two sets of priorities for each learner, taking into account their
aspirations and building on their strengths:

- To develop the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for an active role in work and
  life in society (both now and in the future); and,
- The personal development of the individual and their relationships with others;

The Working Group asserts that it is necessary to recognise teachers and school leaders as
learners, and schools as learning organisations.

There are key areas for policy work to achieve continuity in learner development: bridging
transition points between levels of education and facilitating transition between types of
education; effectively generating and sharing data with appropriate mechanisms (how to
measure and communicate); and the appropriate use and reporting of data analysis by different
stakeholders to support learner decision-making.

Being ‘inclusive’ as a system does not mean solely taking a universal approach to all learners. It is
also important to invest in targeted support to learners with additional needs, including
individualised approaches to those at particular risk (see Figure 2, Section 3.1.3).

Within all of the guiding principles for policy development, it is implicit that:

i. Striving for inclusivity and flexibility (as far as the system will allow) is important in order
to support all learners and their multiple pathways;

ii. Shared accountability is important to bring in all relevant stakeholders; building mutual
trust and understanding; articulating common aims and standards, and aligning budgets
and decision-making structures, with the learner at the centre;

iii. The capacity and role of teachers and school leaders is crucial for schools to have a clear
strategic vision and leadership in order to guide and fully support learners and effectively
communicate with other practitioners and stakeholders.
2.2 Guiding principles

1. **EARLY YEARS:** High quality learning experiences should be available to all children from the beginning of their lives as a foundation for lifelong learning.\(^2\)

2. **LEARNER AND PARENT CHOICE:** Pupils and families should be supported with guidance and participatory decision-making in navigating pathways between levels and types of school education, and between school and future education and employment.

3. **INTER-INSTITUTION COLLABORATION:** Systems should have structures and mechanisms to support collaboration across institutions and between actors, focusing on transitions between levels and types of education.

4. **TEACHING AND LEARNING:** Appropriate curricula and teacher pedagogical approaches should help bridge transitions and foster learners’ growing sense of responsibility for their own competence development and future lives in society.

5. **ACCESS AND INCLUSION:** Systems should ensure sufficient flexibility to include and integrate pupils who enter or leave at different stages, or who have difficulty in accessing formal education.

6. **SHARING DATA:** Relevant learner data should be shared between institutions in both directions, as part of an ongoing dialogue to ensure continuity and progression in learning and continued support for competence development.

7. **DIFFERENT TYPES OF DATA:** Information from quantitative and qualitative assessment and reporting mechanisms should be used to help construct a holistic understanding of learner development and progression.

8. **APPROPRIATE LEARNING CONTEXTS:** Supportive, varied and inspiring learning environments and contexts – relevant to the stage of development and different learners – should be created and reviewed.

9. **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:** Schools should have the capacity to engage with different stakeholders to provide social and emotional support to learners, including during the period of transition between levels of education.

10. **SUPPORT TO ‘AT-RISK’ LEARNERS:** Targeted strategies and resources should be used to identify and support vulnerable learners at the earliest opportunity – this school information should also be fed back at regional/national level to support policy-making and strategic investment for pupils at risk.

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\(^2\) European Union Council’s (2009/C 119/02) strategic priorities for lifelong learning, include: (a) The personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens, and (b) Sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue.
3. Context

3.1 Policy and research context

The learning pathway - from early years and through schools to post-compulsory education - is ultimately a personal one, involving the needs and experiences of the individual learner. These transitions inevitably necessitate co-ordinated action at system level, however, and the planning and organisation of education provision within European countries has profound consequences for the opportunities and risks that learners face as they progress.

3.1.1 Recent research

International studies have demonstrated that the continuity between different stages of education has a significant bearing on learner development. Continuity in the curriculum and teaching methods was one of three sets of factors associated with effective pre-school to primary transitions in a recent longitudinal study, alongside social and institutional adjustment. These findings are mirrored in studies of the primary to secondary transition stage, highlighting the need to maintain sufficient flexibility in the curriculum to maintain and develop learners’ interests and to provide meaningful feedback on their progress. Conversely, poor transitions can occur as a result of ‘systems mismatch’ – where two otherwise well-functioning systems suffer from a lack of synchrony, to the detriment of the learner experience.

Transition from primary to secondary school is a key point at which students who are experiencing socio-economic disadvantage are most likely to fall behind their peers. Research indicates that students from lower socio-economic groups often require greater support to prepare them for the changes in learning environments and academic expectations at secondary school. Furthermore, studies from the Europe and the USA have documented the phenomenon of “summer learning loss” – the dip in academic performance that can occur over summer vacation periods, while students are not engaged in a structured learning environment. Taken together, these factors can serve to widen the gap in achievement, according to learners’ socio-economic backgrounds, or where other disadvantages, such as familial, health, or linguistic factors are present.

Transitions between types of education can also represent a critical stage at which systems offer greater or lesser flexibility to learners. The early assignment of learners to clearly defined academic or vocational tracks is one such stage at which transitions can have far-reaching consequences for the learning pathway and subsequent accreditation. Research has shown that greater flexibility within VET is a priority within some national education systems, and that pedagogies such as work-related learning and personal and social skills development can have a positive impact in preventing ESL.
3.1.2 Structural considerations

At a national level across Europe, responses to supporting transitions are shaped by a number of considerations, which relates to the differences in how education provision is structured and funded. This is coupled with an overall expansion in the compulsory phase in most European countries over the past 20 years, although the starting age for publicly funded education still ranges from 4 to 7 years old, with the total duration ranging from 9 to 13 yearsvi. Perhaps of greater significance, however, is the internal organisation across educational levels. European countries can be grouped according to three “most representative” types of systems (Figure 1).

Figure 1: European education systems – working models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Country coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single structure education</td>
<td>Education is provided from the beginning to the end of compulsory schooling, with no transition between primary and lower secondary education, and with general education provided in common for all pupils.</td>
<td>IS, NO, SE, DK, FI, EE, BG, RS, BA, HR, SI (CZ, LV, HU3, SK4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common core curriculum provision</td>
<td>After successful completion of primary education (ISCED 1), all students progress to the lower secondary level (ISCED 2) where they follow the same general common core curriculum.</td>
<td>UK, IE, PT, ES, FR, BE, IT, CY, EL, TR, PL, RO, MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated lower secondary education</td>
<td>After successful completion of primary education, students are required to follow distinct educational pathways or specific types of schooling, either at the beginning or during lower secondary education.</td>
<td>DE, NL, AT, LT, LU, LI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The challenge of continuity takes on very different dimensions according to whether or not ISCED levels are split by primary and lower secondary phase, and the age at which students choose between academic and vocational tracks. Indeed, transitions between types of education

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3 In Hungary, after successful completion of primary levels, the secondary level schools also follow the same national core curriculum and learners have to choose an appropriate secondary school. In this respect, Hungary considers itself covering all three models.

4 In the Czech Republic, Latvia, Hungary, and Slovakia, compulsory education is single structure up to the ages of 14 to 16. However, students in these countries can enrol in separate establishments providing both lower and upper secondary education at key stages in their education between the ages 10 and 13.
institution can also represent a critical stage at which systems offer greater or lesser flexibility to learners, with varying degrees of learner choice.\(^5\)

### 3.1.3 Key structural elements

Key structural elements influencing learner continuity include, but are not restricted to:

- school admission policies, including catchments, access and entry examinations;
- ability grouping;
- school year or grade repetition;
- curriculum, inspection and accreditation frameworks;
- extent of school autonomy; and,
- the relationship of publicly funded education to private and alternative provision.

Any combination of these factors means a need for a differentiated response at a country level. This report provides a basis for considering these elements and opportunities for system development, whilst acknowledging the diversity of system models.

Action at policy and regional/local level can be directed to different learner groups (see Figure 2): all learners (universal strategies); specific groups (selected or ‘targeted’ strategies) and particular individuals with additional needs or ‘at risk’ (indicated or individualised strategies). This should be taken into account when reviewing policy.

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**Figure 2: Multidimensional strategies in place for meeting individual needs at different levels of need/risk for transition**

- **Indicated** – Individual, Chronic Need
- **Selected** – Some, Moderate Risk
- **Universal** – All

Source: Downes (2016)

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\(^5\) In Germany, a binding decision on the choice of school attended and/or course of education pursued in lower secondary education (general or more vocational) is made in grade 4 to 6, with the age varying between Länder. In Romania, pupils are assigned to an academic or a vocational school between the 8th and 9th grade based on exam results and average marks in the final year of study.
3.2 Working process

The formulation of guiding principles and accompanying examples of policy development was carried out in four ways:

Review of existing research and literature

A background paper of international sources exploring work concerning the topic was created for the Working Groups members.

Working Group meetings, Brussels

Using a blend of sub-group discussion, reporting, and full group reflection, the members explored the topic from different perspectives in working sessions at two two-day meetings. Input was received from guest experts\(^6\), Working Group members sharing case studies from their countries, and guest organisation representatives\(^7\).

Survey to member countries and organisations

Working Group members completed a survey designed to prompt investigation and reflection by respondents on policy developments their school education systems. Participants from 24 countries\(^8\) and 3 associations completed the survey, which was summarised into a report for internal use by the Working Group to inform their work under the mandate.

Peer Learning Activity

The policy challenges and principles set out in this report were developed in depth by 9 countries and 2 organisations attending a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on ‘Continuity in learner development’, hosted by Portugal (14 – 17 February 2017). This PLA focussed on system-level responses that can work towards continuity, with positive outcomes for learners and enable members to critically reflect on the integration of system actors, processes and mechanisms.

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\(^6\) Dr Paul Downes (Dublin City University), on ‘Developing a School System Governance Framework to Promote Quality for Transitions’ and Jean Gordon (Universal Education Foundation: Learning for Well-Being) on ‘Joining the dots in learner development.’

\(^7\) European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, European Parents Association, and Organising Bureau of School Student Unions.

\(^8\) CY, ET, FI, BE(FL), BE(FR), DE(Hesse), EL, IS, IE, IT, LV, MT, NO, PT, MK, RO, SK, ES, SE, CH, and UK(NI)
4. **Principles in action**

This section expands on the guiding principles for policy development relating to continuity in learner development, incorporating discussion points and country examples contributed by members of the ET2020 Working Group on Schools.

4.1 **Early years transition**

**High quality learning experiences should be available to all children from the beginning of their lives as a foundation for lifelong learning.**

Educationalists and policy makers are increasingly acknowledging that learning pathways start with the early years, and that any provisions for formal schooling must also take into account these important first steps in children’s cognitive, social, physical and emotional development.

There is substantial evidence that investing in the early years achieves greater returns than at any other educational stage, although the size and durability of the benefits vary considerably between programmes\(^{\text{vii}}\). High quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is associated with children’s healthy social and emotional development, and with the acquisition of speech, language and literacy competences, as well as creativity and critical thinking skills\(^{\text{viii}}\). It is also associated with improved outcomes during later educational stages, and in reducing the risk of ESL\(^{\text{ix} x}\).

Many countries take this into account. For example, the Education Act in the **Czech Republic** offers all children an opportunity to start pre-school education from the age of two and pre-school education is mandatory for children from the age of five. At the same time, however, it must be recognised that 1 in 20 pre-school age children across Europe do not participate in ECEC\(^{9}\). While the effort to widen participation in ECEC remains a policy objective, it is parents who ultimately hold the responsibility for determining the most appropriate education and care for their children at this stage, therefore support must also be extended to families choosing to raise their children at home.

**Supporting pre-primary to primary transitions**

Flexible and high quality ECEC is rapidly becoming “...a constitutive part of the education and training system” within European countries, and at European policy level\(^{\text{xi}}\). This shift is apparent

\(^9\) The EU-average pre-school participation from the age of 4 to the starting age of compulsory primary education was 94.3% in 2014. See 2016 Education and Training Monitor (Table 3.1.1)

from the growing number of European countries adopting a unitary system, whereby ECEC is organised within a single phase, typically under the Education Ministry\(^1\).

A stronger continuum presents new opportunities for the alignment of staff development, curricula and outcomes frameworks, and softening transitions from pre-primary to primary stage. A number of European countries have undertaken initiatives in this area (Box 1).

**Box 1. Strengthening links between ECEC and primary education (Ireland)**

In **Ireland**, a developmental initiative with preschools and primary schools was launched in early 2017 to establish the ‘enablers’ for improving transition in children’s educational journeys. Although the main objective was to enhance the transfer of information between preschools and primary schools, the initiative will feed into a redevelopment of the primary curriculum including the curriculum experienced by children when they make the transfer from preschool into primary school. This wider curriculum review and development will ensure better alignment between the primary school curriculum and the early years framework and consider opportunities for shared CPD.

The project was led by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), a statutory agency of the Department for Education and Skills. A developmental approach was emphasised from the outset, based on consensus-building with teachers, parents and children. This was enabled by the representative structure of the Council, which includes nominees from the ECEC and primary education sectors.

Learning from the initiative has the potential to feed into a number of aspects of policy development, including ongoing work in reviewing programmes in the higher education sector to incorporate policy developments related to the preschool to primary school transition into courses for practitioners. Monitoring and evaluation is also planned to understand the impact of transferred information on experience and outcomes for children.

**ECEC as a supportive foundation for disadvantaged children**

ECEC has a particular role to play in improving the educational chances of children and families experiencing disadvantages, starting in the early years. For example, OECD data shows that early years education can push-back one third of negative effects of low socio-economic status, using a ‘reading engagement’ approach towards early literacy development\(^xii\).

ECEC can also provide a supportive environment for the integration of migrant children, by providing an early start to multilingual teaching and learning. In Norway, for example, children aged 4 and 5 from migrant backgrounds benefit from 20 hours free early childhood education

\(^{10}\) BG, DK, DE, EE, ES, HR, LT, LV, AT, SI, FI, SE, and UK
called ‘free core time’. This measure results in 15% higher participation in ECEC and better results on mapping tests in 1st and 2nd grade for minority language children compared to city areas where no free core time is available.

Box 2. Tackling social disadvantage at the pre-primary stage (Slovakia)

In Slovakia, the Ministry of Education has legislated the introduction of a contribution for students from socially disadvantaged environments, to support their upbringing and education (Decree No. 649/2008). Furthermore, pre-primary education is free of charge one year before learners start compulsory education and also for children who come from socially disadvantaged families who receive material need benefits (subsidies for food and school supplies). These measures are intended to raise participation in kindergarten education, at pre-primary stage.

Measures to consider for supporting continuity in learner development through Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) include:

- Reducing charges in order to widen access and uptake, so that as many children as possible stand to benefit from the potential continuing education and social gains of high quality ECEC, while recognising parents’ rights to exercise choice at the pre-school stage;
- Reviewing curricula to facilitate continuity from ECEC through primary stage, which may require strategic direction at a national policy level; and,
- Shared practices and professional development opportunities, enabling school education systems and stakeholders to learn from, and be coherent with, effective ECEC pedagogies.

11 Measures also include financing an additional educator in Roma classes for some hours per day. Italian and Hungarian national communities in ethnically mixed areas have the right to education in their respective language. The Constitution also protects the status and gives special rights to members of the Roma community who live in Slovenia.
4.2 Learner and parental participation and choice

Learners and families should be supported with guidance and participatory decision-making in navigating pathways between levels and types of school education, and between school and future education and employment.

The participation of learners - and their parents or carers - in decision-making affecting their education is a key principle of learner development, from 0-18 years and beyond. First, it is important to acknowledge that learner voices and the entitlement to an education are both fundamental rights, as set out in international\textsuperscript{xiii} and European laws\textsuperscript{xiii,xiv}. Research findings suggest that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is having an impact on domestic education policy\textsuperscript{xv}.

Learner ‘voice’ is a prerequisite for creating a school culture within which young people feel valued, and able to make a difference. Effective participation requires willingness on the part of school leaders to share some decision-making responsibilities with young people on meaningful issues relating to the running of the school, and to provide a suitable infrastructure in the form of school councils or other decision-making bodies. It also requires suitable mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and feed back the results of learner participation, so that learners are able to see that their views are taken seriously, and acted upon, and can hold school leaders to account\textsuperscript{xvi}.

There is an abundance of practice and research examples showing that even very young children can participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their education (individually) and in the everyday running of schools or kindergartens (collectively)\textsuperscript{xvii}. Recent research conducted at European level found that comparatively few European countries have mechanisms in place to support child participation at pre-secondary stage, however, and fewer still within ECEC, although forums for participation are in much greater evidence at secondary stage\textsuperscript{xviii}.

**Exercising choice over educational pathways**

The ability to exercise choice requires some degree of flexibility in education systems to accommodate individual learners’ needs and aspirations, and to balance this with the needs of the labour market and the skills demanded by employers.

The degree of choice exercised by learners is subject to change throughout their educational journey. While parents hold the balance of decision making responsibilities at ECEC and primary stage, young people usually exercise increasing influence over decisions about upper secondary

\textsuperscript{xii} The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrined the right for children to express and have their views heard in all matters affecting their lives, in accordance with their age and maturity. The child’s right to be heard is also Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.
pathways and qualifications. The views of learners, parents and schools are not always harmonious, however, and what is supposedly in the child’s best interests can be a contested area.

Choices are possible - to a varying degree - within more or less centralised systems. In some countries, educational trajectories are prescribed to a much greater extent. In other European countries, deregulation and school autonomy, and curriculum diversification have sometimes helped to ensure that educational provision is more responsive, and demand-led. In the UK (Northern Ireland), for example, all secondary schools must offer a balance between ‘applied’ and ‘general’ courses, either in-school or in collaboration with other schools or Further Education colleges. These categories ensure that a range of skills are recognised and rewarded through formal qualifications in all schools. It also helps to signpost pathways into both academic and professional/technical routes to learners from age 14.

In Germany, vocational and academic tracks follow different institutional pathways, and so the transition from primary to lower secondary education has particular significance for the curricula to be followed. In practice, however, the primary schools usually assess the learner aptitude for certain types of secondary schools in consultation with the learner and their parents. The final decision is typically taken by the school or school supervisory authority, and ideally with active parental involvement. Differences in approach can exist between Länder.

Beyond choices about schools and qualifications, some approaches place a stronger emphasis on learners’ participation in everyday decision-making. In Portugal, school autonomy projects allow schools to develop innovative ways of giving higher levels of autonomy to the learner. Schools in Italy are also able to devise ways to increase student participation in the life of the school.

Box 3. Cooperative and democratic model of schooling (Portugal)

The modern school movement in Portugal is based on the principles of “cooperative and democratic organisation”. The school objectives are set by the ministry and follow the national curriculum, but the institutional approach is determined by individual schools, which have autonomy to recruit and train teachers according to their specific pedagogical approach.

Unique among these schools is the Escola da Ponte. The school was established in 1976 in São Tomé de Negrellos by group of teachers who wanted to put their vision for education into action. It spans the 3-15 age range, and offers a truly child-centred approach to learning and school organisation. The learners hold a high level of autonomy and responsibility, negotiating what to learn and how to learn, using a fortnightly plan. The tutor (teacher) is a bridge between the school and the family, providing feedback or help where this is needed. The

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13 Including: DE, NL, AT, LT, LU, and LI.
14 Including: IS, IE, FI, IT, EL, NO and ES.
model is underpinned by continuous self-evaluation, which part of the learning process.

The role of information, advice and guidance

High quality guidance counselling can play a role in preventing educational disengagement, by ensuring that learners make informed and realistic choices at key stages in their journey\textsuperscript{15}. This is a particular priority upon transition to upper secondary vocational education, which often corresponds with an increased risk of early school leaving due to a mismatch in learners’ expectations of their chosen pathway\textsuperscript{15}. Individual coaching or guidance counselling can also counteract feelings of low self-esteem, inadequacy or failure among learners who have early experiences of educational under-achievement, and help to reactivate learners’ motivations\textsuperscript{16}.

It is important to acknowledge the competence of parents and families, as well as the competence of educators to promote sound outcomes for all children. European countries have developed a variety of approaches to support learner and parental choices, through the provision of information, advice and guidance services at different stages within the education system:

- **In Greece**, a multi-stakeholder approach has been taken to develop and disseminate the national Career Programmes. This involves collaboration between school units, other Career and Counselling Centres, Universities, Research Institutes, and NGOs.

- **In Spain**, there has been an emphasis on measures to simplify the curriculum and to make available learner pathways more transparent and clearly signposted\textsuperscript{16}. Similar steps were taken in the UK (EN) to substantially consolidate the number of courses and to disband the previous credit-based system, which was considered to be confusing.

- **In Malta**, there is a different relative emphasis to the guidance provided at each transition point. In the early years there is an emphasis on emotional security, from primary to middle school reassurance and emotional support, and middle school to secondary is more career-orientated.

The Finnish system is based around a comprehensive guidance offer, starting from an early age, and including both universal and targeted provision (Box 4).

\textsuperscript{15} In the Netherlands, for example, a national survey of 1,700 young people who had left education without a qualification found that most had left upper secondary VET schools, because they felt in hindsight that they had made the wrong decision. (Cited in: GHK (2011)).

\textsuperscript{16} These are set out in the Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education, which modified the former 2006 Education Act, and was introduced during the academic year 2014/2015.
Box 4. Integrated national system of guidance and learner support (Finland)

**Finland** has a three-tiered support system based on learner needs (general, intensified and special), which incorporates universal pupil welfare services, guidance, counselling and individually adapted curricula for learners with special educational needs.

A key feature of the Finnish system is that guidance counselling starts in the first grade when children are seven years old. A strengths-based approach is advocated, which recognises that children have growing responsibilities and autonomy throughout their education (Figure 3).

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**Figure 3: National education system in Finland – a visual representation**

- **Legislation**
  - the right for education and services
  - the right to receive information to arrange the education suitable for the student

- **New core curriculums**
  - regulating transitions
  - school-level plans, education provider – level plans, individual plans
  - skills in addition to knowledge

- **Support services**
  - guidance counselling, three levels of support, student welfare services
  - flexible basic education (JOPO), ‘10th grade’, preparatory classes
  - regional one-stop-guidance centres
  - VET for special education needs students

- **Government strategic plan goals**
  - pedagogy, learning environments and working culture in schools is renewed
  - measures defined in Teacher Education Development Programme are in practice
  - new Innovation center supports development
  - the number of young people dropped out of education or working life has fallen
  - the drop-out rate in education has declined
Measures to consider for supporting continuity in learner development through pupil and parental guidance and participatory decision-making include:

- **Establishing appropriate support structures and pedagogical techniques to build learners’ autonomy and responsibility**: developing personal, social and civic competences alongside and within academic learning. This should be from an early age, and these structures evolve with the growing capacities of the learner.

- **Signposting of different learner pathways and educational options**: providing clear and accessible information in a variety of formats, including written materials for learners and parents from minority linguistic and cultural background.

- **High quality careers advice and guidance** in schools: tailored to the needs of the individual learner and from an early age; and contextualised, involving local employers, NGOs and universities.

### 4.3 Collaboration between institutions

Systems should have structures and mechanisms to support collaboration across institutions and between actors, focusing on transitions between levels and types of education

Collaboration between educational institutions is an essential part of the continuum for learners. It is particularly important at the stage when learners move between different levels of education and when they often also experience a change in institutional setting. These transition points therefore represent both a change in learning environment (see also Guiding Principle 5), and in curricula and teacher pedagogical approaches (see also Guiding Principle 6).

Effective collaboration requires strong mechanisms to ensure that there is a flow of information between educational institutions and a clear mutual understanding of responsibilities. The ‘sending’ institution holds the key insights to the learner and is often best placed to lead on transition planning, although shared accountability is essential to ensure that the process is as seamless as possible and the flows of information are in both directions.

Members report that a number of their countries have tested the approach of requiring all education institutions to develop a ‘transition plan’. This is typically a formal document setting out the institutional aims and objectives regarding learner transitions, and the support that is in place for learners’ academic and social development. This document has the advantage of
formalising arrangements, and avoiding the risk that responsibilities for transitions can otherwise become too implicit, with a lack of managerial oversight. In Italy, for example, the National System for School Evaluation requires the different levels of school: primary, lower and upper secondary schools to assess their effectiveness in supporting pupils’ transition to the next level as part of school improvement, while lower and upper secondary schools are also required to assess the effectiveness of their arrangements for linking with the lower level.

More regular opportunities for interaction between teaching professionals from ECEC, primary and secondary education can help to complement the collaboration that takes place at system level (strategic planning and data-sharing), and can ensure that there is a degree of familiarity in principles, curricula and teaching practices deployed in the classroom (see also Guiding Principle 6). This can be as much a question of trust and professional relationships as one of data-sharing.

Box 5. Teacher pedagogical exchanges – primary and lower secondary (United Kingdom (Northern Ireland))

In the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), the introduction of a shared skills framework – The Entitlement Framework – has provided a focal point for a programme of teacher exchanges and joint professional development. They found that lower secondary level teachers welcomed having regular opportunities to see how primary level teachers address literacy and numeracy through all subjects, working with mixed ability groups, and how assessment is undertaken against the framework at primary stage. The experience had challenged secondary school teachers’ expectations for their incoming pupils, as well as helping to build mutual trust and understanding between professionals.

The structure and geographical organisation of educational institutions can serve to enable or hinder collaboration. The highest level of integration is often found where ISCED levels are grouped in the same or similar institutional setting. These arrangements can help to avoid the ‘jolt’ associated with the transition between different institutions. In Italy, this grouping is achieved using comprehensive institutes across primary and lower secondary education. In the UK, school deregulation has seen the emergence of Multi Academy Trusts, grouping networks of primary and secondary schools under a shared governance and management structure. The Trusts also have powers to set curricula. Steiner Waldorf schools usually span multiple educational stages, as described in Box 6 below.

Box 6. Integrated primary and secondary provision (Steiner Waldorf schools in Europe)

In the Steiner Waldorf system, formal schooling usually starts between ages 6 and 7. The oldest kindergarten children are offered special programmes to prepare them for transition
to school, and forms of cooperation are established between early years and primary education.\textsuperscript{17}

Steiner Waldorf schools offer their own secondary school wherever possible. In Germany, for example, Steiner Waldorf schools are comprehensive schools and cover classes 1-12/13, removing the need to change schools when entering lower or upper secondary education. The possibility to offer secondary provision within the same institution mainly depends on the legal context in a given country. Where the upper secondary school is legally distinct, the Steiner Waldorf school is often co-located to provide similar benefits in terms of close cooperation.

A cluster structure can provide similar benefits for inter-institutional collaboration and networking. The Programme for Priority Intervention Educational Areas (TEIP)\textsuperscript{18} in Portugal is one such example (Box 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 7. School clustering to manage transitions between educational levels (Portugal)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Portugal, schools within the TEIP programme are grouped in clusters to promote a seamless transition between different levels of education. Most schools are grouped including the ISCED 0-3 levels. Both regular and specialised educational provision is available within each cluster, to allow for differentiation according to individual learners’ needs.\textsuperscript{19} Transition is an established criterion within the external evaluations carried out by the Inspectorate of Education. Whenever a weakness is identified, schools develop improvement plans with measures to reinforce better transitions and articulation between teachers. One of the areas of the improvement plans developed by schools is management and organisation, under which measures are frequently implemented to ‘soften’ the transition between levels. One of the main challenges has been to overcome communication gaps between teachers from different cycles and/or to build a consistent approach rooted in a local identity. Intensive ongoing collaboration is therefore a central principle of the TEIP programme, involving frequent joint projects and ongoing CPD to maintain open dialogue and learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inter-institutional collaboration can be challenging to achieve in school education systems, for example where there are challenges relating to school closure or under-supply, or where

\textsuperscript{17} These can be either formal or informal and can be organised as follows: Steiner Waldorf early years settings and Steiner Waldorf schools represented in the same national federation (FL, NL, BE, LU, UK, SP, IT, CH, AT, HU, HR, SI, SK, LV, EE); Steiner Waldorf early years staff and Steiner Waldorf school staff part of the same faculty of teachers (NO, NL, BE, LU, UK, SP, IT, CH, SI, EE, UA); Joint weekly conferences: (NL, BE, SP, IT, CH, SI, CZ, LV, EE); Joint seminars (FL, NO, parts of DE, BE, LU, SP, CH, SI, CZ, EE).

\textsuperscript{18} Further information on the TEIP programme is provided on the European Commission School Education Gateway: http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools/detail.cfm?n=434

\textsuperscript{19} Alternative Curriculum Paths (PCA), the Integrated Programme of Education and Training (PIEF), Vocational Courses, Specialized Artistic Courses and Professional Courses.
provision is organised across geographically dispersed or predominately rural areas. In **Malta**, state schools are non-continuous, and learners have to change school after their primary schooling, middle school and secondary school. In most cases this means that they have to change locality. Consequently, there is a greater emphasis on ensuring that learners and their parents or carers are psychologically prepared, as well as attending to other support infrastructure including suitable transport provision.

A much wider range of stakeholders is involved in learner transitions than schools alone. Collaboration is important with pupils, parents, teachers, educational providers and social partners, although there is invariably variation in the profile of different organisations that are involved at each educational stage. Some European countries have developed cross-sectoral approaches involving co-located multi-disciplinary teams, in an effort to overcome fragmentation and to develop a ‘multi-faceted’ response. This might include where teachers work alongside health or social workers, with outreach support where this is needed.

**Box 8. Multiple stakeholder collaboration for learner development (Norway)**

In **Norway**, the national quality assurance system, introduced in 2004, requires the cooperation of all stakeholders, including social partners, national parents’ committees, national authorities, and school leaders and pupils, who participate in analysing data from tests, exams and user surveys. The Norwegian national system for Quality in Kindergarten (ECEC), implemented in 2016, also relies on dialogue and quality assurance mechanisms involving all stakeholders.

**Measures to consider** for supporting continuity in learner development - inter-institutional collaboration - include:

- **Requiring all schools and ECEC providers to develop and review transition plans for their learners:** this creates an accountability mechanisms for transition at an institutional level. This could also require:
  - an outline of differentiated support for learners with additional needs;
  - planning relating to health, wellbeing, and family support in order to strengthen multiple stakeholder accountability and achieve collective ownership of children and young people’s outcomes at different developmental stages.

- **Creating regular opportunities for school leaders, teachers and other education professionals** from ECEC, primary and secondary institutions to **jointly plan and reflect upon their practice** for a common understanding of the key principles, processes, working protocols and outcomes from effective transitions.
• **Clear priorities within national inspection frameworks** to strengthen the emphasis on continuity, guidance and transition, so that judgements about the quality and effectiveness include schools’ support arrangements.
4.4 The content and ways of teaching and learning

Appropriate curricula and teacher pedagogical approaches should help bridge transitions and foster learners’ growing sense of responsibility for their own competence development and future lives in society.

School systems require flexibility to ensure the continuing relevance of teaching methods for learners at different stages, and to ensure that learning content is inspiring and accessible to learners with a diverse range of needs. In addition to subject knowledge, teachers require appropriate conflict resolution skills, diversity awareness, and bullying prevention approaches, to maintain a positive school and classroom climate (see also 4.8).

It is important that work in this area offers a continuum between stages of education, and uses common language and concepts of child development that are relevant for and valued by educators across all ISCED levels. Such curricula might be reinforced through teacher exchanges and joint training and continued professional development (CPD).

European countries have often used a combination of national legislation and standards to improve continuity. In Iceland, for example, the principle of equipping teachers to train across all levels is enshrined in law, although large scale implementation has yet to be realised. In the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), a programme of teacher professional development brings together primary school teachers and lower secondary teachers with a focus on literacy and numeracy skills development and assessment, while Denmark has introduced common objectives for school subjects, which span all stages of education. In Belgium (French community), a competency-based approach has been developed, extending upwards from ECEC to secondary stage (see Box 9).

**Box 9. Ensuring curricular and pedagogical continuity (Belgium (French community))**

In Belgium (French community), transitions between ECEC and primary education are facilitated by a common framework for initial competencies (“socle commun de compétences initiales”), involving collaboration between teachers in pre-school and primary school. The framework stipulates that each school should set up a piloting plan for a period of six years, and that this plan should include, among other measures: strategies to support pupil achievement, and mechanisms to avoid the need for school year repetition, and to prevent early school leaving. Transition to secondary education continues via the pedagogic continuum, which covers eight years from the first year of primary school to the second year of secondary school.

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European countries have adopted a range of methods to monitor and evaluate their curricula at pre-primary and lower secondary stage at national, regional and institutional levels to ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness in supporting learner development (Box 9). These assessments often make reference to OECD guidelines alongside national criteria.

In Sweden, pedagogical approaches are regularly evaluated. At a national level, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate conducts supervision of all municipal and independent schools, from preschool to adult education. At a provider level, the Education Act stipulates that every school shall continuously review and adjust their curricula.

Core curricula in Finland are prepared in wide cooperation with all the key stakeholders – including learners. The process includes various stages where their involvement is essential. For example, the draft curriculum guidelines go through a public commentary round, where feedback is collected from learners. Learners must be involved in the development of local curricula, while national student organizations have representation in the upper secondary education steering group. A similar approach is taken in Ireland.

Box 10. The inclusion of Roma pupils (Slovakia)

The project “Innovative education for primary school pedagogic employees aimed at increasing their intercultural competence in education of Roma pupils” was a partnership between the Slovak National Institute for education and the Council of Europe, co-financed by the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area and the government budget of the Slovak Republic. Its objective was to support the process of intercultural and inclusive education at schools and included educating primary school teachers in the Romani language, culture and history of Roma.

A new Erasmus+ project “Innovation of Romani language didactics for inclusive education of pupils from a disadvantaged environment” is a cooperation between the Institute for Education, the Nansen Centre for Peace and Dialogue (Lillehammer) and the Seminar of Romani Studies (Department of Central European Studies, Charles University, Prague). The aim of the project is to promote and develop education in the Romani language as one of the main tools of applying the inclusive method in primary and secondary schools with pupils from Roma communities. The project reflects the latest trends in inclusive education from abroad, especially from the Czech Republic and Norway.

The importance of Vocational and Educational Training (VET)

Differentiated pathways between mainstream education and VET are a particular feature of some education systems. Whilst not necessarily problematic, these differentiated systems also need to find a way to maintain flexibility. This might entail providing greater variety within VET curricula, to include arts, citizenship and social and emotional learning.
In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the first year of secondary education in VET schools has a large representation of general subjects. The aim is help learners acclimatise to the vocational system and to provide opportunities to transfer between systems if this is necessary. The diverse curriculum is also intended to build socio-emotional competencies. There is a similar emphasis on flexibility in the first year of secondary education in vocational schools in Iceland, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden and Finland.

During 2016-2020, Slovakia will run a national project to implement a dual system of education in all appropriate learning and study fields. This will include the participation of nearly 1500 employers and 300 secondary vocational schools within 8 self-governing regions. (Further information available at www.dualnysystem.sk).

More fundamentally, many European countries are addressing difficulties with the lower status afforded to VET pathways. This lack of parity in status is sometimes reflected in the restricted options at post-compulsory stage, with VET courses offered at a limited number of specialist higher education institutions. Some countries have addressed this issue with a combination of awareness-raising campaigns; reforms to strengthen VET qualifications; and measures to facilitate a stronger role for local government and social partners. In Norway, the Ministry of Education is working with municipalities to raise the profile of VET. This is in response to low completion rates for vocational qualifications (the ‘journeyman’s certificate’), despite 50% of learners participating in VET at upper secondary stage.

**Meeting learners’ needs for the digital world: age-appropriate support**

Curriculum development must also take account of wider societal and technological changes, including the growing significance of the internet and mobile technologies to children and young people’s lives both inside and outside of school. Research shows that children in Europe are going online in increasing numbers from an earlier age, with more widespread access to mobile technologies and social media membership, and that this has profound implications for their peer relationships, social norms and identity formation. This calls for age and development-appropriate pedagogical responses to be co-constructed across levels.

The digital world provides new opportunities for learners as creators and curators of educational content, while the digitalisation of learning resources provides an example of how these technologies have been harnessed by schools and NGOs to widen educational access and inclusion. At the same time, digitalisation presents new challenges for safeguarding and child protection. There is a greater onus on schools to ensure that children’s online lives are factored into curriculum development and learner pathways in an age-and development appropriate form and that teachers are equipped with the tools to support learners in these contexts. For example, in Ireland, the Department has developed a Digital Strategy and there is ongoing work on teacher competences in the context of this strategy.

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Measures to consider for supporting continuity in learner development through curricula and teacher pedagogical approaches include:

- **Creating opportunities for interaction and exchanges** between teachers and support staff working at different levels within national school education systems, to build familiarity and trust, and to develop a common language of learner development. This might include joint initial teacher training, classroom observations, or joint training and continued professional developed (CPD).

- **Developing competency frameworks that span ISCED levels**, and which can reinforce continuity in the curriculum. These can be strengthened by cooperation at a national or regional policy level between Ministries and National Inspectorates tasked with monitoring educational standards for ECEC, primary, and secondary stage education.

- **Informed consultation with learners, parents, NGOs, employers and social partners** as a multi-stakeholder approach to curriculum development with an appropriate level of challenge and debate.

- **Providing a choice of different learner pathways, including a stronger and more appealing range of VET options**, on a parity of status with general educational qualifications. This might require a combination of awareness-raising campaigns to challenge negative social perceptions of VET; qualifications reforms, and measures to facilitate a stronger role for local government and social partners in developing VET routes into local labour markets.

### 4.5 Access and inclusion

*Systems should ensure sufficient flexibility to include and integrate pupils who enter or leave at different stages, or who have difficulty in accessing formal education.*

Whilst it is important to ensure continuity in learner development between levels of education, individual pathways are often non-linear, and can be subject to disruption at any stage. This might include periods of missed schooling for health or family reasons, or where young people are leaving institutional care. More mobile or transient populations such as Roma and migrant families also have distinct needs arising from their inclusion within school education systems at ad hoc points. It is important to ensure that systems are sufficiently flexible and responsive to all learners at these ‘moments’ of risk.
Supporting the inclusion of newly arrived migrant children

European countries have received growing numbers of new migrants and refugees in the wake of the crisis in Syria and other humanitarian crises. The situation of newly arrived migrant children presents specific challenges for education systems. OECD data show that first-generation migrants underachieve relative to their peers in reading and maths, albeit with wide inter-country variations. Research indicates that the timing of entry into preschool and school, plus selection mechanisms such as differentiated school tracks, all present barriers to young migrants, alongside challenges arising from the residential segregation.

In response, European countries have adopted varying approaches to support the inclusion of newly arrived migrant children within the school system. These have ranged from a phased process involving an initial period of separate education in reception classes, to direct ‘immersion’ within mainstream schools. While there is evidence demonstrating the value of multilingual approaches to teaching and learning, challenges remain in building the capacity of schools to support often linguistically and culturally diverse groups of learners. Sweden and other countries have established a type of national centre, with some success (Box 11).

Box 11. Building capacity to support the school inclusion of migrant children (Sweden)

In Sweden, the Education Ministry has financed the National Centre for Swedish as a Second Language (The National Centre) at Stockholm University to support municipalities and schools with the integration of newly arrived migrant learners. The National Centre provides a link role, brokering access to advice, pedagogical tools, and training. The staff at the National Centre have advocated for a ‘whole systems’ approach, based on collective responsibility.

One example of the model in action comes from a municipality in south-eastern Sweden, which contacted the National Centre following concerns about the shortfall in teachers with the necessary competences to support newly arrived migrants in local schools. The National Centre responded with a programme of in-service training for schools, based on a ‘content and language integrated approach’ to learning, which was rolled out in blocks of training for teachers across the locality. The approach was deemed to have been a real success, with more appropriate learner support in place and demand for training from other municipalities.

In Italy, newly arrived migrant learners who do not have the language of schooling may receive Personalised Teaching Plans. Such plans contain all the measures to be put in place to facilitate inclusion including the duration of the classes in the language of schooling, the support given to learn Italian as a second language, the temporary compensatory and dispensatory educational...
measures adopted, the attainment levels and the criteria for formative and summative assessment.

Turkey has received an unprecedented number of newly arrived migrant learners, fleeing conflict in war torn countries. At January 2017, an estimated 900,000 children of school age (5-17) were registered under the temporary protection regime, of whom 507,000 were enrolled at school\textsuperscript{22}. Despite significant efforts to make school places available, nearly two thirds of these children (64\%) have been enrolled in temporary education centres. The Ministry has faced significant challenges in managing the transition into mainstream classrooms with language support, while absorbing the extra demand for places within the system.

**Support for deferment or re-engagement in education**

More widely, a number of countries have introduced flexible approaches for learners to skip a year or to defer starting school, where certain preconditions are met (see Box 12). This model can have the advantage of allowing learners to progress at an appropriate pace, and to avoid school year repetition, which is a known risk factor for early school leaving in some countries.

\begin{boxedquote}
**Box 12. Flexibility to (re)join and progress within mainstream schools**

In Portugal, special programmes have been introduced to reinsert learners to the education system, following periods of missed schooling. The Portuguese Integrated Programme for Education and Training (PIEF) allows students to begin and finish the programme at any moment of the academic year, and to re-enrol on a mainstream pathway. This re-insertion is important, as learning Portuguese, Maths and English is a requirement within the curriculum.

In the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), work has been commissioned to assess the practicalities of allowing deferred entry to school for the first time. The statutory curriculum sets out only the minimum content required to be delivered. The content of the individual school curriculum is directed at school level and can be shaped to meet the needs of the specific intake of pupils.

‘Second chance education’ schemes provide another option for young people seeking to re-engage with formal education having left before achieving an upper secondary qualification. A review of second chance provision in Europe showed that these schemes generally experience greater success where they emphasise their distinctiveness from mainstream school, while at the same time providing an opportunity for learners to work towards recognised qualifications\textsuperscript{xxx}. Other success factors include having roots in the local community, access to social support networks, and strong links to the local labour market, including opportunities for project-based learning, and engaging with employers.
\end{boxedquote}

\textsuperscript{22} Source: \url{http://hbogm.meb.gov.tr/www/suriyeli-ogrencilere-yonelik-koordinasyon-toplantisi-duzenlendi/icerik/589} (05.01.2017)
Measures to consider for supporting continuity in learner development by integrating pupils include:

- **Provision of specific in-service teacher training in assessment and observation, and shared access to resources for clusters of schools**, in order to manage the inclusion of newly arrived migrant learners, who may have missed periods of schooling, and/or have experienced psychological trauma.

- **Developing whole school approaches to support cultural and linguistic diversity**, by adopting good practices in multilingual teaching and learning, and valuing languages other than the language of instruction within the classroom.

- **Promoting flexibility in the duration and entry points of study courses**, by providing learners with the options to enter and leave a course at different points and assessing the possibility of differing entry routes to education. This might include the use of tools to validate prior learning and taking non-formal educational outcomes into account, for example, those gained through volunteering or youth work settings outside of school.

- **Reviewing the range of high quality alternative education provision**, where mainstream school does not provide the most appropriate option for learners. This might include second chance education schemes; pedagogical and psychological support for home educated learners and their families, and for learners who are in institutional care.

### 4.6 Sharing data

Relevant learner data should be shared between institutions in both directions, as part of an ongoing dialogue to ensure continuity and progression in learning and continued support for competence development.

Data sharing between educational institutions takes place for a range of purposes. While there is often a primary focus on sharing ‘hard’ attainment data, other developmental and contextual information can also be valuable for understanding learner transitions. Many European countries have legislated to ensure that schools receive a minimum level of standardised information on individual learners upon completion of each stage of their schooling (Box 13).
Box 13. Standardised information sharing – individual learner record or passport

Pre-school to primary (Estonia)

In Estonia, preschool institutions issue a ‘readiness for school card’ to children who have completed the curriculum, as a child development record. It is the competence of the parents to submit the card to the institution where the child will commence their compulsory school education. The card helps the primary school teacher to understand the child’s individuality and their development needs, and to plan cooperation with parents and support specialists.

The approach is greatly assisted where there is effective communication between preschool and school teachers. Acknowledging this, the Estonian ministry aims to further improve placement and joint training opportunities for preschool and school teachers, and to issue tools and guidance materials in the field of child development and transitions.

Primary to post-primary (Ireland)

In Ireland, transition from primary to post-primary education is facilitated by an Education Passport and supporting materials, developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), which follow the learner. These arrangements are underpinned by a national Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

Lower to upper secondary (Italy)

In Italy, lower secondary teachers normally provide pupils with a written advice about the pathway that is considered to be the most suitable to them, which is shared with upper secondary teachers. Beyond this, it is largely at the discretion of individual secondary schools to establish further measures to facilitate transition.

A ‘data continuum’ throughout educational phases is a significant asset for understanding what makes for effective transitions, and for quantifying the success factors and barriers to progression. This implies a need for longitudinal data collection, which in turn requires consistency in how learner data is captured at the different educational stages or levels. The transmission of information should be multi-directional, so that progress data flows back from secondary to primary school, and/or from primary to ECEC, to close the feedback loop and allow for continuous improvement in how learner development is captured and recorded.

Inter-institutional data sharing is often more developed within European countries where it has a ‘remedial’ purpose: tracking learners at risk of school exclusion, underachievement, or early school leaving. In Denmark, primary school teachers note “points of observation” if the learner is not making adequate progress in the Danish language or mathematics, and this information is shared upon transition to secondary level. In Sweden, a national guarantee (‘Läsa, skriva, räkna-garantin’) stipulates that data must be shared appropriately for learners at risk, to bridge the
gaps between ECEC, primary and secondary, while Portugal has adopted a comprehensive national tracking system to monitor risk of early school leaving throughout the educational continuum.

A number of European countries have developed a centralising function for learner data, to facilitate appropriate access and to minimise the burden on schools:

- In Spain, piloting has taken place of a centralised single record for learners, accessible by each educational institution, with the aim of reducing the administrative costs related to sharing data on learner progression. This tool allows for access to quantitative progress data, with qualitative monitoring to be added.

- In Belgium (Flanders), a national data warehousing project has been established, to gather and analyse information on learners’ development and progress through their nursery and primary education.

- In Greece, ‘Myschool’ is a nationwide database that supports the school units and the educational structures. It provides data from preliminary to high school education for all types of schools including private primary and secondary education which contributes to the monitoring of learners’ pathways.

A holistic understanding of transitions often goes beyond what schools are able to capture and collect, and might also require collaboration with health and social sectors.

**Data protection considerations**

Ethical and data protection requirements play an important role in regulating information sharing between educational institutions. In Belgium (Flanders), national legislation stipulates that primary schools should transfer only information that is relevant to the continuity of care of individual learners, to support secondary transition. In practice, however, data transmission is significantly influenced by parental consent. Many schools will consult with parents to develop protocols, and their permissions are required to share more than basic progress data.

In Ireland, Section 28 of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) states that personal data – or information extracted from such data – may be given to another body (prescribed by the Minister) if the holder is satisfied that it will be used for a relevant education and training purpose only.

The risk of stigma associated with data sharing must also be taken into account. Sharing of information about past challenging behaviours or teacher perceptions can present a risk of ‘labelling’ individuals as trouble-makers, resulting in prejudiced treatment. Learners should be aware of what information is shared about them, and how this will be used to inform judgements about their progress and the support or sanctions they receive.
Measures to consider for supporting continuity in learner development through the sharing of learner progression data include:

- **Incorporating health and wellbeing, social and emotional development, and social and civic competence** in the data that is captured in relation to learner development, where these aspects are not currently reflected.

- **Establishing clear requirements on the appropriate and timely sharing of learner data**, so that both institutions can plan accordingly.

- **Establishing transparent guidelines regarding learner and parental consent for data sharing** between education institutions, within the scope of existing national legislation for information governance, so that the learner and their parent or carer are aware at all times of what data is held, by whom, and for what purpose.

### 4.7 Different types of data and tools

Information from quantitative and qualitative assessment and reporting mechanisms should be used to help construct a holistic understanding of learner development and progression.

Most European countries have established frameworks that incorporate both internal and external quality assurance mechanisms, with the aim of assessing:

1. the performance of the education system overall;
2. the quality and performance of individual schools; and,
3. judgements about individual learner progress and attainment.

Well-functioning quality assurance approaches are clearly focused on supporting learner development and school improvement, and seek to achieve coherence across different mechanisms that have been developed to meet the demands of all relevant stakeholders.\(^{23}\)

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\(^{23}\) A more detailed consideration of Quality Assurance as a topic for the ET2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18, including the proposed “eight guiding principles”, can be found in the companion document to this report.
International, longitudinal and research data (system-level)

At a national level, many European countries make use of data from international comparative studies to understand trends in learner attainment, and to benchmark. This includes Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). European level monitoring and evaluation, including with regard to ECEC also forms an important source of trend data to understand strengths and weaknesses within the system.

Data from standardised tests alone cannot be used as the basis of judgements about effectiveness, however, and most countries also use these data in conjunction with evidence from school inspections, school self-assessment, evaluations of special projects, and teacher and learner surveys, to ‘triangulate’ and provide a more nuanced understanding of the functioning of the system.

- Longitudinal data is often needed to track and identify where the movement (of learners) through systems is expected or unexpected; to identify potential systems blockages, and to understand the trigger points for under-achievement or drop-out.

- Primary research with teachers parents or carers is often necessary to explain trends in the data – especially where this requires an understanding of parental or learner motivations or behaviours driving participation. For example, this might relate to the take-up for ECEC, subject or school choices, or where there are high rates of early school leaving.

- Bespoke small scale trials, pilots or cohort studies can be invaluable in providing sufficient depth of understanding when testing the relative effectiveness of different policy tools or levers, such as funding mechanisms, incentives, or information, advice and guidance (e.g. careers guidance).

Trust and openness, along with a willingness to independently evaluate policy decisions and to disseminate the results, are critical to creating culture of self-improvement at all levels within the system. To these ends, ministries in some European countries have commissioned their own research to better understand specific issues pertaining to transitions (Box 14).
In Slovenia, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport opted to be part of the OECD transition research project in 2016. This revealed unexpected challenges around the transition from pre-school to primary. Although levels of enrolment in ECEC are high in Slovenia, an increasing number of parents have been using the flexibility to postpone their child’s enrolment to the first grade (at age six)\textsuperscript{24}. Further research has been commissioned to understand parents’ motivations, and to identify whether additional campaigns or information might be needed\textsuperscript{25}.

In 2017, the amendment of the Kindergarten Act was the subject of intense debate; in particular regarding the measure that would provide even greater involvement for children who do not attend kindergarten in the last year before starting the school.

In Finland, a consortium led by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre and including representatives from the education ministry and research institutes has embarked on a research project. The rationale is to better understand the success factors within children’s educational transitions, with the aim of strengthening cooperation between government funded projects, and to avoid duplication of effort. There is a commitment to use the results to review the place of transitions within the curriculum at national and local levels.

### Box 14. National level transitions research – understanding the system (Slovenia and Finland)

In **Slovenia**, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport opted to be part of the OECD transition research project in 2016. This revealed unexpected challenges around the transition from pre-school to primary. Although levels of enrolment in ECEC are high in Slovenia, an increasing number of parents have been using the flexibility to postpone their child’s enrolment to the first grade (at age six)\textsuperscript{24}. Further research has been commissioned to understand parents’ motivations, and to identify whether additional campaigns or information might be needed\textsuperscript{25}.

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### Evaluating transition processes (school level)

At an institutional level, the use of formative evaluation can often provide important feedback loops to improve the regularity with which information is passed between institutions (see also 4.6), while also evaluating *processes* as well as outcomes. The self-evaluation completed by Head teachers in Sweden is one example of how this process of formative self-evaluation can be used to review and improve school collaboration.

### Box 15. Factoring transitions into schools’ self-evaluation (Sweden)

In **Sweden**, a reform came into effect on 1 July 2016 to increase the co-operation between the preschool class and compulsory school. This reform includes a clarification of laws Lpfö 98 and Lgr 11 on transition and co-operation. The Swedish National Agency for Education NAE has developed and rolled-out a self-evaluation form for schools, which is designed for the transition between the preschool class and compulsory school. Head teachers are responsible for completing it, thereby factoring transitions into the school's self-evaluation process.

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\textsuperscript{24} The Basic School Act in Slovenia stipulates that parents must enrol their children in the first year of school if they will turn six years old in the calendar year they start attending. According to the same act, the first year of basic education may be postponed for one year. The criterion for postponement is the level of readiness for school. A relevant committee made up of a physician, a school counsellor and a teacher is responsible for making this assessment, but the final decision is taken by the school Head teacher.

\textsuperscript{25} The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is planning independent research with parents and teachers on this subject, in co-operation with The Educational Research Institute of the Republic of Slovenia and National Education Institute Slovenia.
for completing the form, which evaluates: what has worked well and what needs to be developed; stakeholder co-operation (with guardians, involved actors); and asks for further information on support or transition and the ability to meet the needs of the learner.

Understanding learner progress and development

Formal learner assessment has a significant role to play in transitions, as this is a mechanism through which learners are assigned to, or choose, different pathways. The position of formal assessment varies between countries where the end-of-primary test results are critical in determining the child’s secondary school options (e.g. Germany), and countries where the primary to secondary transition is based on teacher assessment or portfolio evidence (e.g. Croatia).

A portfolio-based approach can provide a more holistic and contextualised overview of learner progress and development, beyond formal academic attainment, but brings certain challenges with regard to data collection and review. In Estonia, for example, piloting of portfolio-based assessment was met with some resistance from teachers, due to the additional time and administrative requirements of compiling the evidence for assessment. The pilot also underlined the need for robust and transparent criteria for assessing and grading qualitative learner evidence, due to the inherently more subjective basis for interpreting the data.

Some countries make use of qualitative measures of wellbeing, although these are often non-formal, and less systematically implemented. In Slovenia, for example, some primary schools take learner wellbeing into account within self-evaluation, although this is not mandatory and reporting practices vary considerably. In Denmark, the Ministry of Education funds an annual survey of student wellbeing, including learner and teacher perspectives, which schools are invited to complete on a voluntary basis. In the United Kingdom(England), the national inspection framework was updated to include a judgement on schools’ efforts to promote learner wellbeing, although performance on this criterion does not influence the overall grade.

Monitoring learner pathways

Individual countries vary in the extent to which they gather data on learner pathways across different stages of education. Some countries such as Iceland and Portugal have established data collection systems that allows for tracking throughout the compulsory education phase. Monitoring and evaluation of learner pathways also plays a central role in the education policy in Greece, with a specific database (HFAISTOS) established by the Education Ministry to record data for students with disabilities and/or special education needs.

Belgium(Flanders) has identified a priority to develop a similar data warehousing tool to enable a more robust tracking and analysis of pathways for learners with special educational needs, following legislation concerning special needs education in September 2015, which covers pre-
primary, primary and secondary education. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Decree has reportedly been hindered to date by the lack of available quantitative and qualitative data.

These systems are by no means universally established, however, and many countries lack an equivalent single record enabling the systematic monitoring and reporting on learner pathways. Solutions are sometimes developed at the local level, therefore, with some municipalities managing very comprehensive data collection. In the city of Antwerp, for example, the municipal authority has established a multi-sectoral partnership and organises its own data gathering across a range of indicators, including learner well-being, and risk of early school leaving.

**Measures to consider** for supporting continuity in learner development with quantitative and qualitative assessment and reporting tools include:

- **Periodically reviewing quality assurance mechanisms**, specifically regarding their support to learner development and school improvement at each educational stage. This might imply a need for adjustment, where different quality assurance tools create unintended behaviours.

- **Making systematic use of small scale trials and pilot programmes**, to test and evaluate different parts of the education system, alongside longitudinal tracking to understand trends in learner participation and achievement across ISCED levels.

- **Making balanced and appropriate use of data from international comparative studies** such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS, to understand trends in learner attainment, and creating forums within which these data can be discussed and debated without fear or stigma.

- **Diversifying assessments of learner development** to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods, and that measures of social and emotional wellbeing and belonging at school are taken into account alongside academic attainment.

### 4.8 Creating appropriate contexts for learning

Supportive, varied and inspiring learning environments and contexts – relevant to the stage of development and different leaners – should be created and reviewed.
Research has shown that the school climate exerts a strong influence over learners’ development.26 A major study from the USA concluded that school safety, connectedness and peer support were predictors of learners’ social and emotional wellbeing at upper primary and lower secondary school. A further study found a strong association between the quality of teacher-learner relationships and learner behaviour and adjustment at school. The school climate can present risks as well as opportunities, where there are issues relating to school organisation, such as those relating to discipline, access and inclusion. There is evidence that bullying and discrimination can become institutionalised, where social norms go unchallenged or are inadvertently reinforced by teacher attitudes. One review concluded that 85 per cent of school bullying episodes involved onlookers and bystanders, and that the wider psychological effects of school bullying are likely to have been underestimated.

Learner development is not limited to the classroom environment, and effective partnership working is needed to ensure that learners have access to appropriate creative, cultural and civic learning opportunities outside of the school. This implies ‘real world’ experience, through study visits and informal or non-formal education. Research has shown that an early introduction to concepts of working life and careers education can also be beneficial, with a potential role for local employers and social partners from primary school stage to provide contextualised experiences relating to the local labour market.

Schools also require effective strategies to support parental engagement in their children’s learning and development, to ensure that home learning environments are recognised, valued, and supported through the work of the school. Family learning, educational outreach, and language schemes can engage and empower parents at each stage of the learner’s journey.

**Supporting the transition between learning environments**

It is important for schools to recognise and take into account learners’ evolving developmental needs and capacities, and to provide appropriate structures for young people to exercise their growing autonomy, whilst maintaining a functioning learning environment.

**ECEC to primary**

European countries have encountered a common challenge in ensuring that learners have the opportunity to benefit from high quality ECEC, while avoiding the introduction of formal instructional teaching methods prematurely. The pressure to make early years settings more like primary school can arise for a number of different reasons, including parental anxieties about children’s academic progress. Relatedly, parental decisions to delay the start of formal schooling can arise from beliefs about the benefits of remaining in a play-based learning environment. The concept of the “school-ready child” can be problematic in this respect, where it is structural issues within the school rather than the child’s adjustment that pose a barrier.

26 School climate is generally understood to mean the “quality and character of school life”, including both the physical and social aspects of the school environment.
In Slovenia, the kindergarten curriculum and basic school syllabus each identify common goals, but in practice the teaching methods have evolved quite differently, with a less learner-centred approach at primary stage. Although basic school and pre-school teacher cooperation was proposed some 20 years ago in a government White Paper, implementation has been challenging. For example, there are occasions in first grade where there is another teacher beside the class teacher but not the pre-school teacher like it was pledged and originally intended. A combination of austerity measures and a lack of geographical proximity of schools and kindergartens have made this intended cooperation harder to achieve. However, the Ministry is exploring alternatives, including a continuation of elements of the kindergarten curriculum into the first year of primary, to smooth the transition.

**Primary to secondary**

The transition to secondary level is often characterised by a stronger emphasis on teacher authority, larger class sizes, ability grouping, and multiple subject teachers. Secondary level education corresponds with the start of adolescence, and tensions can arise where disciplinary methods come into conflict with young people’s growing needs for independence. A recent study from Ireland found that there was a significant dip in learners’ opinions of how fairly they were treated by teachers, between the upper primary and lower secondary stages.

Some countries have legislated to allow for greater flexibility at lower secondary level, to preserve more of the valued characteristics of primary schools. This has usually been accompanied by measures to increase levels of school autonomy. In Portugal, for example, 'autonomy contracts' allow schools to exercise control over 25% of their curriculum time. Regulatory reforms in Spain have afforded schools similar levels of discretion (Box 16).

**Box 16. Adjusting the lower secondary learning environment (Spain)**

In Spain, high rates of early school leaving at lower secondary level have highlighted that the transition is problematic for some learners, albeit with significant improvements in recent years. It is reported that this is a multifaceted issue relating not only to educational, but also social factors. These challenges also relate to the learning environment, as some learners find it more difficult to move from a small, self-contained classroom to a more heterogeneous school with an increased expectation of independent academic performance.

As a way to facilitate transition from primary education, education authorities or schools may adopt specific organizational measures within the first years of secondary stage, such as the grouping of subjects of this year into knowledge areas. These regulations further authorise education authorities to exceptionally allow teachers to teach more than one subject, in order to reduce the impact of moving to a school setting where there are much greater numbers of

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27 See on Early School leaving: [http://www.mecd.gob.es/dctm/inee/documentos-de-trabajo/abandono-educativo-temprano-2.pdf?documentId=0901e72b818e38f4](http://www.mecd.gob.es/dctm/inee/documentos-de-trabajo/abandono-educativo-temprano-2.pdf?documentId=0901e72b818e38f4)

28 See the Organic Law of Education, arts. 24 and 26.3
Learner adjustment to the school climate has sometimes been assisted by schools adopting clearer structures to support learner participation in decision-making about school life and disciplinary policies. The ‘Rights respecting schools’ programme in the United Kingdom provides an example (Box 17).

Box 17. Rights respecting schools (United Kingdom)

The ‘Rights Respecting Schools Award’ (RRSA) was developed by Unicef as part of an ongoing programme of work with schools across the United Kingdom. The award takes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a starting point and provides a framework for the implementation of rights-based approaches at an individual school level.

The model is based on three levels of accreditation, starting with a ‘Recognition of Commitment’, which requires the school to demonstrate that children and adults are working together to develop a whole-school rights respecting approach with head-teacher endorsement, through to Level 2, where the school is assessed as having embedded UNCRC into its ethos and curriculum. The Award has achieved widespread take-up, with more than 4,000 schools working towards the award across the country, covering 1.5 million children.

Measures to consider for supporting continuity in learner development through attention to learning environments include:

- Encouraging inclusive school policies to build positive and supportive school climates, zero tolerance of bullying and discrimination, and creating opportunities to develop teacher-learner relationships. The latter might include summer school transition schemes, residential visits, and teacher engagement in after school enrichment activities.

- Developing a broad base of partnership-working for schools, to make the most of assets within the local community, to ensure that learners benefit from developmentally appropriate civic and cultural educational experiences outside of the classroom.

- Valuing and preserving play-based and non-formal learning, with active engagement from parents; starting with the kindergarten environment at ECEC stage, and continuing into primary education at the start of formal schooling.
• Preserving valued characteristics of primary schools in lower secondary school learning environments: for example, gradual transition from single teacher to multiple teacher learning contexts, grouping subjects into broader thematic areas, and maintaining time for project-based learning within the timetable.

4.9 Social and emotional support to learners

Systems should have the capacity to engage with different stakeholders to provide social and emotional support to learners, including during the period of transition between levels of education.

Learners’ developmental needs are multi-faceted, and go beyond the need for support with academic attainment alone. Individual social and emotional wellbeing is influenced by a wide range of factors, including the quality of peer, family, and teacher relationships; physical health, including exercise, diet, nutrition and sleep, and feeling safe. School safety includes physical and socio-emotional safety, and substance misuse avoidance.

The development of social and emotional skills have a direct impact on teaching and learning. Young people are more receptive to learning when they are able to control their emotions, empathise, and relate to their peers and teachers, while conversely high levels of academic pressure, bullying and negative peer influences can hinder individual learners’ progress. A study of 1800 learners aged 11-14 in Australia found that support from peers was the strongest predictor of social and emotional wellbeing, while school connectedness and feelings of safety were also significant. These influences continued into the first two years of secondary school.

The 2012 PISA study included an indicator on young people’s sense of belonging and inclusion at school, which allows for benchmarking across European countries, although the measure is comparatively under-utilised within educational policymaking.

European countries have developed a variety of mechanisms to support social and emotional development, and to plan for continuity in provision across different levels or stages of education. The role of school counsellors is particularly well-developed within Scandinavian countries, where all young people have access to social and psychological support alongside academic support within schools, typically starting at primary stage.

Box 18. Support specialist services (Estonia)

In Estonia, Support Specialist Services (SSS) are available to learners in every school. These multi-professional teams typically include a special teacher, speech therapist, career advisor, 29

The statements include: “I feel like I belong at school”, and “I feel like an outsider (or left out of things at school)”, which are asked using an Agree / Disagree scale.
psychologist, and a social pedagogue. They have been supported with the creation of 16 new Lifelong Learning Guidance (Pathfinder Centres), representing one per county (Figure 3). Since these reforms were introduced, 1 in 3 secondary school learners in Estonia is believed to have received guidance counselling, and the early school leaving rate has reduced to just 1.5%, which is one of the lowest rates in Europe. The main challenges of the new system related to implementation at a school level. In practice, schools had varying levels of existing infrastructure and resources, meaning that some faced a significant task to provide the required level of support for the SSS teams.

The main development areas identified by the ministry included the need to achieve better quality data on young people’s needs, to improve the responsiveness of the system, and to engage teachers as partners in delivering the new support system.

Figure 4: Estonia – multi-dimensional system of learner support

In Slovenia, particular attention has been given to how learners’ needs are first identified at pre-primary stage, to enable planning of (social and emotional) counselling support upon transition to primary school. The specific arrangements are determined by the governance arrangements (Box 19).

30 ‘Counsellors’ refers here to professionals who specialise in psychological support, and should not be confused with ‘Careers Guidance Counsellors’.
In Slovenia, the school counsellors perform three related and often entwined types of activities: direct support and intervention, development and prevention, and planning and evaluation. They are routinely involved in the transition from preschool (kindergarten) to primary school, to ensure that learners’ wider developmental needs are addressed. The model is organised differently according to schools’ governance and funding arrangements. It is up to the local authority to decide what kind of organisation between ECEC and school they will opt or decide for. An important characteristic of kindergarten is if it is organized as a unit of the basic school – i.e. it is associated with the school (vrtec pri šoli - ‘kindergarten at the school’) - and is also typically located in the same building. The head, administration and the counselling service are in this case shared and fall under a common management structure. This is seen as a great advantage for children and usually means a smoother transition because the children are already familiar with the environment, the building itself, teachers and counsellors. In some schools, the kindergarten and the first years of school may be located very close together. This situation is more common in rural areas and smaller towns. In 2014/15, 27% of children were enrolled in kindergartens at the school, 72% were in ‘independent’ kindergartens (SORS, 2016).

Aside from additional support, the simple provision of stable learning environments with a degree of staff continuity, was put forward by members as a way to help young children to develop the relationships and trust necessary to comfortably explore and learn from their surroundings.

**Measures to consider** for supporting continuity in learner development with an investment in social and emotional support include:

- **Investing in programmes of study from an early age to develop learners’ social and emotional skills**, starting early in ECEC and continuing into secondary education. This might include targeted peer support and mentoring, where learners are identified as being at higher risk of developing psychological difficulties.

- **Directly monitoring and supporting learner wellbeing**: engaging learners in identifying helpful measures to ease academic pressure, for example by creating dedicated spaces within the

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31 Public kindergartens may be established if the inclusion of at least ten groups of children is guaranteed. If there are less than 10 groups of children, the kindergarten may be associated with the school. This ensures a good network of kindergartens. In kindergartens at the schools, the school’s head appoints his/her assistant as an educational and organizational leader of the kindergarten unit.
school where learners can take ‘time out’; and maintaining time in the curriculum for physical activity, sports, mindfulness or meditation classes.

- **Reviewing the provision of psychological support at each educational stage**, to ensure continuity and to avoid gaps. This might include a minimum guarantee of access to a psychologist for all young people who need one, and clustering of different support structures within multi-agency teams to serve schools across a given local area.

- **Greater importance of social and emotional development in school inspections.**

### 4.10 Targeted support to ‘at-risk’ learners

Targeted strategies and resources should be used to identify and support vulnerable learners at the earliest opportunity – this school information should also feedback at regional/national level to support policy-making and strategic investment for pupils at risk.

The factors predicting how and when learners become ‘at risk’ of negative outcomes are often complex and highly situational, involving a combination of individual needs and circumstances, socio-economic factors, and structural factors relating to the school system. These combinations of factors can take on particular significance at transition points, when learners are required to adapt to changes in familiar learning environments and curricula, which are often combined with disruption to relationships with peer groups and teachers.

Research shows that mental health difficulties; special educational needs and disabilities; family difficulties; substance misuse, insecure attachment \(^{xlvi}\); and the effects of psychological trauma (following domestic abuse, violence, or exposure to other traumatic events) are all potential factors predicting vulnerability upon transition \(^{xlvii}\). Risk cannot be understood simply as a constellation of 'problem' issues, however, and learners’ abilities to cope in the face of adversity is also a question of their resilience and the personal assets they can draw upon.

European countries have developed a range of approaches to provide targeted support at transition points for learners with additional needs. Common measures include tracking and assessment to identify the ‘early warning signs’ and to share relevant information between schools (see also 4.6), and access to specialist psychological services (see also 4.9). As learners with complex needs often require a combination of different services, some countries have moved to devolve budgets to municipalities so that this provision can be planned coherently across providers and serving multiple schools (Box 20).

**Box 20. Cross-sectoral and area-based support for vulnerable learners (Norway)**

In **Norway**, the Ministry of Education and Research has focused on early intervention. Their objective is to identify pupils who are ‘at risk’ of negative outcomes at the earliest possible
stage, to prevent escalation. This work has involved mapping key stakeholders in the field of early intervention, and supporting cross-sectoral work between education, health and social care sectors, to develop locally specific responses within each of the municipalities.

Continuity in the development of learners with special needs

Data on achievement levels of learners with special needs are relatively sparse internationally, as they are in Europe, reflecting that individual countries have varying definitions. Learners from migrant or minority groups, most notably Roma children, are more likely to be placed in the ‘special needs’ category. This over-representation is partially explained by language, cultural differences, negative stereotypes and a lack of early childhood support. Learners with special needs are routinely separated from mainstream classes and institutions, which can restrict the educational pathways available to them, and the possibilities for social inclusion.

The general trend within national education systems in Europe has been towards integration of learners with special needs within mainstream schools wherever possible, although separate institutions are funded in many countries for learners with very specialist needs.

This move towards more inclusive policies has highlighted the need to update initial teacher training and CPD programmes, in order to equip teachers to support learners with learning difficulties within mainstream classroom settings. For example, more than half (58%) of teachers responding to the 2013 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) noted that they were in need of training to support students with special needs more effectively.

Most countries have implemented a range of support measures, examples of which include:

- **Municipal development centres** – In Latvia, the Ministry funds 11 institutions with the status of ‘special education development centres’. Their aim is to provide support to learners with special needs who are integrated in mainstream schools, and to build capacity and offer advice and support to teachers. Recent legislation places requirements on the centres to support minimum numbers of teachers (50) and students (50) per annum, and sets targets for numbers of information sessions delivered per year.

- **Specialist support and guidance counselling** - In Ireland, designated central agencies have a role in supporting transitions for learners with additional and special needs, working with schools. In Slovakia, professional workers of the Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology (VÚDPaP) deliver counselling services to children, their parents and teachers with focus on problems of children in the area of cognitive, social, emotional, and school development, and in the area of vocational orientation. This work includes specialist inputs for children with special needs and their families.

- **Designated responsibilities for transition within schools** - In Sweden, designated special needs teachers play a vital role as transition coordinators, supporting and guiding staff in the
receiving school. For learners with medical conditions, provision is also made for collaboration between the preschool and public health authorities.

- **Entitlements and personal development plans** – In **Italy**, schools have a legal duty to set in place, monitor and review individual learning plans for learners with certified special needs. These plans are devised jointly by the school, parents and health specialists, culminating in a certificate of attendance with the description of the skills developed, in case pupils cannot obtain the diploma. In the **United Kingdom (England)**, since April 2016, learners (0-25 years) statemented with Special Educational Needs of Disabilities (SEND) must have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. The plan brings together a set of statutory responsibilities for schools; health and social care professionals, and it clearly outlines the support to be provided.

The national context within **Greece** provides an example of multiple pathways for learners with special needs, having supported a policy of inclusion over the past decade (Box 21).

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**Box 21. Developing flexible and supported pathways for learners with special needs (Greece)**

In **Greece**, a combination of measures is provided to support the transition of learners with special needs, facilitated by close cooperation between mainstream and special schools. Following KEDDY’S recommendation[^32], changes to the legal framework mean that learners with special needs are able to change pathways between a mainstream or Special Education route, and the learner and their parent or carer has designated rights and duties regarding school selection.

The available study paths include:

- Inclusion within classrooms in mainstream schools, supported by the class teacher,
- Inclusion within classrooms in mainstream schools, with parallel support from qualified Special Education teachers, when necessary
- Specially organised and staffed inclusion classes, which operate within the mainstream schools;
- Special Education school units; schools or departments that operate as autonomous units or annexes of other schools within certain hospitals; or,
- Education at home.

Learners benefit from curriculum flexibilities, allowing the freedom to explore curriculum themes more open-endedly. They are also entitled to suitable educational materials; theoretical and practical experiences, and specialist counselling and careers advice services.

[^32]: This refers to the recommendations from evaluation of educational provision for learners classified as having ‘special needs’ in Greece (Law 3699/2008), carried out by the Centre of Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support of Special Educational Needs (KEDDY).
Supporting learner development in the context of poverty and disadvantage

There are strong economic arguments for ensuring equity in education, as well as moral and rights-based ones. Research based on PISA data shows a relationship between indicators of equity and attainment. This, and other research, provides convincing evidence that more equitable school systems achieve better quality and higher educational standards.

The targeting of central educational funds provides one lever for supporting vulnerable learners. Euydice data shows that most European countries take student characteristics into account when determining their funding allocations. The criteria usually correspond with numbers of students with additional learning needs and according to linguistic or ethnic background. In the United Kingdom (England), an evaluation of targeted funding in schools showed that secondary schools achieved a statistically significant impact on the attainment of learners from low socio-economic status groups, where targeted effectively.

School can often be a lower priority for families from low socio-economic status, behind work and health. It is necessary to provide the families with support and assistance that enables them to engage with schools effectively, and vice-versa. This means ensuring that educational and economic issues are addressed in tandem; starting in the early years, but also continuing throughout the different levels of education. Poverty and disadvantage, along with cultural influences, can be a significant factor in early school leaving, for example, where young people prioritise work and supporting their family over education and view this as an either/or decision.

The development of special educational programmes is a further way in which schools and school systems have tackled the risk of exclusion or under-achievement for learners with low socio-economic status and supported them to progress. The Complex Instruction Programme (CIP) is one example that has been trialled successfully in schools in Europe (Box 22).

Box 22. “Equal status” learning environments – the Complex Instruction Programme

The Complex Instruction Programme (CIP) was originally developed in the USA as a “high equity, high inclusiveness” model, targeted at schools with academically and social diverse populations. The CIP was developed in response to the challenge that children from higher socio-economic status groups often exercise higher status within classroom settings. This can result in these learners being more vocal and gaining disproportionate access to teacher time.

33 The ‘Pupil Premium Fund’ is allocated to schools in England based on the numbers of children entitled to and registered for free school meals (FSM) and children who have been in public care continuously for more than six months. Schools can use the fund at their discretion, with the purpose of closing the attainment gap between learners from lower socio-economic status families and their peers.

34 The evaluation found that impactful schools met a number of criteria, rather than any individual standing out as being the most effective. The criteria included promoting an ethos of attainment for all pupils; an individualised approach; a focus on high quality teaching and individual learner outcomes; strong school leadership, and an effective use of data to inform how the funding was utilised (p.10).
To counteract this scenario, the CIP uses a pedagogical approach based on small cooperative groups. Teachers follow the principles of “equal status participation”, using familiar everyday reference points (such as board games, problem-solving) as a tool for the group work. Teachers facilitate peer group dialogue and discussion and provide encouragement.

The CIP model has shown promising outcomes with regard to attainment and progression. Hejőkeresztúr primary school in Hungary provides an example. While the school draws 73 per cent of its learners from socially disadvantaged communities, 100 per cent go on to participate in secondary education, and 70 per cent achieve secondary level qualifications.

Measures to consider for supporting continuity in learner development and focusing on supporting vulnerable learners include:

- **Developing cross-sectoral policies and indicators** for early intervention, to ensure that accountability is shared between schools, health, and social services and youth services, and facilitate a multi-dimensional understanding of learner progress.

- **Recognising the importance of the agency of learners and families** in protecting against risk, and making provision for targeted support that focuses on building resilience and equipping learners to cope with adversity.

- **Supporting the principle of integrating learners with special needs within mainstream schools** wherever possible, taking a multi-faceted approach.

- **Updating initial teacher education and CPD programmes**, to better equip teachers to support learners with learning difficulties.
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