INSCOOL

Inclusive Schools II

Advocacy for changes on a systemic level

Advocacy for changes on a local/national level

Recommendations from the advocacy groups

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AT POLICY LEVEL	AT PRACTICAL LEVEL
• **Stakeholder's voices:** teachers and school leaders, learners and parents must be a part of the decision making process to develop comprehensive policies and strategies which target all learners within the school community. These mechanisms should be integrated within the policies. All involved in the different educational spheres should come together to identify the existing barriers to the participation in learning and implement the necessary measures to overcome them. • **Ensure a smart allocation of funding:** to address the gaps in policy implementation by providing adequate resources to ministries at all levels, to support school leaders and teachers (including training offer), as well as to incentivise collaboration within the schools' communities and beyond. A decrease or stagnation in investment in education must be avoided. • **Beyond raising awareness:** policies need to support going beyond raising awareness to the development of concrete competences of teachers, school leaders and learners as well as parents and the wider community. Policies also need to ensure the shift from integration towards inclusion in and support the better understanding of these processes. • **Teachers' and school leaders' wellbeing:** Better investment in education systems not only allows for better implementation of reforms but also to ensure teachers' and	• **Teachers motivation and inclusive pedagogies:** it is important to foster the motivation of teachers and provide learning opportunities (i.e. linking the training with learning credits). A different approach is needed to attract people who are not committed. The trainings could be based on mutual learning and sharing their own experiences. • **Training of pre-service teachers:** for this group the most relevant training would be in the schools together with teachers and school leaders. The topics for this group include inclusive methods for special needs students, learners with disabilities and different socio-economic backgrounds in a very practical format. Self-reflection and self-discovery is key to helping fight their own prejudices. In the case of MOOCs it is advisable to include extra credit. • **Training of teachers/school heads:** Participants recommend self-paced online learning and/or short 1-2 days intensive trainings, including sharing of experiences. School leaders face different challenges for which training them separately was suggested. The topics include: learners with different socio-economic backgrounds, different educational needs, behaviour problems, victims of bullying and domestic violence, parent engagement, fighting teachers' own prejudices (i.e. bullying towards students).

school leaders' wellbeing: diminish the administrative workload of teachers and school leaders; and to better interconnect their work with the one of non-teaching staff such as psychologists.

- **Teacher shortages:** More work is needed to attract talent to the teaching profession: including working conditions that support wellbeing, participation in decision making at different levels and appropriate strategies to integrate potential measures such as non-teaching professionals and use of digital tools.

- **Role of school leaders and teachers:** the local level also has an important role to play in closing the gaps of national policies. Schools and school leaders maintain a sense of autonomy and support also their teacher's autonomy to implement inclusion in their class. The work through advocacy groups can also be an important platform to learn how to navigate policy making processes.

- **Systemic cooperation:** Every school should function in a small ecosystem. This approach entails cooperation with public and private institutions and civil society organisations, forming strong networks to make schools not only reactive but also proactive in addressing learners' needs. An important aspect is the coordination between policy makers and the practitioners (school leaders, teachers). Ensuring the exchange channels across Member States remain active and are not mere receptors but work together in developing solutions and make sure project results are not lost and can inform decision making at different levels.

- **From holistic to targeted training:** Holistic training on inclusion is a necessary foundation across all Member States, however, depending on the national/local needs targeted training offer is needed to deal with specific inclusion gaps, for this teachers and school leaders voices are crucial in training offer development.

- **Stakeholders advocacy:** School leaders and teachers have a role to play at local level when it comes to advocate for inclusive practices within their schools. Empowering them to take on their autonomy can be an important step towards generating changes in their schools and communities. Initiatives such as the advocacy groups can be a good way to bring together members from different areas to exchange ideas and practices.

THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS II PROJECT

The project aims to significantly increase the knowledge and skills of school leaders, teachers and teacher trainees/pre-service teachers to work inclusively with the increasing range of diverse learners in their schools. The project will scale up the good practice established with the Inclusive Schools I project.

The main objectives are:

*   To promote change in school culture to enable people to live, work and learn together equitably and peacefully, without fear of discrimination or bullying;
*   To deepen educators' knowledge and understanding of inclusive education policy, practice and culture;
*   To influence policy change at school, local, regional and national levels;
*   To contribute, through promoting a sense of belonging and the common values of respect, freedom, democracy and equality, to the decrease of radicalisation.

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, project partners have worked on different activities to get to know more in depth the needs of school leaders, teachers and teacher trainees.

The needs analysis extracted from the focus groups results was put together as part of a report covering all participating countries (Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom) as well as a comparative needs analysis.

Another part of this work included building upon the knowledge and practical experience from previous projects and initiatives. The results were covered on the same report where 30 inspiring practices are presented.

This activity served as the basis for the development of face-to-face trainings (for teachers and school leaders) and the MOOC (for teacher trainees and newly qualified teachers). An aspect that was important for participants in the focus groups was the opportunity to meet and explore together through a combination of theory and practice. The practical nature of the classes with an appropriate balance with theory were indicated as preferred (working on specific scenarios of classes, the possibility of observing model classes).

This practical aspect was highlighted also for the development of the MOOC. The trainings were conducted at different times according to the availability in each partner country between 2022 and 2023. The MOOC was finalised in 2023 and over 300 participants from across Europe have already engaged with it.
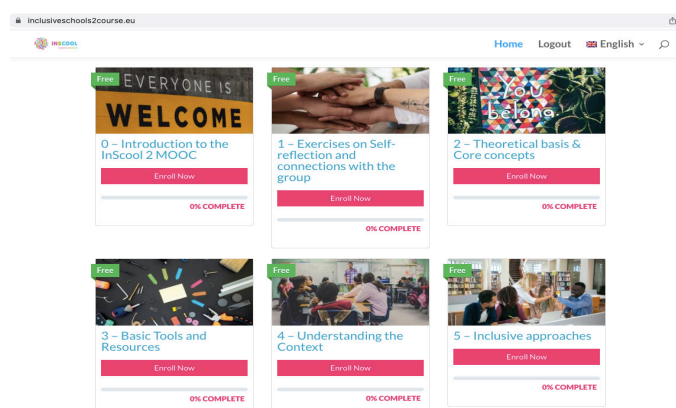
● Advocacy for changes on a systemic level ●

To support the achievement of the objective on policy change at school, local, regional, national and EU levels, project partners implemented various activities in their own countries as well as on an EU level.

The project advocacy activities were targeted at participant school leaders, teacher trainees and teachers, external stakeholders in the field of education, higher education institutions responsible for initial teacher training, civil society organisations working at different levels and policymakers and public authorities staff (EU institutions, ministries, local authorities).

The work on advocacy had also the aim to upscale the Inclusive Schools I Project by engaging more beneficiaries, education and training stakeholders and beyond and disseminating the results to a wider audience at local, national and European level. The results of the work around advocacy helped partners in forming concrete recommendations for policy makers at a local, national and European level to support the efforts to influence policy formation in every partner country.

The main activities around advocacy were the formation of local advocacy groups focused on the implementation of inclusive education practices in schools and at policy-making level. The work of these advocacy groups, through their meetings and networking with education stakeholders, inspired recommendations for relevant institutions at local, national and European level which are presented in this document.

The final publication of the project on policy recommendations will gather the advocacy group results, as well as the work stemming from the needs analysis, the face to face training, the MOOC and the final conference which took place in May 2023.

● ━━━ THE ADVOCACY GROUPS ━━━ ●

Implementation of advocacy groups

The advocacy groups were formed by partners in the first half of 2022 and the meetings of the advocacy groups took place in Spring/Summer 2022. They focused on the existing knowledge from project participants around policy making as well as networking with other education stakeholders which joined the advocacy groups meetings. In 2023, project partners considered a good approach to have an additional advocacy group meeting before the end of the project.

Participants got a better knowledge of the project's outcomes and discussed the further use of the tools and trainings implemented after the project ends. An important point of reflection was how the project results could support them in their own local advocacy for inclusive schools. The results from these meetings were also incorporated in this final document. The groups were attended on average by 7-9 participants.

- **Recruitment:** in some cases participants were invited through different means such as mass emails to partner's networks of school communities in different levels of education and from different spatial locations.

- **Type of participants:** Partners involved several stakeholders such as individuals taking part in the project activities such as school leaders, teachers, parents and teacher trainees or pre-service teachers as well as representatives from other stakeholder groups in line with a whole-school approach such as project managers working on inclusion, non-teaching staff (i.e. psychologists), teaching training institutions and foster homes. The advocacy groups also included representatives from public bodies and private entities. The different backgrounds and places of origin of participants ensured a diversity of perspectives and experiences.

- **Format:** Since not all participants were established in the same places where partners are based, some advocacy groups took place online or hybrid. In some countries, partners organised their meetings in collaboration with other local partners and projects.

Results from the advocacy groups meetings

There were partners that highlighted that the advocacy group meetings were not only an interesting exchange of ideas and opinions but also a confirmation of many of the issues that emerged at the research phase of the project - namely the [focus groups](#).

Partners perceived that the project was well received by participants. It is considered to be a much needed project and there is still much to be done. In some countries, such as Spain, it is also deemed timely in light of the current interest by the government in promoting an inclusive education. Another aspect observed was that while some participants mentioned policies related to inclusion, a number of them focused more on single practices than on policies.

Beyond looking at advocacy, the meetings of the local groups were also an opportunity for partners to get a sense of how the project was being implemented and the feedback participants had for this implementation. It was important for participants to learn how project partners have taken into account their inputs in the development of the deliverables. Some of the strong points underlined were the quality of deliverables and the relevance of the topic in their work, although it was felt that the deliverables were available later than expected.

The content of the [MOOC](#) was also well received by the participants: in Hungary for example, it was stated that it will be very useful for pre-service teachers and also most in-service teachers. A reflection made was around the question of how to make teacher trainees and current teachers interested. Similarly, a call was made to have every deliverable available in each partner country language.

The participants in the local groups also took the chance to assess the work on advocacy itself. It was considered positive that the groups brought together a diverse group of actors. In the Netherlands and Hungary for example it was found that despite these differences there were commonalities around values and ideas related to inclusion. Having these informal discussions were helpful for their work and it made them feel supported in their work around inclusion. It was noted that there was no more time to dedicate to the project so more work could be done around advocacy and to effectively have impact. The financial aspects were underlined as important to continue this work. In Hungary, the group was very pessimistic about potential positive changes in their context.

Depending on the country, the focus of inclusion varies from integration of EU migrants and non-EU migrants, inclusion of learners with disabilities, multilingualism and taking action against bullying. There are also gaps in terms of terminology with participants being, in some cases, very well informed on the difference between integration and inclusion and in others there were still limitations in the understanding of inclusion - i.e. limited to learners with disabilities - instead of a holistic understanding. The commonality was that regardless of understanding, inclusion was of great concern for all participants and that the training needs to be fine tuned to the local challenges of teachers.

The participants of the local advocacy groups were asked to give their inputs in relation to the future of the project deliverables.

Participants appreciated the content of the MOOC and were willing to disseminate the training and to promote it in their national languages. There was also interest to organise more training in the next school years so they fit better schools' training agendas. In the case of the Netherlands, this will be possible together with project partner ESHA.

In other countries it was inquired whether the trainings could be delivered in individual schools. To support the sustainability of the deliverables, participants gave input regarding future funding opportunities so that the trainings can continue to be implemented such as small scale funding at local/national level as well as the potential partnerships that could be explored.

What are inclusive schools?

Following the [INSCOOL I project](#), inclusive education is one based on concepts, models and processes that focus on equitable access to and engagement in learning for all children, regardless of gender, ability, disability, race, religion, sexuality, socioeconomic status or any other difference.

The [European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#) defines it as "educational arrangements in which teachers, school leaders and schools in general have the instructional and other supports to: welcome and include all learners, in all of their diversity and exceptionalities, in the regular classroom, in the neighbourhood school with their age peers; foster the participation and fullest possible development of all learners' human potential; and foster the participation of all learners in socially valuing relationships with diverse peers and adults".

Integration entails the teaching of children who need support within the classroom but separately from their peers. Whereas segregation means the teaching of children who need support away from their peers.

The advocacy group participants shared reflections around the idea of an inclusive school. An inclusive school is considered to be a community that leaves no one behind and is able to turn differences within into strengths. An inclusive school focuses on the needs of the learners and is able to go beyond integration towards inclusion.

It was emphasised that an inclusive school is one in which the teacher is a specialist and a professional who can flexibly respond to diverse needs of learners (and their parents). For teachers in an inclusive school, inclusion is part of an everyday process of teaching and interacting with learners and not dedicated only to the work of the specialists.

Moreover, an inclusive school has a comprehensive and flexible strategy that can address the diverse needs of learners. The strategy, actions plans and activities are co-created taking into account the learners and their parents. An inclusive school is founded on the commitment and cooperation of the entire educational community: starting with the management and teaching staff and it extends to the learners, families and other social actors in the community. Removing barriers to learning and participation in school is the basis of inclusive education.

An inclusive school implies an adaptation of the system to the learners and not of the learners to the system. This process implies forgetting the rigid and inaccessible curriculum which, under the perspective of integration, had to be reached by all students, with too much effort and little meaningful benefit for the majority. Furthermore, an inclusive school addresses the wellbeing of both learners and educators.

Challenges at policy level

- **Different policy agendas:** Project partners experience a variety of policy priorities and democratic practices which affects the place of inclusion in education (and in society) in the policy agendas. There is a very big challenge in countries where there is no room for advocacy actions around inclusive education. In these cases the scope of work of actors working on inclusion remains localised to schools or institutions such as churches.

- **Gaps in policy implementation:** in countries like Italy, a huge problem is the gap between governmental regulations or directives and their application. Sometimes schools lack the resources to implement those regulations. In the case of Poland, integration policies exist but they are all the time in process and at the moment there are debates on shifting from integration to inclusion. Spanish participants underscored that despite the existence of international, national and regional regulations around inclusion, the implementation of an inclusive educational model has not yet been systematised and there has not been proper transfer from law regulations to reality. On a positive note, however, the very new education law seems to be making a strong commitment on this issue. In the case of Hungary, there is clear misalignment with EU policy and where implementation is mainly limited to individual teachers participating in exchanges of experiences. The gaps also take place in the other direction where evidence from different projects and initiatives do not translate into improving policies around inclusion.

- **Insufficient resources and cutbacks:** in many cases the poor implementation of policies is due to insufficient resources given not only to teachers and school leaders to implement changes in their schools but also to governmental staff that need to deploy the policies across the countries at different levels. The insufficient investment also affects the training offer. In the case of Spain, a challenge mentioned was the increasing privatisation and cutbacks in the public education system which jeopardises the future of the quality education to which the institutions are aiming.

- **Teacher shortages:** A very big issue that policy at different levels needs to urgently address is related to teacher shortages across the EU which connects to issues of wellbeing of teachers and the reduction of administrative burden among other measures that would attract motivated young people to the teaching profession. The topics of solving these shortages through more digitalisation and by hiring teachers without degrees were brought up by participants. In some cases, the path from

pre-service teachers to full-service has been made extremely difficult which exacerbates the issue.

- **Stakeholder's advocacy:** although there are avenues through which stakeholders such

as parents, teachers, schools leaders and practitioners can get involved in decision making, the general feeling is that their voices are often not heard by politicians. In other cases they cannot even reach policy makers at higher levels.

Challenges at school level

- **Understanding of inclusion:** One of the challenges found in Italy was related to the understanding of inclusion as there is still a high number of teachers or school leaders who are mostly focused on inclusion when it comes to students with disabilities instead of the holistic understanding of the approach. Participants in Poland underlined how important it is to explain and promote the idea of inclusive education in a comprehensible way and to teach it distinguishable from integration.

- **Teacher motivations and fears:** another challenge is related to the motivation of teachers. It is at times difficult to support them in broadening their vision and start working with more inclusive pedagogical approaches. It is tricky to reach beyond teachers who are already interested in the topic. Moreover, depending on the country, another challenge is to address the fears of teachers when it comes to implementing measures related to such contested topics.

- **Insufficient resources:** Participants highlighted that often, challenges at school level are caused by the lack of resources - most of the time financial resources. An example can be found in the Netherlands where school meals were highlighted as a possible inclusion measure which currently

doesn't exist.

- **Training offer:** The training offer was also noted by participants. In this case, the offer in some countries was considered insufficient or inadequate. Participants in Hungary underlined that most of these training are "preaching to the converted". Although a holistic vision of inclusion is not high on the education policy agenda, many teachers invest a lot in it regardless. Polish participants had varying views, with institutional representatives considering the offer very high and of quality and some teacher representatives had the perception that the trainings did not always respond to their needs.

- **Different inclusion needs:** participants in the Netherlands underscored that once again their system was not totally capable of and thus shocked by dealing with the influx of newcomers, this time from Ukraine. In this country, there is also the issue of inclusion of EU-migrants whose families often only come for a short period. The topic of bullying as a relevant topic was endorsed by the participants. It was referred to not only when it happens among students but also from teacher to student. In the case of Hungary, a concern was related to the offer provided to Hungarian speakers outside of Hungary and how the training offer provided to Hungarian speakers outside of

Hungary and how the training offer for Hungarian speaking teachers is very much needed.

- **Teacher wellbeing and non-teaching staff:** a recurrent topic was the overburden of teachers with administrative tasks which reduces their time available for flexible and individualised approach to each learner in their class. It was noted that in Poland the work with learners going beyond teaching subjects is shifting to specialists (i.e. psychologists) because a regular teacher does not have time for it. Teachers are also required to deliver on the curriculum, leaving little space for answering to different needs. While it is positive to work towards reducing the unhealthy workload from teachers, a balance has to be found in order not to silo the work on inclusion. Depending on the context, the trainings themselves can be a burden on the teacher's time, so a better assessment of training needs has to be done so that training on inclusions are not repetitive.

- **From holistic to targeted training:** As mentioned above, depending on the needs of the country more targeted approaches can be implemented. Whereas holistic trainings on inclusion are needed in some countries, in others more targeted trainings for example on multilingualism would be more appropriate. This applies also beyond the country of origin when it comes to learning minorities (i.e Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries).

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ADVOCACY GROUPS

Policy level Recommendations

- **Stakeholder's voices:** In addition to teachers and school leaders, it is imperative to include learners and parents in the decision making process from the broad perspective of inclusion. Such mechanisms of stakeholder cooperation need to be embedded in the policies themselves. By meaningfully involving representatives of the different learners' needs, more comprehensive policies and strategies can be developed which target all learners within the school community. Learners, parents, teachers and school leaders' representatives need to be given access to different levels of policy making in order to ensure policies reflect all the diversity that policies on inclusion need to address. Having comprehensive policies must go hand in hand with improvements in curricula and training offered.

- **Ensure adequate funding and prevent cutbacks:** This aspect is key to address the gaps in policy implementation by providing adequate resources to ministries at all levels to carry out the necessary reforms. Smart allocation of resources is also crucial to support school leaders and teachers in implementing policies and programmes aiming at closing inclusion gaps at local level. Adequate resources are also important to improve the training offer for all teachers and school leaders as well as to incentivise collaboration among different groups in

schools and inter-schools. Cutbacks to education funding need to be avoided in countries/regions where this issue has been identified to ensure quality of education and that the inclusion initiatives being developed currently are properly supported. In cases where Member States have drifted away from EU policy, EU funding opportunities are key to support individual teachers in developing their competences and participate in exchange of experiences, which do not necessarily have to be abroad.

- **Beyond raising awareness:** something to be taken into consideration in terms of inclusion is to go beyond raising awareness to the development of concrete competences for teachers, school leaders, teacher trainees, learners and parents. More efforts should be put to incentivise the collaboration of different groups of schools that is often missing. In terms of raising awareness, it can go beyond the school community to bring the benefits of inclusion to the wider community and make the case to politicians. Policies need to ensure the shift from integration towards inclusion in their school systems and support the better understanding of these processes.

- **Teachers' and school leaders' wellbeing:** Better investment in education systems not only allows for better implementation of reforms but also to ensure teachers' and

Solutions need to be put forth to diminish the administrative workload of teachers and school leaders; and to better interconnect their work with the one of non-teaching staff such as psychologists. Inclusion needs to be part of the everyday process of teaching and interacting with learners and not dedicated only to the work of the specialists.

- **Teacher shortages:** The work around funding, teacher's voices and their wellbeing is also key to address the teachers shortages across the EU. More work is needed to improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession - including working conditions that support wellbeing and participation in decision making at different levels. Legislation also needs to be simplified in cases where it has been made extremely difficult for pre-service teachers to become in-service teachers.

  As people from other professions are integrated into the teaching profession, strong quality benchmarks need to be established as well as support to the newcomers. Successful practices need to be shared and multilingual and multicultural practices incentivised. Similarly, a careful approach is needed when introducing digital tools to make up for teacher shortages, as digital resources are not immediate solutions but support to teachers and if not implemented in this way, they can exacerbate the inclusion gaps present in schools.

- **Systemic cooperation:** different stakeholders need to work together on a systemic level to better address issues of inclusion in schools and the education system as a whole. As part of the stronger cooperation among stakeholders, an important aspect is the coordination between local/regional/national policy makers and the practitioners

(school leaders, teachers).The exchange of knowledge and practices at different levels need to be improved to ensure all stakeholders are on the same page and able to jointly address systemic and individual cases. Every school should function in a small ecosystem: this approach entails cooperation with other institutions (public institutions) and organisations (civil society), forming strong networks that can help solve the problems facing the schools. Conditions must be set by all involved in the different educational spheres (competent administrations, those in charge of the learning centres, other educational entities and the rest of the community) to identify the existing barriers to the participation in learning and implement the necessary measures to overcome them.

The idea of such cooperation requires that schools are not only reactive but also proactive in addressing learners' needs. In this way preventive actions are jointly developed and space is given to development of competences. Systemic cooperation to achieve inclusion goals is by no means easy and it requires institutional, curricular and didactic changes on the part of different actors.The EU can have a key role in offering guidance and also resources that allow for better bridging between policy and practice in both directions. Ensuring the exchange channels across Member States remain active and are not mere receptors but work together in developing solutions including quality benchmarks to ensure minimum standards.

Mechanisms also need to be developed to ensure project results are not lost and can inform decision making at different levels to make investment in inclusion more efficient and tailored to the needs on the ground.

Practice level Recommendations

- **Teachers motivation and inclusive pedagogies:** it is important to foster the motivation of teachers and provide opportunities to learn about and develop competences to work with more inclusive pedagogical approaches. For these trainings to be successful it is necessary to understand teachers' needs and find concrete practices to support them in integrating inclusive pedagogies in the classroom. One form of motivation is by linking the training with learning credits which might make them more appealing to teachers and school leaders who are not yet convinced about inclusion.

- **Reach out to more teachers:** Solutions need to be found when it comes to reaching out to teachers and school leaders beyond the groups that are very enthusiastic and already implementing inclusive pedagogies and techniques. A different approach is needed to attract people who are not committed. As mentioned above, adding credits as part of the training offer might attract more teachers and school leaders. In this case, trainings should be very basic, focusing on inspiration, self-reflection and fighting prejudices. These trainings are also relevant for already committed teachers since it provides them with opportunities to learn more about new approaches and methods. These trainings could be based on mutual learning and sharing their own experiences. For the already motivated teachers, specially the ones in environments that don't support inclusion, it is important to provide opportunities to these teachers to network and share experiences with other colleagues working on the subject.

- **Training of pre-service teachers/teacher trainees:** for this group the most relevant training would be in the schools, possibly together with teachers who are not yet committed. Committed teachers could even act as trainers themselves. It was suggested that in-person trainings would be preferable to be carried out together with teachers and school leaders. Pre-service teachers have no anchor to tie such a training online, only a training that also makes it possible for them to implement their learning with learners would make sense.

  The topics for this group include inclusive methods for special needs students, learners with disabilities and different socio-economic backgrounds (Roma, refugees), in a very practical format. Self-reflection and self-discovery is key to helping fight a teacher's own prejudices. The best approach would be to offer hands-on training and in the case of MOOCs it is advisable to include extra credit. It should be clearly communicated what the training adds to what they already cover in their curriculum.

- **Training of teachers/school heads:** There is a clear preference from participants for self-paced online learning, however some found that a short, 1-2-day intensive training is manageable for the most part. School leaders face different challenges, so it was suggested to train them separately. Another option would be to train teams of schools under the same organisation. Different topics were mentioned that could be addressed through trainings to teachers and school heads: inclusion of learners with different socio-economic backgrounds (Roma, refugees), learners with

special education needs, behavioural problems, victims of bullying and domestic violence, fighting teachers' own prejudices (including bullying towards students), self-discovery of teachers, sharing experiences. It is crucial to support both school leaders and teachers in engaging parents/guardians.

- **From holistic to targeted training:** Holistic training on inclusion is a necessary foundation across all Member States, however, depending on the national/local needs targeted training offer is needed to deal with specific inclusion gaps. For example, language minorities, Roma, specific physical or mental needs.

- **Stakeholders advocacy:** School leaders and teachers have a role to play at local level when it comes to advocate for inclusive practices within their schools. Empowering them to take on their autonomy can be an important step towards generating changes in their schools and communities. The work through advocacy groups bringing together different actors at local/regional levels can also be an important platform to exchange ideas and practices fostering peer learning and mutual support.

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