European Commission

European Education and Culture Executive Agency

EURYDICE REPORT

Addressing underachievement in literacy, mathematics and science

Policy changes in European school education since 2020

School education

Erasmus+

Enriching lives, opening minds.

This document is published by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA, Education and Youth Policy Analysis).

Please cite this publication as:

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2025), Addressing underachievement in literacy, mathematics and science. Policy changes in European school education since 2020. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Education and Culture Executive Agency

Platforms, Studies and Analysis
Boulevard Simon Bolivar 34 (Unit A6)
BE-1049 Brussels

E-mail: eacea-eurydice@ec.europa.eu

Website: http://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu

Printed by the Publications Office of the European Union in Luxembourg

Text completed in October 2025.

This document should not be considered as representative of the European Commission's official position.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2025

Print

ISBN 978-92-9488-939-3
doi:10.2797/992314
EC-01-25-073-EN-C

PDF

ISBN 978-92-9488-938-6
doi:10.2797/1883015
EC-01-25-073-EN-N

Addressing underachievement in literacy, mathematics and science

Policy changes in European school education since 2020

Eurydice Report

Foreword

Every student in Europe should be able to develop the basic skills that open doors to learning, to opportunity and to a confident future.

Literacy, mathematics, science, digital and citizenship are not just school subjects, they are essential tools for life. They unlock learning, empower participation and allow each young person to contribute to their community and to Europe. Supporting all students to acquire these skills is one of the most important investments we can make - for them and for Europe's shared future.

Recent international assessments show that a significant number of students in Europe still complete compulsory education without reaching the expected levels of basic skills. This is a serious concern for Europe's capacity to meet the challenges of the future. When students do not receive the support they need to develop basis skills, they may be left behind just at the point when they should be gaining confidence and discovering their potential.

To address these challenges, the European Commission has placed a strong focus on basic skills within its broader skills and education agenda. The *Union of Skills Communication* sets out a common vision for equipping learners with the competences needed in a changing world. The *Action Plan on Basic Skills* defines concrete steps to improve learning outcomes, strengthen teaching, and reduce inequalities. Alongside this, the *STEM Education Strategic Plan* promotes excellence and engagement in STEM from the early years ensuring that all students, not just a few, can aspire to reach high levels of achievement.

This Eurydice report offers valuable evidence of how education systems across Europe are working to address underachievement in reading, mathematics and science at primary and lower secondary level. It presents recent policy developments in curriculum and assessment, learning support, teacher training and parental engagement. It also points to areas where further efforts are needed to ensure that no students have equal access to quality education.

Prioritising innovative learning approaches, inclusion, and recognising the value of personalised support to those who need it most, can help ensure better outcomes. Our aim is to support Member States to reach this objective with a target of less than 15% of underachievers in literacy, mathematics, science and digital skills and a share of top performance of at least 15%, by 2030. With the Basic Skills Support Scheme to be launched in 2026, the Commission will work together with interested Member States on effective intervention measures to address basic skills deficiencies.

I thank the Eurydice Network for preparing this important report. It will serve as a valuable resource for education policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders across Europe. By continuing to work together – guided by a shared commitment to quality, inclusion, and excellence – we can ensure that all students in Europe build the strong foundations they need to thrive in school and beyond.

Roxana Mînzatu

Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills,

Quality Jobs and Preparedness

Contents

Table of figures

Codes and abbreviations

Country codes

EU	European Union
EU-27	27 Member States of the European Union
BE	Belgium
BE fr	Belgium – French Community
BE de	Belgium – German-speaking Community
BE nl	Belgium – Flemish Community
BG	Bulgaria
CZ	Czechia
DK	Denmark
DE	Germany
EE	Estonia
IE	Ireland
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FR	France
HR	Croatia
IT	Italy
CY	Cyprus
LV	Latvia
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
HU	Hungary
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
AT	Austria
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
FI	Finland
SE	Sweden

European Education Area and candidate countries	
AL	Albania
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CH	Switzerland
IS	Iceland
ME	Montenegro
NO	Norway
RS	Serbia
TR	Türkiye

Other codes

:	not available
NA	not applicable

Abbreviations

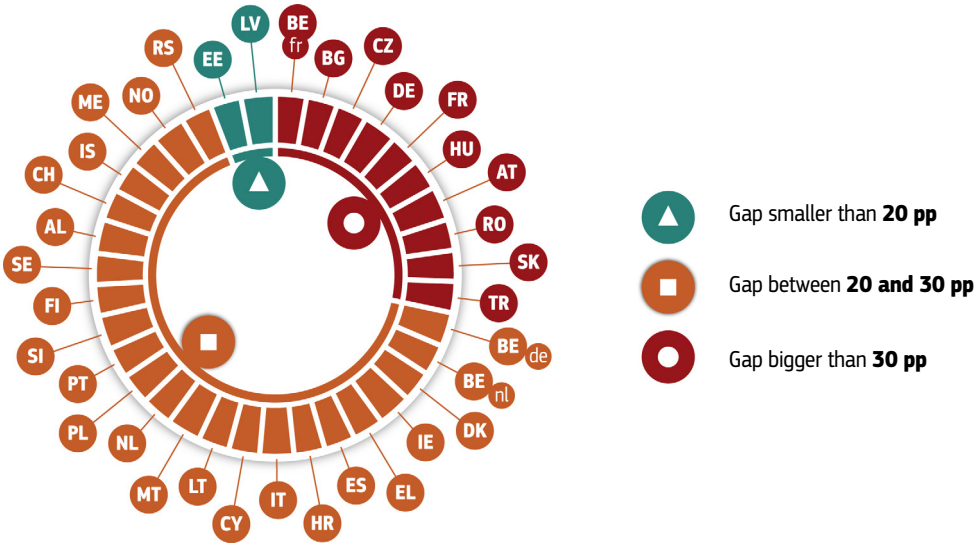
CPD	continuing professional development
ECEC	early childhood education and care
EEA	European Education Area
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITE	initial teacher education
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SEN	special educational needs
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UDL	universal design for learning
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations agency for children

Executive summary

Ensuring that all learners acquire solid skills in literacy, mathematics and science remains one of the most pressing challenges for European education systems. These skills underpin lifelong learning, employability, civic engagement and personal development. Yet, recent results from international assessment surveys such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) show increasing numbers of low achievers, particularly among disadvantaged students, and growing gaps between socioeconomic groups. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, widening inequalities in access to learning and accelerating downward trends in performance. This is well illustrated by Figure A, which shows on the basis of the 2022 PISA Survey (mathematics) that in 2022, there were only two education systems where the difference between the low achievement rates of students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds was smaller than 20 percentage points (pp).

Figure A: Percentage point differences between the underachievement rates of 15-year-old students from low and high socio-economic backgrounds (with 0–25 and 26+ books at home, respectively) in mathematics, 2022



Source: Eurydice, based on OECD, PISA 2022 database.

In response, the European Union has significantly reinforced its policy framework. The 2022 Council recommendation on pathways to school success ([1]) call for inclusive, learner-centred approaches to boost basic skills acquisition. In 2025, 'The Union of Skills' package ([2]) introduced the STEM Education Strategic Plan and the Action Plan on Basic Skills, which promote early detection of learning difficulties, personalised support, strengthened teaching and learning and meaningful involvement of parents and communities (European Commission, 2025a, 2025b).

([1]) Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2022/C 469/01, OJ C 469, 9.12.2022.

([2]) Union of Skills – European Commission.

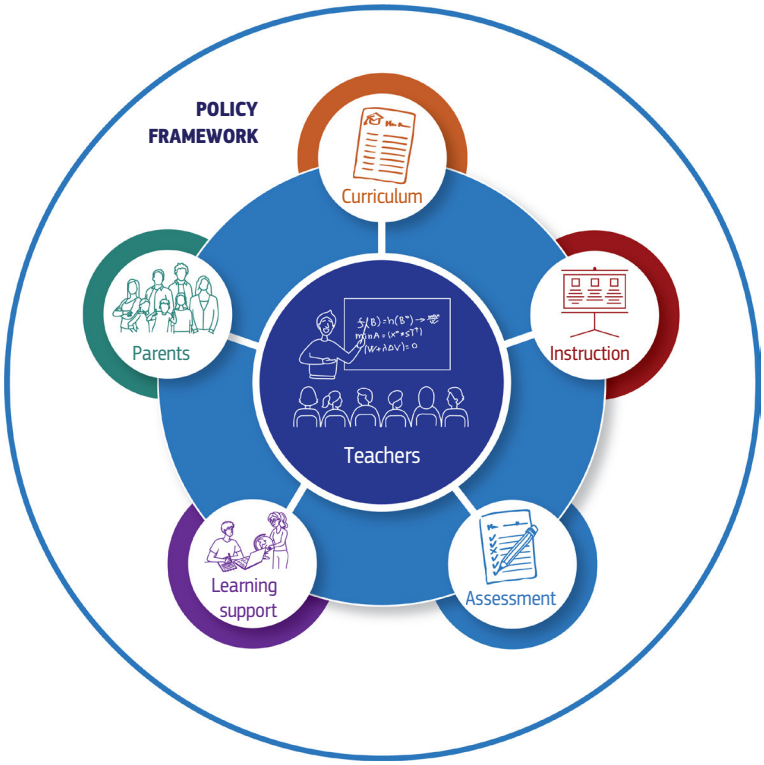
Content and structure of the report

This report analyses policies aiming to counter underachievement in basic skills (literacy, mathematics and science) that were adopted and/or implemented in the school year 2020/2021 or later and were still in place in 2024/2025. Temporary measures (e.g. related to the immediate management of the COVID-19 crisis) that are no longer active are excluded from this study. The report relies on qualitative data on policies and measures that have been collected by means of a Eurydice data collection survey. It covers primary and lower secondary education in 37 European education systems.

While the focus is on new policy measures or changes to existing policies that have been adopted/implemented since 2020, it is evident that in all education systems, relevant policy measures were also put in place before 2020. Indeed, policies to tackle underachievement in basic skills and, more generally, enhance inclusion in education and support disadvantaged students, have been extensively reported in several recent Eurydice reports (see especially European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, 2022, 2023, 2024), which, where relevant, are referenced in this report as background information.

The report consists of seven chapters examining the topics depicted in Figure B, which illustrates the interdependent ecosystem of policy measures that education systems have put in place to address underachievement in basic skills.

Figure B: Interdependent ecosystem of policy measures addressing underachievement in basic skills



Source: Eurydice.

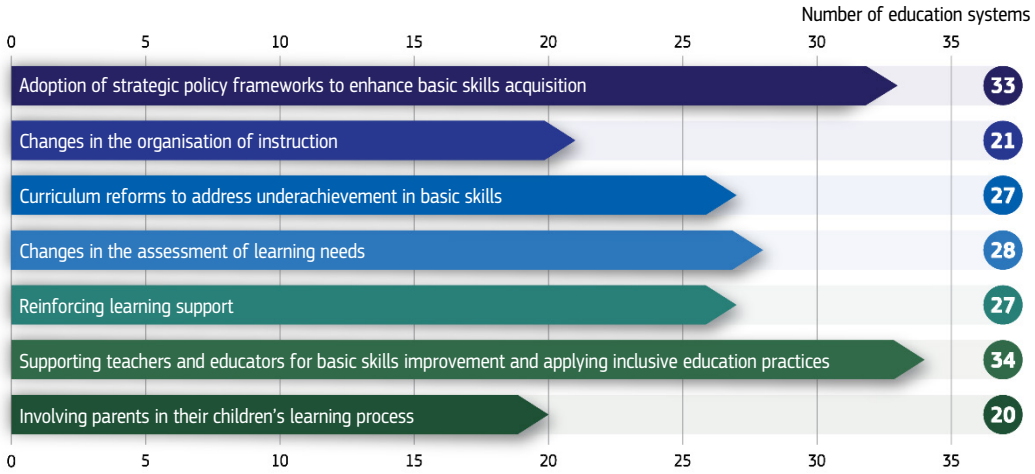
At the foundation of this ecosystem lie strategic policy frameworks, which shape and connect reforms across curriculum, instruction, assessment, learning support, teacher development and parental engagement. At the centre of this ecosystem are teachers, whose professional competence and support structures are crucial for effective curriculum delivery, instructional practices, assessment, learning support and collaboration with families. The report shows that since 2020/2021, almost all education systems have introduced reforms

supporting teachers – through continuing professional development (CPD), inclusive pedagogical resources and the recruitment of specialised staff. These changes are closely aligned with broader curriculum reforms that prioritise essential skills, differentiated instruction and inclusive learning environments. While national approaches vary, there is growing convergence around integrated, whole-system responses that combine universal and targeted measures to support all learners.

Main findings

Figure C summarises the main areas of reforms that European education authorities have undertaken since 2020. As the figure shows, new top-level strategic policy frameworks have been adopted by the large majority of the education systems covered in this report. Almost all education systems adapted their policies concerning teachers. Changes have taken place in more than half of the education systems in all areas, with the organisation of instruction and support provided to parents remaining relatively more stable. Overall, the figure reflects a broad policy effort to strengthen all key domains contributing to basic skills development, with particular attention to teacher support and systemic coherence. Changes in each policy area are analysed below in turn.

Figure C: Areas of policy changes addressing underachievement in basic skills (2020/2021 to 2024/2025), ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

Strategic policy frameworks increasingly address basic skills within broader agendas for equity and school success

Since 2020, 33 education systems have adopted or revised at least one top-level policy framework directly addressing underachievement in basic skills. These initiatives vary in thematic focus and scope. In total, 49 policy frameworks are reported, of which 36 are broader and 13 dedicated. Dedicated policy frameworks focus exclusively to improving basic skills, while broader ones address the issue as part of wider initiatives on inclusive education, student well-being or school success. In both cases, basic skills objectives are addressed through defined policy commitments and implementation measures. Both broader and dedicated frameworks reflect the principles of the 2022 Council recommendation on pathways to school success, promoting a whole-system, learner-centred approach that combines universal and targeted measures.

Eighteen education systems report at least one policy framework with concrete objectives linked to performance benchmarks (e.g. PISA proficiency levels) or national standards, such as reducing the proportion

of low achievers or increasing basic skills attainment among disadvantaged groups. Recent frameworks also take account of post-pandemic learning loss as well as teacher and parental engagement.

Monitoring and evaluation remain relatively limited aspects of policy implementation. While approximately half of education systems have policy frameworks with measurable targets, only six report structured impact evaluations, and even these are often focused on implementation rather than impact. Nonetheless, the use of performance indicators suggests growing efforts to strengthen the coherence, reach and accountability of basic skills policies.

Changes in the organisation of instruction tend to go towards increasing learning time and the flexibility of instruction

The organisation of instruction is one of the fundamental attributes of students' educational experience. The report analysed reforms related to the amount and flexibility of instruction time available to students dedicated to basic skills; the length of the formal school day; and the grouping of students for educational experience and instruction.

Between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025, top-level education authorities implemented changes in more than half of the European education systems analysed in this report. Differences between education levels are marginal, showing that education authorities have targeted both primary and lower secondary students.

Changes in the organisation of instruction aiming to tackle underachievement in basic skills have generally tended towards increasing students' time spent in school, either through dedicating more time to subjects linked to basic skills or even expanding the length of the school day. While five education systems implemented changes for all subjects linked to basic skills, another five concentrated on specific areas, notably reading or science literacy.

In addition to the amount of instruction time, reforms of the organisation of instruction have most often brought about increasing flexibility and more autonomy given to schools in organising teaching. In more than a quarter of European education systems, schools have become more autonomous in defining part of the instruction time dedicated to given subjects, and/or in organising the work and the grouping of students in the classroom. Often, flexibility has increased in both dimensions at the same time, and eight education systems are creating the conditions of and encouraging differentiated teaching and flexible groupings to respond to all students' learning needs.

A majority of education systems have made curriculum changes to support basic skills development

School curricula play a central role in delivering quality and inclusive education and supporting skills development. Education authorities across Europe regularly review and re-focus the content of school curricula, to respond to the evolving needs of society and learners, address emerging policy issues and reflect new pedagogical approaches.

Since the 2020/2021 school year, the majority of European countries have undertaken curriculum revisions to support the development of basic skills and improve achievement. While the reported measures are wide-ranging and often pursue multiple objectives, several recurring themes can be observed. Most commonly, education authorities aim to improve the curricula by clarifying attainment targets and making them more focused on basic skills and by reducing curriculum content to avoid overload and support deeper learning. Other frequently cited changes intend to make the curriculum more inclusive and to strengthen the support to students at risk of underachievement, as well as to increase the focus on STEM subjects and promote innovative teaching based on problem-solving and interdisciplinary approaches.

Primary schools are more likely to see changes in diagnostic assessment

Effective assessment is necessary to address underperformance. Without it, it is unclear which students need learning support, when they need it and what exactly their learning gaps are. The Eurydice data collection focused mainly on post-2020 reforms in diagnostic assessment practices and in national exams. In all, 28 European education systems introduced new assessment tools or revised existing ones. The number of education systems reforming their assessment methods was fairly stable across education levels, with one important exception. Significantly more education systems recently undertook reforms in the diagnostic assessment tools in primary education, compared to lower secondary. Thus, more than one third of education systems introduced new or revised diagnostic assessment in primary education, as opposed to less than a quarter in lower secondary. National exams reforms were conducted in about a quarter of the European education systems at both the primary and lower secondary levels.

Reforms in assessment have been diverse, but most of them relate to policy growth (e.g. introducing diagnostic assessment in new subject areas or extending them to additional grades), methodological development (e.g. new definitions) and those targeting specific student populations (e.g. students with migrant or refugee backgrounds).

A third of education systems introduced or revised small group tutoring

Additional learning support is a key tool for helping students to boost their performance. More than two thirds of the European education systems took relevant measures, which in most cases apply for both primary and lower secondary education. Among the most common measures are the development of a new policy framework (e.g. new guidelines, action plans and/or programmes) and the provision of one-to-one or small group tutoring during or outside school hours.

The report shows that after 2020/2021, about a third of the education systems introduced or revised personalised or small group tutoring in primary schools, but only about a quarter did so at both the primary and lower secondary levels. The introduction or revision of small group tutoring outside the main school hours or days has also been rather limited.

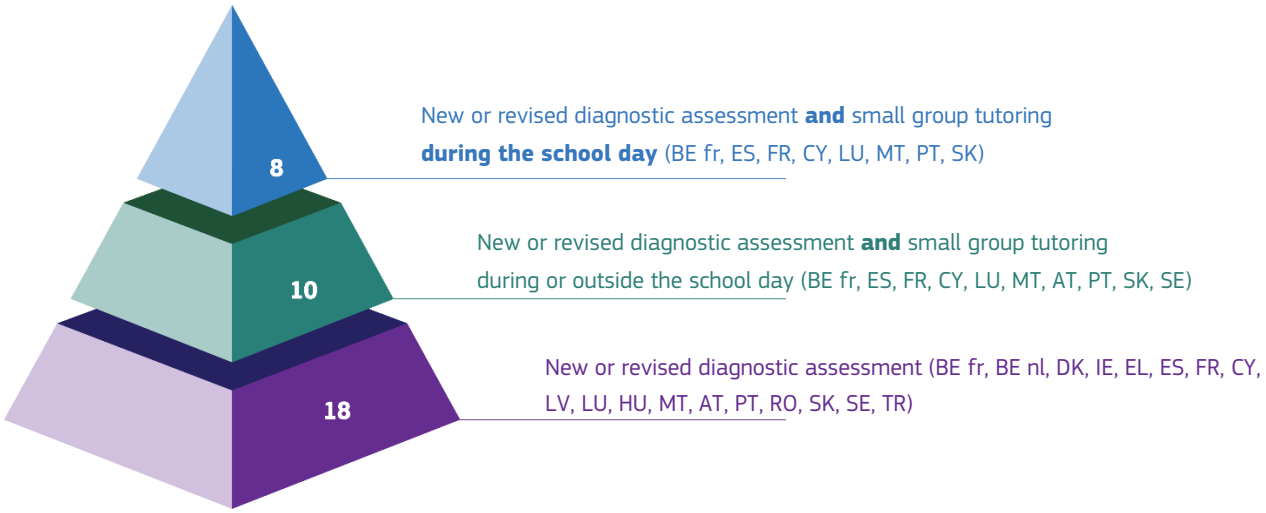
In slightly more than a third of the education systems, national (or regional) authorities have made additional funding available that schools can use to strengthen learning support.

It is also worth mentioning that learning support measures, especially those concerning reading literacy, sometimes target specific student groups (e.g. those with a migrant background), but generally they tend to be available for all students facing difficulties.

Reforms in diagnostic assessment and small group tutoring are not always linked

Ideally, reforms to improve student performance should be interlinked to maximise effectiveness. However, as Figure D suggests, reforms in diagnostic assessment are not always linked to small group tutoring reforms. In fact, even though about half of education systems made changes concerning diagnostic assessment, less than half of these education systems also made reforms concerning small group tutoring.

Figure D: Education systems with new or revised diagnostic assessment and small group tutoring



Source: Eurydice.

Teachers are key enablers of basic skills improvement, and education systems are investing in comprehensive support measures to strengthen their role

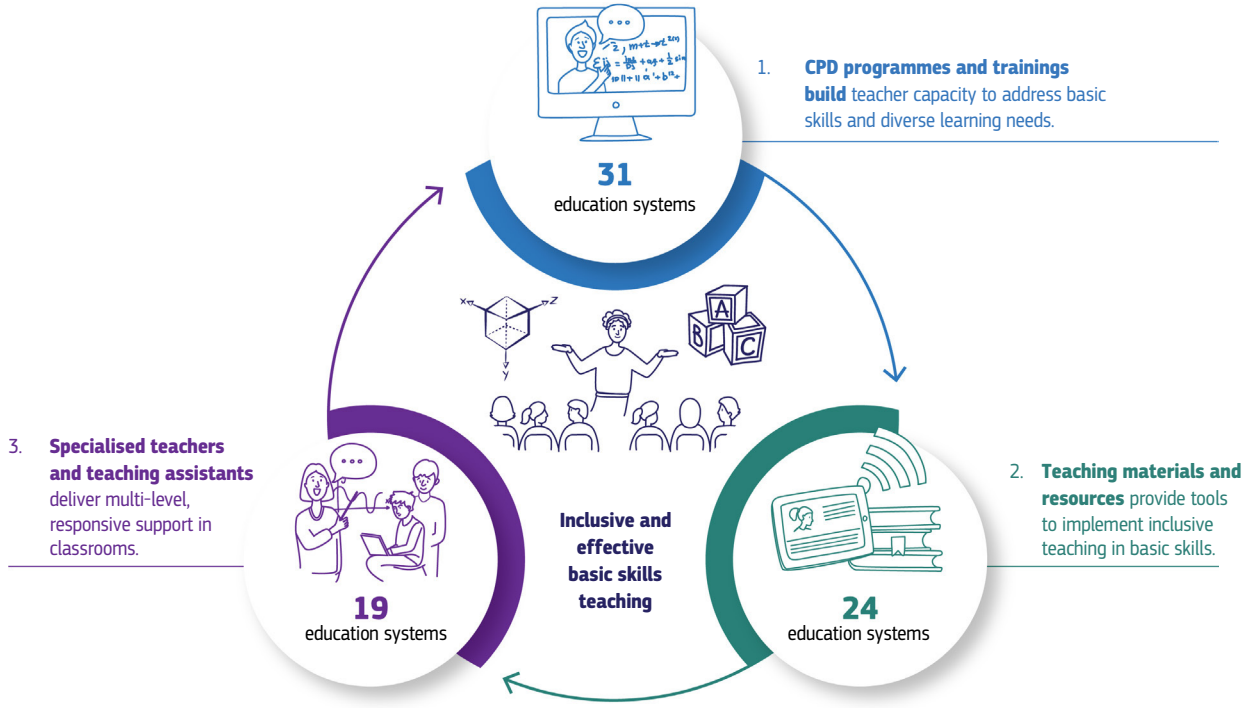
Improving students' literacy, mathematics and science outcomes depends on teachers' ability to identify learning needs and deliver inclusive, engaging instruction. Recent policy developments reflect this by enhancing professional development opportunities, providing tailored materials, and recruiting specialised staff to support teaching. A systemic approach is evident, grounded in alignment across these three core support areas.

A majority of education systems have developed CPD programmes that combine subject-specific training with inclusive pedagogical approaches, including differentiated instruction, formative assessment and the use of diagnostic tools. Some have gone further, offering sustained mentoring and coaching to help teachers address the learning profiles of low-achieving students. To ensure consistency in teaching practices, education authorities increasingly accompany CPD with structured pedagogical resources – such as lesson plans or methodological guides – often aligned with curriculum reforms.

At the same time, approximately half of education systems have introduced or expanded policies to recruit specialised support staff – such as teaching assistants or specialised teachers – to provide targeted, in-class support and help teachers personalise learning for students who face persistent difficulties.

Effective support for basic skills and inclusive teaching relies on the alignment of three key levers: professional development, pedagogical resources and classroom-based staffing (see Figure E). CPD and structured resources act as enablers, while the deployment of specialised staff ensures responsive, multi-level support tailored to diverse learning needs.

Figure E: Three levers for stronger basic skills teaching: training, resources and teaching support for inclusive classrooms



Source: Eurydice.

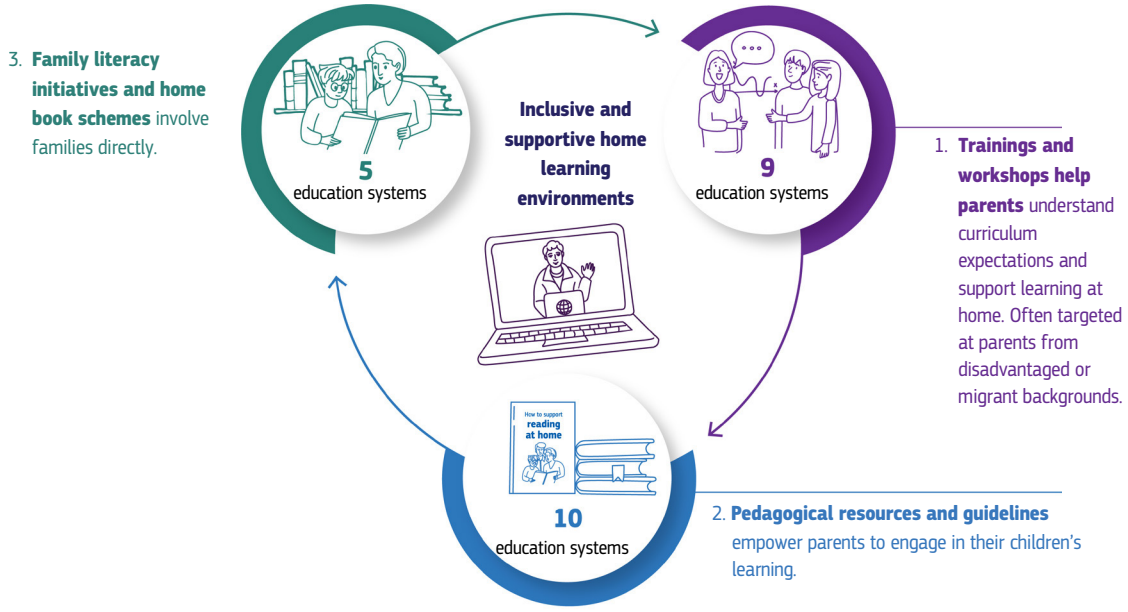
Together, these developments reflect a coherent and strategic approach to teacher support. While implementation varies across education systems, there is growing convergence around the idea that improving basic skills requires sustained investment in teachers' professional capacity, backed by practical tools and team-based assistance. These trends point to increasing recognition of the pivotal role teachers play in addressing underachievement and promoting more equitable learning outcomes.

Parents play a key role in shaping students' learning outcomes, and education systems are investing in measures to better engage and support them

The home learning environment strongly influences students' basic skills acquisition. Since 2020/2021, many European education systems have introduced or revised policies to better engage parents as partners in supporting literacy, mathematics and science learning. These policies are often designed to address equity gaps by reaching disadvantaged and migrant families.

Recent measures focus on helping parents understand curriculum expectations and to provide targeted learning support at home (see Figure F). Approaches include training workshops for parents, the distribution of pedagogical resources with practical guidance, and family literacy initiatives such as home reading schemes, often developed in collaboration with local libraries. Several systems have introduced digital platforms to enhance communication between schools and families, while others provide home visits or school–family liaison officers to offer more personalised support.

Figure F: Engaging parents to support basic skills learning



Source: Eurydice.

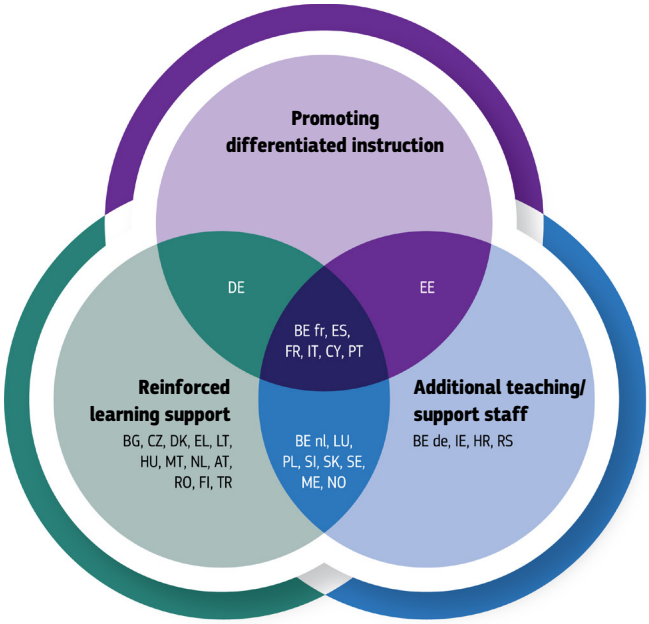
However, the integration of these measures into broader school strategies remains uneven and evaluations of their impact are limited. Still, promising practices are emerging – particularly where support is sustained, culturally responsive and embedded within coordinated school–family partnerships. Parental engagement has become a recognised policy priority, with many systems seeking to strengthen school–family cooperation.

* * *

Overall, this report highlights that addressing underachievement in basic skills remains an urgent and shared policy priority across Europe. Since the 2020/2021 school year, European education systems have responded with a wide range of policy measures spanning instruction time, curriculum, assessment, learning support, teacher development and parental involvement. Many of these actions are embedded within strategic policy frameworks, which promote a whole-system, equity-driven approach to improving basic skills.

While national approaches vary, common trends emerge: increasing flexibility in instruction, integrating inclusive pedagogies into teacher training, reinforcing diagnostic and support mechanisms and reaching out to families – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, there is an increasing emphasis on individualisation and differentiation through curriculum reform, the organisation of instruction, the availability of additional support/teaching staff as well as learning support. Figure G illustrates this latter trend, showing to what extent European education systems have created the conditions of more individualised teaching and learning through the interplay of differentiated instruction, the provision of additional teachers / support staff and reinforced learning support measures.

Figure G: Education systems introducing differentiated instruction, additional teaching/support staff and new/reinforced learning support measures between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025, ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

However, monitoring and evaluation are uneven, which might hinder effective implementation. In the future, sustained and coherent policy action – combining universal and targeted measures – will continue to be essential to improving basic skills outcomes and promoting equity in primary and lower secondary education.

Introduction

Quality education is rooted in the basic skills of literacy, mathematics and science acquired in early years and at school. By ensuring that students master these skills, not only do education authorities undertake the most essential task in education, but also lay the groundwork for boosting EU competitiveness, fostering active citizenship and reinforcing democratic participation.

Improving educational outcomes and addressing underachievement have become critical priorities within the EU, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic – which significantly disrupted education throughout Europe – and the significant decline in student achievement as measured by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Survey. To illustrate and compare the main policy directions European countries are taking when aiming to counter underachievement in basic skills, this report provides an overview of education policies and measures adopted in this recent period.

Basic skills: policy context and definitions

Reducing underachievement in basic skills and enhancing learning outcomes have been and continue to be key EU targets. They are part of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) ([3]), highlighting a commitment to equity, inclusiveness and social cohesion across Europe. Underachievement – or low achievement – in this context refers to the percentage of students performing below the expected level of attainment in one or more subject areas. In relation to the EU-level targets – that the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15 % by 2030 ([4]) – this level is defined on the basis of the OECD's PISA Survey.

As international student assessments continue to reveal persistent challenges in basic skills acquisition, the EU has reinforced its policy commitment to quality education, equity and skills development. Recent European Commission initiatives emphasise the need for a comprehensive policy approach, combining targeted investments, evidence-based interventions and innovative teaching strategies to improve learning outcomes. By addressing underachievement and promoting lifelong learning, these efforts aim to strengthen educational resilience and social cohesion, while supporting the EU's long-term goals for economic competitiveness and inclusion.

Mastering basic skills is indeed also crucial for sustainable and inclusive economic development (Gust, Hanushek and Wößmann, 2024). Basic skills acquired through education boost labour productivity and support the innovation pace required by the digital transition and an increasingly knowledge-based economy (Wößmann, 2015; Thum-Thysen, Cravetto and Varchola, 2021). Hanushek and Wößmann (2019) simulated the macroeconomic impact of improving basic skills, showing that the EU's gross domestic product (GDP) could be 30 % higher by 2100 with improved educational outcomes compared to the 2015 levels. The Letta Report (Letta, 2024) highlights that closing educational inequalities is essential for strengthening Europe's human capital, economic resilience and global competitiveness. Similarly, Mario Draghi's competitiveness report (European Commission, 2024) stresses that investment in foundational skills is vital for sustaining Europe's economic growth and ensuring that education systems effectively prepare young people for an

---

([3]) Council Resolution of 19 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), 2021/C 66/01, OJ C 66, 26.2.2021.

([4]) Council Resolution of 19 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), 2021/C 66/01, OJ C 66, 26.2.2021.

evolving labour market. Furthermore, mastering basic skills is a key prerequisite for developing transversal skills such as critical thinking, entrepreneurship or creativity.

The Council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning ([5]) urges EU Member States to support and reinforce the development of key competences and basic skills from an early age and throughout life. Furthermore, the Council recommendation on pathways to school success ([6]) provides comprehensive policy guidance to help all students achieve the necessary level of proficiency in basic skills and reduce early school leaving. This recommendation calls for a systemic approach, emphasising collaboration, monitoring and targeted support combined with more universal measures to create equitable and high-quality education systems across Europe.

In March 2025, the European Commission adopted 'The Union of Skills' package ([7]), introducing the STEM Education Strategic Plan (European Commission, 2025a) and the Action Plan on Basic Skills (European Commission, 2025b). The Action Plan on Basic Skills aims to boost basic skills teaching and learning, support educators and enable supportive environments. It emphasises the importance of early identification mechanisms and monitoring, extra learning time and personalised support, professional development opportunities and support provided to teachers, and supporting and enabling parents to help their children. The STEM Education Strategic Plan further emphasises the need to reform STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education and training, aiming to improve curricula and making them more engaging to spark interest in STEM subjects.

The concept of basic skills has broadened over the years and across the different Council recommendations. Earlier documents refer to reading literacy, mathematics and science competences as 'basic skills' – the three areas assessed by the PISA Survey. The 15 % EU-level targets also relate to these domains. The Council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning ([8]) and the Council recommendation on pathways to school success ([9]) indicate basic digital skills as part of basic skills; however, the latter still keeps the focus on the original three areas, as digital skills are addressed by the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) ([10]). In addition to literacy, mathematics, science and digital skills, the newly adopted Action Plan on Basic Skills also lists citizenship skills as part of the 'basic skills set' (European Commission, 2025b). However, given the more limited focus of the EU targets, and as digital and citizenship competences are often at the centre of separate initiatives, this report concentrates only on the three basic skills assessed by the PISA Survey ([11]).

Post-pandemic educational outcomes

The daily reality of schools across Europe was strongly affected in 2020 and 2021 by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to school closures in many countries and periods of distance or blended learning for many students. Many reports and studies point to the effects of the lack of effective formal teaching during this time and the resulting learning losses (Blaskó, da Costa and Schnepf, 2021; Maldonado and De Witte, 2022; Gajderowicz *et al.*, 2024; Jakubowski, Gajderowicz and Patrinos, 2024; Schnepf *et al.*, 2024; Crato and Patrinos, 2025).

([5]) Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ C 189, 4.6.2018.

([6]) Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2022/C 469/01, OJ C 469, 9.12.2022.

([7]) Union of Skills – European Commission.

([8]) Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ C 189, 4.6.2018.

([9]) Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2022/C 469/01, OJ C 469, 9.12.2022.

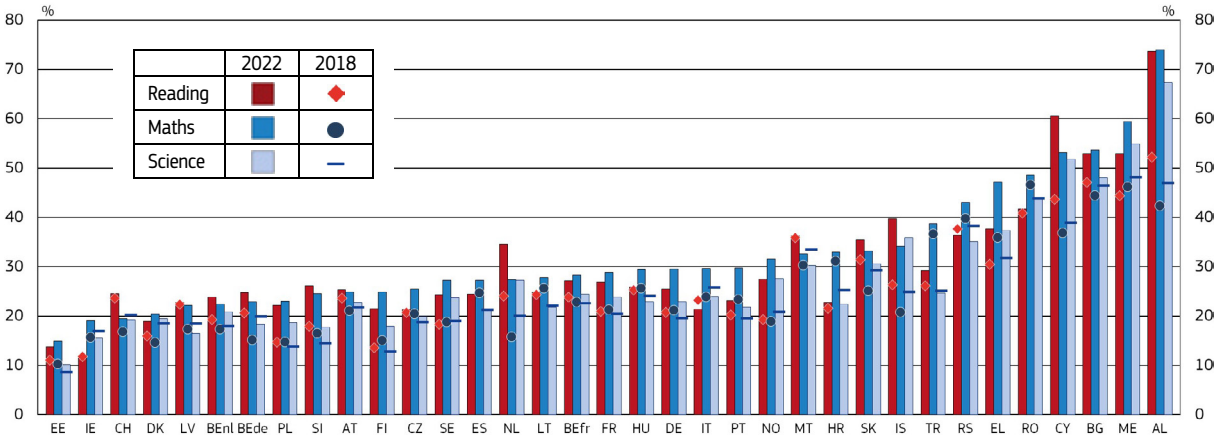
([10]) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age, COM(2020) 624 final.

([11]) For information on digital education, see European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2019, 2022b). For information on citizenship education, see European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2017).

Moreover, studies have also shown that the impact of school closures and the resulting learning loss are not distributed evenly. Whereas some students could count on quick and effective support from education authorities and parents, others received little or no support. Consequently, school closures generally widened educational inequalities (Gajderowicz *et al.*, 2024; Jakubowski, Gajderowicz and Patrinos, 2024).

These findings are supported by and are partly based on the latest results of the OECD's PISA 2022 Survey, which show a significant decline in student performance in all tested domains. This decline is a continuation of longer-term trends, which were exacerbated by the pandemic (Schnepf *et al.*, 2024). To illustrate how student performance changed between the last two rounds of PISA, Figure 1 shows the percentage of low-achieving students in reading, mathematics and science in 2018 and 2022 in European countries with available data. As the figure depicts, the percentage of low-achieving students increased in all European countries in mathematics, remained stable or increased in all countries in reading, and increased in the majority of countries in science.

Figure 1: Percentage of low-achieving 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science, 2018 and 2022



		EE	IE	CH	DK	LV	BE nl	BE de	PL	SI	AT	FI	CZ	SE	ES	NL	LT	BE fr	FR
Reading	2018	11.1	11.8	23.6	16.0	22.4	19.3	20.6	14.7	17.9	23.6	13.5	20.7	18.4	:	24.1	24.4	23.8	20.9
	2022	13.8	11.4	24.6	19.0	22.8	23.9	24.8	22.2	26.1	25.3	21.4	21.4	24.3	24.4	34.6	24.9	27.1	26.9
Mathematics	2018	10.2	15.7	16.8	14.6	17.3	17.3	15.1	14.7	16.4	21.1	15.0	20.4	18.8	24.7	15.8	25.6	22.8	21.3
	2022	15.0	19.0	19.5	20.4	22.2	22.4	22.9	23.0	24.6	24.9	24.9	25.5	27.2	27.3	27.4	27.8	28.3	28.8
Science	2018	8.8	17.0	20.2	18.7	18.5	18.0	20.0	13.8	14.6	21.9	12.9	18.8	19.0	21.3	20.0	22.2	22.6	20.5
	2022	10.1	15.6	19.2	19.5	16.5	20.9	18.4	18.6	17.8	22.7	18.0	19.9	23.7	21.3	27.3	21.8	24.5	23.8

		HU	DE	IT	PT	NO	MT	HR	SK	IS	TR	RS	EL	RO	CY	BG	ME	AL	
Reading	2018	25.3	20.7	23.3	20.2	19.3	35.9	21.6	31.4	26.4	26.1	37.7	30.5	40.8	43.7	47.1	44.4	52.2	
	2022	25.9	25.5	21.4	23.1	27.5	36.3	22.7	35.5	39.7	29.3	36.4	37.6	41.7	60.6	52.9	52.9	73.7	
Mathematics	2018	25.6	21.1	23.8	23.3	18.9	30.3	31.2	25.1	20.7	36.7	39.8	35.8	46.6	36.9	44.4	46.2	42.4	
	2022	29.5	29.5	29.6	29.7	31.5	32.6	32.9	33.2	34.1	38.7	43.1	47.2	48.6	53.2	53.6	59.5	73.9	
Science	2018	24.1	19.6	25.9	19.6	20.9	33.5	25.4	29.3	25.0	25.2	38.3	31.7	44.0	39.0	46.5	48.2	47.0	
	2022	22.9	22.9	23.9	21.8	27.6	30.3	22.4	30.6	35.9	24.7	35.1	37.3	44.0	51.8	48.0	54.9	67.4	

Source: Eurydice, based on OECD, PISA 2018 and 2022 databases.

Explanatory notes

Education systems are depicted based on the percentage of low-achieving students in mathematics in 2022 (ascending order). Only education systems participating in this report with data available for PISA 2022 are included.

The percentage of low-achieving students is defined as the percentage of students who score below the baseline level of proficiency (level 2) on the PISA reading, mathematics and/or science scales. This corresponds to not achieving 407.47 points in reading, 420.07 points in mathematics and 409.54 points in science. For more details, see (OECD, 2019, 2023b).

Country-specific note

Spain: No data is published for PISA 2018 in reading, as the comparability of the results cannot be assured due to data showing implausible student-response behaviour.

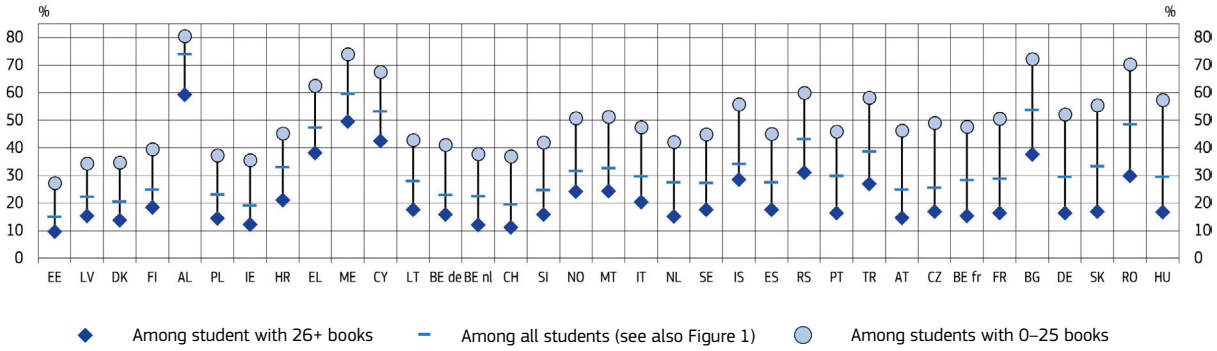
Estonia is the only country where the percentage of low-achieving students remained below the 15 % European target ([12]) in all areas. In addition, Ireland kept the underachievement rate stable and below 15 % in reading. At the same time, the percentage of low-achieving students reaches 50 % in Cyprus, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Albania. The difference between 2018 and 2022 levels of underachievement exceeds 10 percentage points in one or more areas in the Netherlands, Norway, Iceland, Greece, Cyprus, Montenegro and Albania.

Percentages of low-achieving students tend to correlate across subject areas. Thus, within an education system, there are likely to be similar levels of underachievement in reading, mathematics and science. This highlights the importance of designing comprehensive support for students who are falling behind.

While the growing proportion of low-achieving students is a longer-term trend in Europe, school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic seem to have had an additional detrimental effect. This is all the more alarming as underachievement rates increased more substantially among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Figure 2 shows the percentages of low-achieving 15-year-olds in mathematics ([13]), by the number of books at home (0–25 books or 26 or more books) ([14]), in relation to the underachievement rates among all students.

Figure 2: Percentage of low-achieving 15-year-old students in mathematics, by the number of books at home, 2022



	EE	LV	DK	FI	AL	PL	IE	HR	EL	ME	CY	LT	BE de	BE nl	CH	SI	NO	MT
26+ books	9.7	15.4	13.8	18.4	59.2	14.5	12.2	21.1	38.2	49.6	42.5	17.6	16.0	12.1	11.1	15.8	24.3	24.3
0-25 books	27.3	34.4	34.7	39.7	80.6	37.3	35.6	45.3	62.6	74.0	67.7	42.8	41.2	37.8	36.9	42.1	50.8	51.3
Percentage p. difference	17.6	19.0	20.9	21.2	21.4	22.8	23.5	24.1	24.4	24.4	25.2	25.2	25.3	25.8	25.8	26.2	26.5	26.9

	IT	NL	SE	IS	ES	RS	PT	TR	AT	CZ	BE fr	FR	BG	DE	SK	RO	HU	
26+ books	20.5	15.1	17.7	28.4	17.5	31.1	16.3	27.0	14.7	16.9	15.4	16.4	37.6	16.5	16.9	29.8	16.7	
0-25 books	47.5	42.2	44.9	55.8	45.2	60.0	46.0	58.2	46.3	49.1	47.7	50.7	72.3	52.1	55.5	70.3	57.4	
Percentage p. difference	27.1	27.1	27.3	27.4	27.6	28.9	29.7	31.2	31.6	32.1	32.3	34.3	34.7	35.7	38.5	40.5	40.7	

Source: Eurydice, based on OECD, PISA 2022 database.

Explanatory notes

Education systems are depicted in ascending order based on the percentage point differences between underachievement rates among students with 0–25 and 26+ books in mathematics.
The original categories of the number of books at home variable (ST255Q01JA) were transformed so that there were two values only: (1) 0–25 books and (2) 26+ books. Please consult the Statistical tables for the relative size of the two subgroups and for the standard errors.
Differences in the percentages of low achievers between the two subgroups of students are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in all education systems. Percentage point differences were calculated before rounding.

([12]) The renewed strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training for 2021–2030 defines five EU-level targets to be reached by 2030, including one on low-achieving students of basic skills: the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15 % by 2030 (Council Resolution of 19 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021–2030), OJ C 66, 26.2.2021).

([13]) While the figure only refers to mathematics achievement, similar patterns can be found in relation to reading and science competences.

([14]) The number of books at home as reported by students is a common proxy used for socioeconomic status (see, for example, Schütz, Ursprung and Wößmann, 2008). This figure examines differences in the percentages of low achievers among students from lower (maximum of 25 books at home) and higher (26 books or more at home) socioeconomic backgrounds.

In all European education systems, students from households with a maximum of 25 books (considered as students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) have lower results than those with 26 or more books at home. As the chart and table both show, gaps between the underachievement rates of students from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds are between 17 and 41 percentage points. The smallest differences, of lower than 20 percentage points, can be found in Estonia and Latvia, while the differences are largest (above 40 percentage points) in Romania and Hungary.

When comparing these 2022 figures with low achievement gaps in the previous PISA round, in 2018 (see Figure 1.6 in European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a), it becomes clear that differences between students from low and high socioeconomic backgrounds increased substantially in this period. In 2018, no education system had gaps larger than 40 percentage points; and not two, but eleven systems had gaps lower than 20 percentage points. With the exception of Greece and Montenegro, the increase in the underachievement rate in mathematics was bigger among students with fewer books than among their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in all European education systems. This highlights the importance of implementing more inclusive policies, as education systems have become even less equitable than they were before.

Nevertheless, the picture looks slightly less worrying when examining data concerning primary school students from the fourth grade based on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

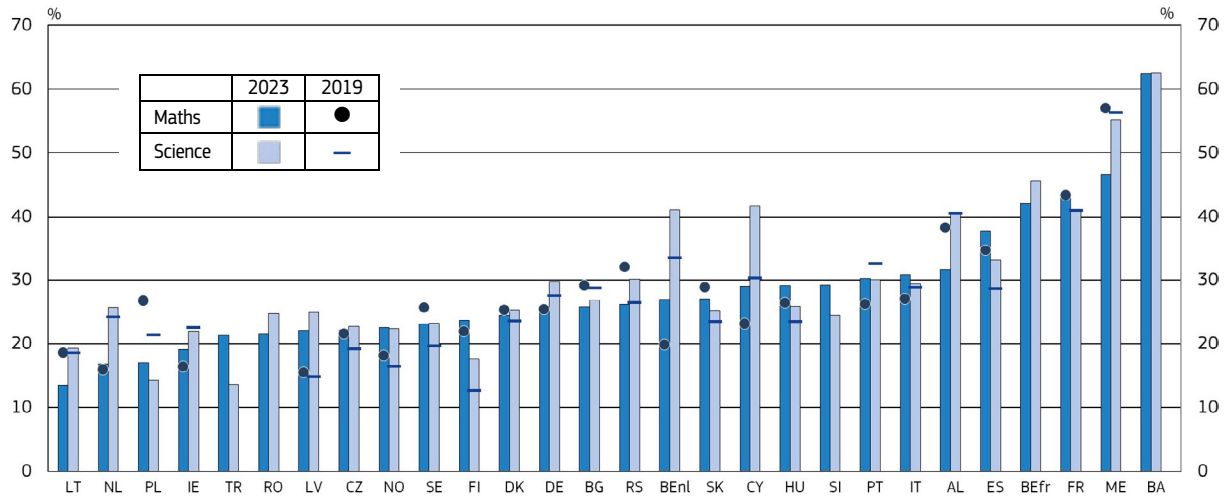
Figure 3 shows the percentage of low-achieving students in mathematics and science in the fourth grade. As the figure depicts, the increasing trend in underachievement rates is much less straightforward in the case of primary school students.

Certainly, low levels of underachievement are still far from reach for most countries at this education level as well, with Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), Cyprus, Albania, France, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina reaching 40 % underachievement rates in one or both subject areas. The percentage of low-achieving students increased considerably in several education systems, especially in Cyprus, Latvia and Belgium (Flemish Community).

At the same time, in around a quarter of education systems with available data, the proportion of low-achieving students decreased in the post-pandemic period (between 2019 and 2023), even in mathematics, in Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Albania and Montenegro. In Poland and Montenegro, the percentage of students not reaching the Intermediate International Benchmark decreased by around 10 percentage points.

Are these positive trends associated with policies aiming to address underachievement? Have educational authorities paid special attention to primary school students after the COVID-19 crisis? The current report makes the first step towards answering these questions. In particular, it explores whether following the COVID-19 pandemic and the results of mentioned international assessment surveys, education authorities took any measures to tackle underachievement. Likewise, it analyses if and what kind of measures were taken at the primary and lower secondary education levels.

Figure 3: Percentage of low-achieving students in mathematics and science in the fourth grade, 2019 and 2023



		LT	NL	PL	IE	TR	RO	LV	CZ	NO	SE	FI	DK	DE	BG
Mathematics	2019	18.6	15.9	26.8	16.4	NA	:	15.5	21.6	18.1	25.6	22.0	25.3	25.4	29.1
	2023	13.5	16.9	17.1	19.1	21.4	21.5	22.0	22.1	22.6	23.1	23.6	24.5	25.1	25.8
Science	2019	18.6	24.3	21.5	22.6	NA	:	14.9	19.3	16.6	19.7	12.7	23.6	27.6	28.8
	2023	19.3	25.7	14.3	21.9	13.6	24.8	25.0	22.7	22.4	23.2	17.7	25.3	29.7	26.8
		RS	**BE nl**	**SK**	**CY**	**HU**	**SI**	**PT**	**IT**	**AL**	**ES**	**BE fr**	**FR**	**ME**	**BA**
Mathematics	2019	32.1	19.9	28.8	23.1	26.4	:	26.2	27.0	38.3	34.6	:	43.3	57.0	NA
	2023	26.2	26.9	27.0	29.1	29.1	29.2	30.2	30.8	31.7	37.8	42.1	43.7	46.6	62.4
Science	2019	26.6	33.5	23.5	30.3	23.5	:	32.7	28.9	40.6	28.7	:	41.1	56.4	NA
	2023	30.1	41.1	25.2	41.8	25.9	24.4	30.1	29.3	40.5	33.1	45.6	40.9	55.2	62.6

Source: Eurydice, based on IEA, TIMSS 2019 and 2023 databases.

Explanatory notes

Education systems are depicted based on the percentage of low-achieving students in mathematics in 2023 (ascending order). Only education systems participating in this report with data available for TIMSS 2023 are included.
The percentage of low-achieving students is defined as the percentage of students not achieving the Intermediate International Benchmark, which is set at a score of 475 points.

Country-specific note

Albania: 2023: Does not satisfy guidelines for sample participation rates.
Bosnia and Herzegovina and **Türkiye**: 2023 data not comparable for measuring trends. Hence, 2019 data is not depicted (shown as NA in the table).

Content and structure of the report

Against this background, this report thus analyses policies aiming to counter underachievement in basic skills (literacy, mathematics and science) that were adopted and/or implemented in the school year 2020/2021 or later and were still in place in 2024/2025. Temporary measures (e.g. related to the immediate management of the COVID-19 crisis) no longer active are excluded from this study.

While the focus is on new policy measures or changes to existing policies that have been adopted/implemented since 2020, it is evident that in all education systems, relevant policy measures were also put in place before 2020. Indeed, policies to tackle underachievement in basic skills and, more generally, enhance inclusion in education and support disadvantaged students, have been extensively reported in several recent Eurydice reports (see especially European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, 2022a, 2023, 2024), which, where relevant, are referenced in this report as background information.

The report consists of seven chapters examining the following topics and policy areas:

1. adoption of recent strategic policy frameworks to enhance basic skills acquisition;
2. changes in the organisation of instruction;
3. curriculum reforms to address underachievement in basic skills;
4. changes in the assessment of learning needs;
5. reinforcing learning support;
6. supporting teachers and educators for basic skills improvement and applying inclusive education practices;
7. involving parents in their children's learning process.

Methodology and data sources

The report relies on qualitative data on policies and measures that have been collected by means of a Eurydice data collection survey.

The Eurydice indicators are based on information derived primarily from national regulations or other official top-level education documents, such as curricula, guidelines or similar steering documents. Where available and relevant, comparative indicators are supplemented by examples of approaches in specific education systems.

The Eurydice data collection covered primary and lower secondary education (ISCED 1 and 2) in public schools. In the case of Belgium, Ireland and the Netherlands, government-dependent private schools were also taken into account.

The data collection focused on policies and measures adopted and/or implemented in the school year 2020/2021 or later, and still in place in 2024/2025. The report covers 37 education systems: the 27 EU Member States ([15]), as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye. All contributors are acknowledged at the end of the report.

([15]) Each of the three Belgian communities (Flemish Community, French Community and German-speaking Community) is considered a separate education system.

Chapter 1: Strategic policy frameworks

Basic skills in literacy, mathematics, and science are essential not only for academic achievement, but also for long-term employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development. Ensuring a strong foundation in these skills is crucial for addressing educational disadvantage and fostering broader societal progress (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2019).

Promoting equitable access to quality education is a core objective of the European Union's strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area (EEA) and beyond (2021–2030) ([16]). Reducing disparities in basic skills acquisition is at the heart of this goal, as persistent gaps in foundational competences undermine social cohesion, economic growth and democratic participation (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2019). Many top-level policy frameworks are aligned with EU-level benchmarks, particularly the goal of reducing the proportion of low-achieving students in international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to below 15 % by 2030. Cross-national evidence indicates that even modest improvements in basic skills can yield significant long-term benefits for economic productivity and citizen well-being (Gust, Hanushek and Wößmann, 2024).

Improving basic skills is strongly associated with improved educational quality and equity. However, persistent disparities in proficiency levels across Europe continue to signal systemic challenges. The Council recommendation on pathways to school success ([17]) encourages Member States to adopt comprehensive national strategies combining inclusive teaching, early intervention and targeted support.

Recent major EU initiatives, such as 'The Union of Skills' communication and the Action Plan on Basic Skills (European Commission, 2025b, 2025c), further emphasise the importance of coordinated action across governance levels to address underachievement. These policy initiatives provide concrete, evidence-based policy guidance to support Member States in reducing learning gaps and strengthening equitable educational outcomes. As recent research underlines, strong governance and policy coherence across education levels are critical to building inclusive, adaptive and sustainable education systems (Nardi, 2023).

Against this policy backdrop, Chapter 1 explores how education systems address underachievement in basic skills through top-level strategic frameworks adopted or revised since the 2020/2021 school year and still in force in the year 2024/2025. The analysis considers both broader frameworks that include basic skills as part of wider reforms and dedicated policy initiatives targeting literacy, numeracy or science learning. Specifically, the chapter explores:

- the scope of top-level policy frameworks adopted across Europe, distinguishing between broader policy frameworks and those specifically targeting basic skills;
- the objectives and policy measures of broader policy frameworks, with attention to the integration of prevention, intervention and compensation approaches;
- dedicated policy initiatives that address specific learners' needs, often focused on literacy, mathematics or learning environments;
- monitoring and evaluation approaches, including measurable targets.

([16]) Council Resolution of 19 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), 2021/C 66/01, (OJ C 66, 26.2.2021).

([17]) Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on pathways to school success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2022/C 469/01, (OJ C 469, 9.12.2022).

Underachievement in basic skills remains a pressing concern, with international evidence indicating deteriorating or stagnant results across Europe. As shown in Figure 1 of the Introduction to this report, mathematics outcomes have declined across all European education systems, while reading literacy and science have either stagnated or deteriorated in most countries. In some cases, the proportion of low achievers has increased by more than 10 percentage points, further widening educational inequalities. These outcomes are highlighted in a range of international assessments, including PISA and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)'s Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which collectively provide a broader picture of learner performance across both primary and secondary education. Their findings underscore persistent socioeconomic disparities, as also reflected in recent European Commission monitoring reports – including the 2022 and 2024 editions of the Education and Training Monitor and the progress report on the EEA, which highlight the need for renewed efforts to reduce disadvantage (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022a, 2022b, 2024a).

In this context, the Council recommendation on pathways to school success ([18]) sets out a whole-system, learner-centred approach to improving school success, encouraging Member States to act across multiple policy areas – from school climate and well-being to basic skills acquisition. It explicitly calls for the development of strategic, long-term frameworks backed by measurable goals, multi-stakeholder collaboration and data-informed evaluation. These messages have been echoed in the 2024 Roadmap for school success developed by the EEA Working Group on Schools, which provides further support for implementing inclusive and targeted education reforms (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2024b).

Policy frameworks analysed in this chapter reflect these principles to varying degrees. Many prioritise the early identification of students at risk of underachievement, through measures such as diagnostic assessments, individualised learning plans and targeted support programmes (OECD, 2021). They also highlight the central role of teachers in addressing learning gaps, with an increasing emphasis on professional development focused on inclusive pedagogy, cultural responsiveness and differentiated instruction (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023).

At the same time, most policy initiatives emphasise the importance of collaborative approaches, involving schools, families, communities, and other education stakeholders. These cross-sectoral partnerships are seen as essential for building resilient education systems capable of addressing both academic and socioeconomic barriers to learning (UNESCO, 2021; Council of the European Union, 2022).

This chapter presents the main strategic policy frameworks reported through the European education systems. While these do not constitute an exhaustive inventory of national policy action, they reflect the principal directions pursued by top-level authorities to tackle underachievement. Some education systems are represented by overarching strategies, while others reported specific policy initiatives with a more focused scope. By combining targeted interventions with system-wide reforms, policymakers aim to establish coherence across governance levels, which may strengthen education systems in addressing future challenges ([19]).

([18]) Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on pathways to school success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2022/C 469/01, (OJ C 469, 9.12.2022).

([19]) Council Resolution of 19 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), 2021/C 66/01, (OJ C 66, 26.2.2021).

1.1. New or revised top-level policy frameworks since 2020/2021

This section provides an overview of the European education systems that have adopted either broader or dedicated policy frameworks, outlining their scope and characteristics. Some education systems have introduced strategic frameworks aimed at reforming the education system more widely, while others have focused on policy initiatives specifically targeting the improvement of basic skills. The diversity of approaches across Europe reflects differences in policy priorities, instructional models (see Chapter 2), curricular structures (see Chapter 3), and assessment practices (see Chapter 4).

Depending on the national context, a strategy may refer to a specific document formally labelled as a 'strategy', or to another type of policy document (e.g. plan, programme) that serves a similar function without necessarily bearing that title. In this report, a strategy is understood as a document issued by top-level authorities that outlines a vision, defines qualitative and/or quantitative objectives, describes implementation processes and funding mechanisms, and provides guidance for action (see Glossary).

Strategies may exist as stand-alone documents or be embedded within broader policy plans, programmes or frameworks. To capture this diversity, education systems were invited to report one or two top-level frameworks or major policy initiatives currently in force that contribute to addressing underachievement in basic skills. Some of these are fully dedicated to improving outcomes in literacy, mathematics or science, while others have a broader scope but include objectives or dedicated sections on basic skills.

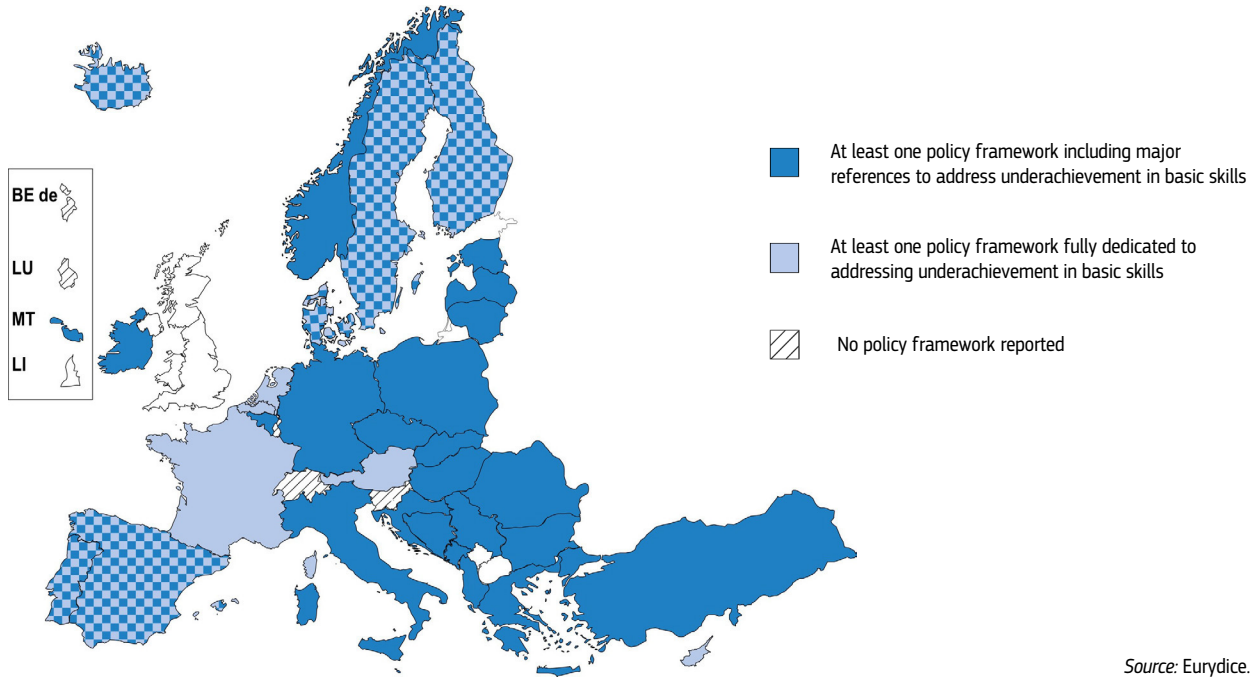
Figure 1.1 shows the number of education systems that reported at least one policy framework falling into either of these categories. In total, 33 systems are covered: 16 report a single policy framework and the other 17 report two. The absence of newly introduced or revised frameworks does not necessarily imply a lack of policy commitment, as some education systems continue to rely on earlier strategies that are still considered relevant.

The majority of education systems report broader policy frameworks in place, which address underachievement in basic skills as part of wider education reforms. Within this group, eight systems – Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Slovakia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – report two such frameworks. These broader frameworks typically extend across entire education systems, addressing a wide range of objectives beyond basic skills such as equity, inclusion and the modernisation of education.

Eleven education systems – the Flemish Community of Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland, Sweden and Iceland – report dedicated frameworks with a specific focus on addressing underachievement in basic skills. Among them, the Flemish Community of Belgium and France each report two dedicated frameworks.

In total, 49 policy frameworks are reported: 36 broader and 13 dedicated. The Annex to the report provides an overview of these policy initiatives. Most frameworks apply to both primary and lower secondary education, with only minor differences between the two levels. This variation reflects national priorities and the stages of education where countries choose to focus their efforts on improving basic skills outcomes.

Figure 1.1: New or revised top-level policy frameworks, ISCED 1 and ISCED 2 levels, 2020/2021–2024/2025



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific notes

Greece, Cyprus and Sweden reported a policy framework focused on ISCED 1.

The following sections provide a more detailed analysis of the reported policy frameworks. Section 1.2 focuses on broader frameworks, followed by Section 1.3 on dedicated frameworks, including their specific objectives and implementation approaches.

1.2. Broader top-level policy frameworks

Nearly three quarters of the education systems have adopted broader policy frameworks aimed at improving equity and quality in schools, while also including measures to address underachievement in basic skills. These frameworks align with the approach recommended by the Council recommendation on pathways to school success ([20]), which emphasises the importance of combining **preventive, intervention and compensation measures** within inclusive education systems.

Depending on their emphasis, the reported frameworks can be grouped into three main categories:

- frameworks with a predominant focus on prevention (the French Community of Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Albania);
- frameworks combining preventive and intervention measures (Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Norway, Serbia);
- frameworks integrating preventive, intervention, and compensation measures (Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Slovakia, Iceland, Montenegro, Türkiye).

In several cases, education systems appear in more than one group, as they reported two frameworks, each placing emphasis on different components.

([20]) Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2022/C 469/01, (OJ C 469, 9.12.2022).

Frameworks prioritising **prevention** typically focus on the early identification of learning difficulties, inclusive curricula and pedagogy, teacher training and collaboration with families and communities. These measures aim to reduce the risk of underachievement before it emerges. For example, in the French Community of Belgium (see country example), a Decree introduced a mandatory student support file (*Dossier d'Accompagnement de l'Élève*, DAccE) to systematically monitor students' progress over time.

In the **French Community of Belgium**, the Decree establishing the DAccE ([21]) introduced a systematic approach to tracking student progress in core areas, notably literacy and mathematics. The DAccE represents a policy initiative that supports the broader objectives of the Pact for Excellence in Teaching. It facilitates the early identification of learning difficulties and supports the development of personalised learning plans. The initiative enables teachers to adapt instruction to individual learners and promotes coordinated intervention strategies. A key feature is its emphasis on inter-professional collaboration, involving teachers, school psychologists and social workers, as well as families. By facilitating the sharing of relevant information, the initiative helps build a coherent support network around each student.

Broadening access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a main preventive measure in several broader strategies aimed at reducing underachievement. In Bulgaria, the 2021–2030 Strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning ([22]) places strong emphasis on expanding ECEC participation, particularly among vulnerable groups, as a means to improve basic skills acquisition and mitigate future learning gaps. Similarly, Estonia's 2021–2035 Education strategy ([23]) promotes inclusive learning pathways from an early age, emphasising the role of ECEC in ensuring equal starting points for all children. The strategy supports early identification of learning needs and calls for stronger cooperation between early childhood settings and schools to ensure smooth transitions and reduce the risk of later underachievement. In both countries, ECEC policies are embedded within wider strategic frameworks that link early intervention to improved outcomes in basic skills during the primary and lower secondary years.

Other strategies in this group prioritise teacher training and the use of evidence-based teaching practices, which are integral to the preventive policy approach. In Poland, the Integrated skills strategy 2030 ([24]) promotes the use of evidence-informed methodologies in basic skills instruction, alongside tools for early identification and targeted teacher training. Albania's 2021–2026 National education strategy ([25]) expands training in competence-based teaching and strengthens monitoring systems for students at risk.

Curriculum reforms are another central component. Estonia's 2021–2035 Education strategy also aims to modernise its curriculum by promoting flexible learning and the use of digital solutions, while Finland's Government programme ([26]) highlights the importance of accessible digital learning environments to strengthen early acquisition of key competences. Similarly, Sweden's STEM Strategy for the period 2025–2035 ([27]) places a strong emphasis on early mastery of basic skills in mathematics as a foundation for future STEM learning. It combines curriculum reform, investment in teacher professional development and national funding for teaching materials, reinforcing the development of basic competences from primary education onwards.

A second group of policy frameworks combines **preventive and intervention measures** to ensure early support alongside targeted assistance for students already experiencing learning difficulties. These strategies often include small group instruction, mentoring and extended learning opportunities.

Ireland's 2024–2033 Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy ([28]) promotes prevention through an expanded early years provision and strengthened

([21]) Decree establishing the student's support file (DAccE) of the French Community of Belgium.

([22]) Bulgaria's 2021–2030 Strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning.

([23]) Estonia's 2021-2035 Education strategy.

([24]) Poland's Integrated skills strategy 2030.

([25]) Albania's Council of Ministers Decision No 621, dated 22 October 2021, approving the National Education Strategy 2021–2026 and its implementation action plan.

([26]) Finland's Government programme – a strong and committed Finland – the Government's vision.

([27]) Sweden's STEM Strategy for the period 2025–2035.

([28]) Ireland's 2024–2033 Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy.

language and numeracy teaching from the primary level. Intervention measures include diagnostic tools, targeted support for low-achieving students and continuing professional development for teachers on inclusive and evidence-based teaching. In the mathematics and science subject areas, Germany's STEM Action plan 2.0 ([29]) includes early promotion of STEM learning, targeted support in mathematics and science and mentoring for students from under-represented backgrounds. The plan aims to close achievement gaps through inclusive pedagogy and hands-on learning. Similarly, in Norway, the 2023-2024 White Paper 'A more practical school – Better learning, motivation and well-being in grades 5–10' ([30]) combines preventive measures to strengthen fundamental skills and students' motivation with interventions such as early identification and targeted support.

In **Slovakia**, the 2023–2030 National action plan of the European Child Guarantee ([31]) also exemplifies this dual approach. It includes preventive measures such as flexible education programmes focusing on the early development of literacy, numeracy and other key competences. In parallel, the plan introduces targeted interventions, including tutoring, mentoring and the establishment of inclusive support teams in schools. These measures are particularly aimed at students from vulnerable backgrounds, including marginalised Roma communities, and are intended to ensure timely and well-coordinated support.

In **Serbia**, the Strategy for the development of education by 2030 ([32]) integrates both preventive and intervention components. On the preventive side, the strategy promotes early identification of learning needs through enhanced diagnostics, curriculum modernisation and improved teacher preparation. Intervention is supported through professional development opportunities that enable teachers to provide differentiated and inclusive instruction. The strategy also encourages cooperation between schools, local authorities and civil-society organisations to strengthen community involvement.

Intervention policies frequently prioritise teacher training and pedagogical support to equip educators with the tools necessary to assist low-achieving students. In Denmark, the Agreement on the future evaluation and assessment system in primary schools ([33]) introduced a national framework for monitoring students' proficiency. This system is designed to identify learning difficulties at an early stage and adapt teaching, accordingly, thereby linking preventive mechanisms with targeted intervention. In Portugal, the 'Learn more now: recover and improve learning' plan ([34]) combines national assessments with targeted student support.

Parental and community involvement also plays a key role in the implementation of preventive and intervention measures. In Czechia, the Strategy for education policy until 2030+ ([35]) promotes collaboration between schools, municipalities and non-governmental organisations to provide both academic support and socio-emotional assistance for low-achieving students. These policies integrate preventive strategies, such as parental engagement and school–community partnerships, with targeted interventions to ensure comprehensive support.

Curriculum adaptation and flexible learning pathways represent another important element of intervention measures. In Greece, the Teaching instructions for the subjects of primary education ([36]) incorporate structured curricular modifications and updated instructional methods to ensure low-achieving students receive personalised learning support. These curriculum-based adjustments function as preventive tools while also serving students in need of remedial assistance.

The above analysed prevention–intervention policy frameworks illustrate how education systems align early identification mechanisms with structured responses, ensuring that students at risk of underachievement receive timely and effective academic support.

([29]) Germany's STEM Action plan 2.0.
([30]) Norway's 2023-2024 White Paper 'A more practical school – Better learning, motivation and well-being in grades 5–10'.
([31]) Slovakia's 2023–2030 National action plan of the European Child Guarantee.
([32]) Strategy for the development of education in Serbia by 2030.
([33]) Denmark's Agreement on the future evaluation and assessment system in primary schools.
([34]) Portugal's Plan 'Learn more now: recover and improve learning'.
([35]) Strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic up to 2030+.
([36]) Greece's 2024-2025 Teaching instructions for the subjects of primary education for the 2024–2025 school year.

An important aspect of the analysis is the third group of policy frameworks, which integrate **prevention, intervention and compensation** measures to provide a comprehensive approach to underachievement. These frameworks aim to ensure that education systems not only prevent learning gaps but also intervene effectively and offer sustained support to students who have fallen behind. A defining characteristic of these approaches is their equity-driven focus, acknowledging that academic underachievement is often linked to external factors such as poverty, limited access to resources and family circumstances. Compensation measures provide long-term support to students at risk of disengagement, supporting their continued participation in education.

Fifteen education systems have reported integrated approaches combining prevention, intervention and compensation measures. Among these, some adopt a structured model that combines diagnostic assessment with targeted funding and personalised support mechanisms. Czechia, Germany and Spain exemplify this model (see country examples).

In **Czechia**, the 2023–2027 Long-term plan for education and the development of the education system ([37]) integrates all three types of measures to improve educational outcomes and reduce disparities. Preventive actions include targeted funding for high-need schools, infrastructure improvement, enhanced digital resources and teacher training. Learning difficulties are addressed through early identification and structured remedial programmes in literacy and mathematics. To support equity of access, the plan also provides free school meals, tutoring and transport subsidies. Inclusive education is further strengthened through individual learning plans, counselling and support from specialist staff. Community partnerships complement school-based support through mentoring, tutoring and enrichment activities.

In **Germany**, the *Startchancen* programme ([38]) prioritises prevention by identifying disadvantaged schools and allocating additional resources to break the link between educational success and social background, ensure greater equality of opportunity and increase the number of students who meet the minimum standards in mathematics and German. A number of measures are included to achieve the objectives of the programme. These range from an investment programme for a modern and conducive learning environment to needs-based intervention measures for school and teaching development, and personnel intervention measures to strengthen multi-professional teams at schools. More specifically, intervention measures include – among other things – targeted teacher training, tutoring and personalised learning approaches. At the compensation level, the schools receive additional staff and specialists to provide socio-emotional support to students, such as psychologists and outreach workers. The holistic approach also involves parents in supporting their children's learning and working with stakeholders in the schools' communities.

In **Spain**, the Programme for orientation, progress, and educational enrichment (PROA+) ([39]) targets schools at ISCED levels 1 and 2, aiming to improve learning outcomes and reduce underachievement in basic skills, particularly among vulnerable students. The programme combines preventive measures such as identifying learning barriers and monitoring individual needs, with intervention strategies including academic reinforcement in literacy and mathematics, individual tutoring and inclusive teaching support. It also promotes whole-school improvement through structured planning and teacher training. Schools implement the programme through a national catalogue of 'leverage activities' aligned with five strategic lines, focusing on equity, teaching quality, student engagement and inclusive learning environments.

Ireland follows a similar model through the redefined 'Delivering equality of opportunity in schools' (DEIS) programme ([40]), which integrates preventive measures such as a revised needs-based targeting approach, intervention through literacy and numeracy support and compensation via additional funding and professional development for teachers. Montenegro's 2025–2035 Education reform strategy ([41]) likewise reflects this integrated model. It links curriculum reform and inclusive teaching with broader systemic objectives such as improved assessment practices, equity in learning outcomes and access to early education. The strategy places particular emphasis on preventing underachievement through curriculum renewal and teacher support, while also introducing intervention and compensation measures to assist disadvantaged learners.

Another group of countries, including Croatia and Italy (see country examples), has prioritised territorial equity and structural inclusion, directing national resources to reduce regional disparities and support foundational competences.

([37]) Long-term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic 2023-2027.

([38]) Germany's *Startchancen* programme.

([39]) Spain's Programme for orientation, progress, and educational enrichment (PROA+).

([40]) Ireland's Delivering equality of opportunity in schools (DEIS) programme (redefined).

([41]) Montenegro's 2025–2035 Education reform strategy.

In **Croatia**, the National plan for the development of the education system until 2027 ([42]) addresses underachievement and promotes inclusion through the use of formative assessment, targeted support and cooperation between general and specialised education staff. Additional school resources, including assistive technologies, are provided, while enhanced collaboration with parents and local communities aims to reduce early school leaving and improve students' outcomes.

In **Italy**, the 2021–2027 'South agenda' ([43]) and 'North agenda' ([44]), part of the 2021–2027 National programme 'School and Skills' ([45]), channel additional resources to underperforming schools in order to reduce educational inequalities. The 'South agenda' focuses on tackling territorial disparities, early school leaving and educational poverty, through actions in basic skills development, inclusive education and infrastructure investment. The 'North agenda' places greater emphasis on digital inclusion, modern learning environments and teacher professional development. Both programmes combine financial aid, targeted academic support and pedagogical innovation to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. In addition, a specific investment line under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) supports tailored interventions to strengthen students' basic skills and address early school leaving, with resources allocated to underperforming schools in disadvantaged areas.

Bulgaria and Slovakia have implemented similar equity-focused strategies targeting vulnerable groups. Bulgaria's 2021–2030 National strategy for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma ([46]) combines the expansion of early childhood education with teacher training in culturally responsive practices and close cooperation with Roma families. Slovakia's 2021–2028 Strategy for youth ([47]) addresses underachievement by supporting the acquisition of key competences among disadvantaged learners, including migrants and students with disabilities. Measures include targeted interventions and tailored support.

Several other countries have adopted integrated frameworks with a focus on long-term structural reform. In Latvia, the 2021–2027 Guidelines for the development of education: future skills for future society ([48]) include mentorship programmes and financial assistance to reduce socioeconomic inequalities, alongside second-chance education opportunities. In Lithuania, the 2021–2030 Education development programme ([49]) combines early diagnostics and teacher training with collaborative teaching practices and the introduction of modern teaching methodologies, particularly in mathematics and science. Malta's 2024–2030 National education strategy ([50]) focuses on diagnostic assessment and personalised intervention to address gaps in literacy and numeracy, while ensuring continued support for students experiencing persistent learning difficulties.

Another strand of integrated approaches combines inclusive pedagogy with investment in infrastructure. Hungary's 2021–2030 Public education strategy ([51]) addresses underperformance and early school leaving while also promoting the development of digital competences and inclusive education. It promotes early childhood education and inclusive teaching methods as preventive measures, while compensation is delivered through infrastructure development and support for marginalised populations, including ethnic minorities. Similarly, in Türkiye, the 2024–2028 Strategic plan of the Ministry of National Education ([52]) adopts an integrated approach to addressing underachievement in basic skills. The strategy combines preventive, intervention and compensation measures, including early identification of learning gaps, targeted support for disadvantaged students and strengthened professional development for teachers. The plan also emphasises the use of inclusive teaching practices and digital learning tools to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes across the school system.

A comparable focus on equity and tailored support can also be found in Iceland, where the Education policy

([42]) Croatia's National plan for the development of the education system until 2027.
([43]) Italy's 2021-2027 'South agenda' national programme.
([44]) Italy's 2021-2027 'North agenda' national programme.
([45]) Italy's 2021–2027 National programme 'School and Skills'.
([46]) Bulgaria's 2021–2030 National strategy for equality, inclusion, and participation of Roma.
([47]) Slovakia's 2021–2028 Strategy for youth.
([48]) Latvia's Educational development guidelines for 2021-2027 'Future skills for the future to the public'.
([49]) Resolution No 1016 of 01/12/2021 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the approval of the 2021-2030 Education development programme.
([50]) Malta's 'Visioning the future by transforming education: 2024-2030 National education strategy.
([51]) Hungary's 2021-2030 Public education strategy.
([52]) Türkiye's 2024–2028 Strategic plan of the Ministry of National Education.

2030 – first action plan ([53]) links early identification and support for students with learning difficulties to intervention measures such as differentiated instruction and tailored assessment tools. Compensation measures include financial and material assistance to address barriers faced by disadvantaged students.

While the structure and emphasis of integrated frameworks vary, a common feature is the combination of system-level strategies with targeted measures implemented at the school or local level. Many approaches link early identification and intervention with compensation support aimed at addressing socioeconomic disadvantage. In several cases, national policies are designed to work in coordination with local initiatives, indicating a move towards multi-level responses. This trend reflects efforts to address both academic and structural dimensions of underachievement through coordinated policy action.

The analysis also indicates a focus on early childhood education as a preventive measure to reduce the emergence of learning difficulties later in schooling. Early identification mechanisms are frequently combined with intervention strategies to prevent the persistence of learning gaps. Teacher training and competence-based pedagogies are prioritised to enhance instructional quality, particularly in diverse and inclusive classroom settings. Many policy frameworks also promote stronger cooperation between schools, families and community actors, underlining the role of local engagement in supporting students' progress.

Equity-related measures are present across many policy frameworks. Financial assistance, investment in school infrastructure and targeted remedial support are widely used to address socioeconomic barriers to learning. These trends suggest that underachievement is increasingly addressed not only through educational interventions but also through broader efforts to promote equal access to learning opportunities.

The following Section 1.3 examines dedicated strategies and policy initiatives aimed at improving the acquisition of basic skills.

1.3. Dedicated top-level policy frameworks

Eleven education systems – the Flemish Community of Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland, Sweden and Iceland – reported the adoption and implementation of 13 strategic policy frameworks specifically dedicated to reducing underachievement in basic skills. The Flemish Community of Belgium and France each reported two dedicated frameworks, while the remaining systems reported one.

Unlike broader reforms aimed at systemic change, these dedicated policy initiatives focus on short- to medium-term outcomes for specific groups or regions. They apply a variety of approaches, including literacy programmes that foster a reading culture, numeracy interventions providing intensive remedial support and policies aimed at addressing socioeconomic disparities. By responding to immediate learning needs, these strategies seek to improve basic skills outcomes and strengthen the foundational competences necessary for students' future academic progress.

The policy frameworks examined can be broadly grouped according to their principal focus areas:

- frameworks addressing literacy that foster a culture of reading;
- frameworks targeting underachievement in mathematics;
- frameworks emphasising the modernisation of learning environments.

Several dedicated initiatives prioritise **literacy** development in response to stagnating or declining reading results. In many cases, they involve partnerships with libraries, municipalities, teacher training providers and cultural institutions.

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, the Reading action plan ([54]) builds a coordinated network across schools and public libraries, while the Language action

([53]) Iceland's Education policy 2030 – first action plan.

([54]) Reading action plan of the Flemish Community of Belgium.

plan ([55]) enhances early language development and supports language-sensitive teaching. Similarly, Austria's Reading programme (see country example) integrates competence grids, reading ambassadors and national reading assessments into literacy instruction. These initiatives aim to address systemic challenges in literacy and ensure that all students, regardless of background, achieve reading proficiency.

In **Austria**, the National strategy to address underachievement in literacy through the Reading programme ([56]), introduced in the 2023/2024 school year, is a core element of its education policy. The initiative enhances reading skills through competence-based learning and structured support measures. A key component is the introduction of competence grids, outlining the literacy skills students should master at each stage and providing clear benchmarks for teachers and learners alike. National reading assessments track progress and enable early identification of difficulties, facilitating timely intervention. A distinctive feature is the use of reading ambassadors – public figures who visit schools to inspire students and promote reading as a lifelong habit. Schools demonstrating excellence receive a 'reading quality seal' in recognition of their work. The programme also incorporates digital literacy resources to support reading comprehension, particularly benefiting students who struggle with conventional methods.

Cyprus's Functional literacy remedial teaching programme ([57]) focuses on early detection of reading difficulties in primary education and combines specialised instruction, teacher training and parental involvement. Finland's 2030 National literacy strategy ([58]) promotes lifelong literacy development through a broad network of municipal and community-based actors. Iceland's Language action plan ([59]) supports school libraries, the provision of digital reading tools and multilingual resources. Across these frameworks, the use of benchmarks, early screening and community involvement is a common feature, with strategies aimed particularly at improving reading outcomes among low-achieving or disadvantaged learners.

A second group of policy frameworks focuses on improving **mathematics** skills through remedial support, teacher training and adapted instruction. Denmark's Quality programme for primary schools (see country example) is an example of targeted support for students experiencing difficulties in mathematics and reading.

In **Denmark**, the Quality programme for primary schools ([60]) targets the lowest-performing 10 % of students, particularly in Danish and mathematics. A central component is targeted funding, with DKK 500 million (approximately EUR 67 million) allocated annually based on school-level performance data. Schools have the freedom to organize the initiative, including implementing tailored learning strategies, remedial teaching and small group sessions, allowing for flexible, locally adapted interventions. The programme also enhances teacher professional development, providing training in evidence-based approaches to literacy and mathematics instruction. Additional resources are directed to schools with higher numbers of low-achieving students, including funding for extra staff and specialised teachers. Municipal authorities are responsible for implementation, monitoring progress and ensuring accountability.

Spain's Territorial cooperation programmes for strengthening mathematical and reading competences ([61]) similarly provide additional instructional time, external advisory teams and coordination mechanisms to promote evidence-informed practice. In France, the Action plan 'Shock of knowledge to raise school standards' ([62]) includes additional support and small group mathematics instruction for lower secondary students. Portugal's Learning monitoring tests for 4th and 6th grades ([63]) form part of a national digital assessment strategy that supports the identification of learning gaps and

([55]) Language action plan / The School year of Dutch of the Flemish Community of Belgium.

([56]) Austria's Reading programme.

([57]) Cyprus's Functional literacy remedial teaching programme.

([58]) Finland's 2030 national literacy strategy.

([59]) Parliamentary Resolution on an action plan for the Icelandic language for the years 2024–2026.

([60]) Denmark's Quality programme for primary schools.

([61]) Resolution of 2024, from the Secretary of State for Education, publishing the Agreement from the Sectoral Conference on Education of July 30, 2024, which approves the proposal for territorial distribution and criteria for allocating credits managed by autonomous communities aimed at the Territorial Cooperation Programme for Strengthening Mathematical Competence for the 2024 budgetary exercise and Resolution of 2024, from the Secretary of State for Education, publishing the Agreement from the Sectoral Conference on Education of July 30, 2024, which approves the proposal for territorial distribution and criteria for allocating credits managed by autonomous communities aimed at the Territorial Cooperation Programme for Strengthening Reading Competence for the 2024 budgetary exercise.

([62]) France's Action plan 'Shock of knowledge to raise school standards'.

([63]) Portugal's Learning monitoring tests for 4th and 6th grades.

informs subsequent instructional and mentoring support, including in numeracy.

A third group of policy frameworks promote the **modernisation of learning environments** through curriculum reform, digital tools and cross-curricular teaching. In France, the *Plan français* ([64]) introduces curriculum reforms and deploys 'French referents' – trained mentors who support teachers in delivering updated literacy instruction. In the Netherlands, the Masterplan for basic skills (see country example) combines reading and writing skills, mathematics, digital literacy and citizenship education. Sweden's Language and mathematics strengthening efforts ([65]) ensure that both areas remain central within the curriculum while equipping teachers with updated pedagogical methods.

In **the Netherlands**, the Masterplan for basic skills ([66]) seeks to improve students' outcomes in reading, mathematics, digital literacy and citizenship. The strategy includes curriculum reform, updates to core education standards and financial support via the 'Improving basic skills' grant scheme. Schools are supported to implement evidence-informed teaching practices and receive funding for teacher training. The initiative also fosters collaboration between schools, libraries and childcare centres to support literacy-rich environments. The effectiveness of these interventions is monitored annually.

Across the analysed policy frameworks, literacy and mathematics are the most common focus areas. Policy measures often revolve around teacher training, targeted assessment and remedial instruction. Literacy strategies frequently involve community partnerships, while numeracy programmes favour small group formats and additional learning time. Efforts to modernise learning are shaped by digitalisation and a shift towards competence-based teaching. While some frameworks refer to digital technologies often developed to support students at risk of underachievement, these measures are typically presented in the context of broader innovation or curriculum reform. At the same time, recent policy discussions at the European level underline the importance of balancing digital innovation with considerations related to wellbeing and effective pedagogy.

It is noteworthy that science, while recognised as a basic skill in many contexts, is not explicitly prioritised in the dedicated strategies reviewed. Unlike literacy and numeracy, which are commonly the subject of early intervention policies, science appears to be addressed within broader educational frameworks rather than through the analysed dedicated strategies.

1.4. Monitoring and evaluation of top-level policy frameworks

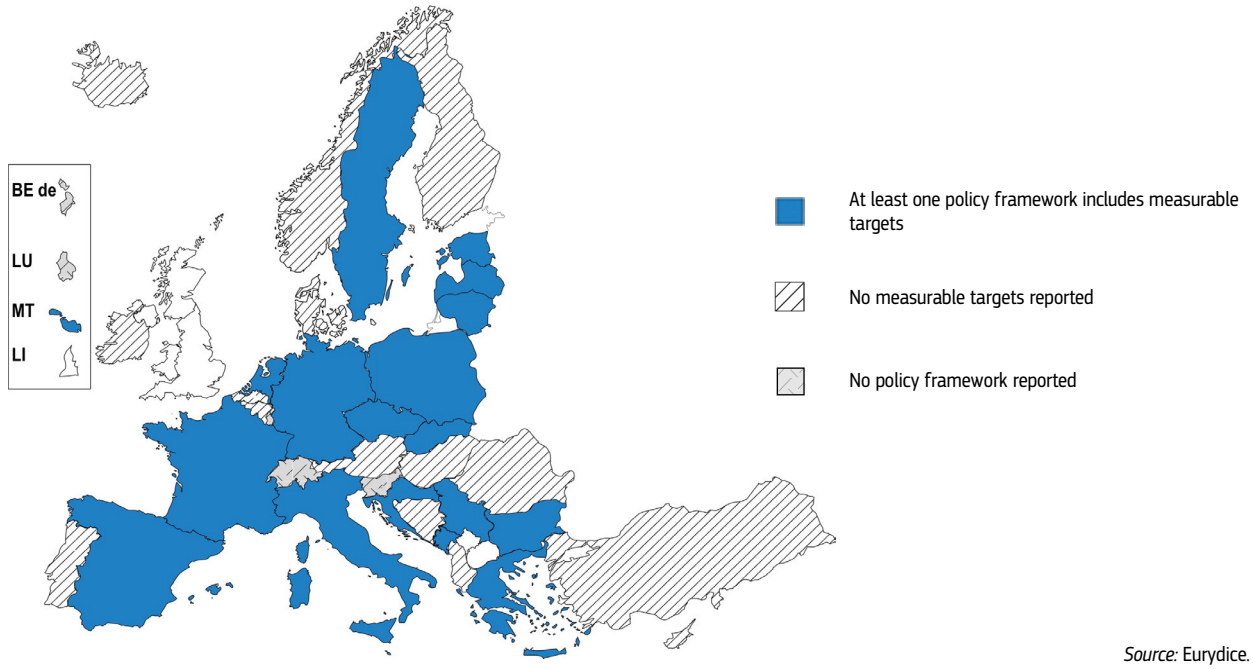
Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential to assess the implementation and effectiveness of top-level frameworks addressing underachievement in basic skills. Building on the policy frameworks presented in the previous sections, this section explores how education systems set targets, measure progress and use evidence to inform policy development.

Education systems reported whether their policy frameworks include measurable targets related to basic skills and described how these are monitored and evaluated. A distinction is drawn between quantitative objectives – such as reducing the share of low-achieving students – and broader monitoring approaches tracking policy implementation and progress.

Figure 1.2 provides an overview of the presence of measurable targets in the newly adopted or revised top-level policy frameworks for basic skills. Eighteen education systems report at least one policy framework that sets measurable targets for reducing underachievement in basic skills. These targets are frequently aligned with international benchmarks, such as PISA or PIRLS, and typically aim to decrease the proportion of students performing below basic proficiency levels.

([64]) France's *Plan français*.
([65]) Sweden's language and mathematics strengthening efforts.
([66]) The Netherlands' Masterplan for basic skills.

Figure 1.2: New or revised policy frameworks with measurable target(s) addressing underachievement in basic skills



Source: Eurydice.

Examples include Bulgaria's 2021–2030 Strategic framework for education, which sets the goal of halving the proportion of students with low performance in literacy and mathematics by 2030, alongside a target to train 90 % of teachers in digital competences. Germany's *Startchancen* programme similarly includes a target to reduce low achievement in core subjects. Among other things, the programme relies on individual diagnostics as well as scientific support and evaluation of the programme.

Serbia's Strategy for the development of education by 2030 defines indicators based on international large-scale assessments (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS), covering both average performance and the proportion of students below basic proficiency. Montenegro's 2025–2035 Education reform strategy includes measurable indicators in PISA domains and implementation targets for key areas such as curriculum development, teacher training and digital infrastructure. Ireland's 2024–2033 Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy sets out clear targets, monitored through national assessments and milestone reviews. In parallel, the 'Delivering equality of opportunity in schools' (DEIS) programme is monitored using socioeconomic indicators, complementing the broader goals of the national strategy.

Some education systems adopt region-specific targets. Spain's Territorial cooperation programmes focus on improving outcomes in the lowest performing 15 % of schools. Italy's South agenda and North agenda programmes, under the 2021–2027 National Plan for the European Social Fund Plus, set region-specific dropout reduction targets. Monitoring data indicate that Italy has already reached the European NRRP early school leaving target ahead of schedule ([67]).

Across Europe, both international and national assessment data are employed to monitor progress in basic skills. For example, Denmark's National quality programme mandates annual assessments in Danish and mathematics, while Lithuania's Strategy 'Lithuania 2050' uses PISA benchmarks to define targets – for instance, no more than 15 % of students below proficiency by 2050 ([68]). Similarly, Sweden's 2025–2035 STEM Strategy aims for at least 15 % of students to reach Level 5 or above in PISA

([67]) Italy's 2021–2027 National Plan for the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), see specific objective ESO4.6.

([68]) State progress strategy 'Lithuania's vision for the future 'Lithuania 2050'', page 80, Indicator No 16.

mathematics by 2033. National assessments and international indicators are used to monitor progress toward this goal.

France monitors its *Plan français* through national assessments, targeting 63 % reading fluency by the end of grade 6. Estonia and Croatia use PISA indicators to inform strategic adjustments. Estonia's 2021–2035 Education strategy leverages real-time data analytics to reduce the share of low-achieving students, particularly in literacy and mathematics. Croatia's 2027 National education plan is aligned with OECD benchmarks, aiming to raise performance to the OECD average through reforms in teaching and assessment.

Equity considerations are embedded in some monitoring frameworks. Finland's Literacy strategy tracks reductions in reading inequality via digital tools. Qualitative monitoring approaches are also present in some cases. In the French Community of Belgium, the Decree establishing the DAccE enables continuous documentation of individual learning progress, supporting tailored intervention.

While nearly half of education systems report having frameworks with defined targets, only a small number have implemented structured impact evaluations.

Bulgaria's 2021–2030 National strategy for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma includes a monitoring report on outreach and support for over 40 000 students, though it does not assess effectiveness ([69]). Czechia reviewed its Strategy 2030+ using PISA and PIRLS, noting an increase in high-achieving readers despite other indicators remaining stable ([70]).

Spain includes evaluation components in both its 'PROA+' and the Programme for strengthening mathematical and reading competences, requiring participating schools to submit indicators and progress reports to regional and national authorities. A national synthesis report is under preparation, although most available data still focus on implementation rather than providing evidence of policy impact.

France employs a mixed-methods evaluation approach to assess the impact of the *Plan français* together with the *Plan mathématiques*. In 2023, national surveys collected both quantitative and qualitative data from teachers, trainers and local education authorities ([71]). Early findings indicate positive changes in teaching practices and students' performance.

Croatia uses PISA 2022 to assess the impact of its National education plan, which shows improved results in science and stable or modest progress in reading ([72]). However, a dedicated impact study has not yet been published. Cyprus reported using quantitative evaluation to assess its national literacy intervention ([73]). Around half of participating schools demonstrated improved outcomes and a reduced risk of underachievement. However, the evaluation remains descriptive and does not yet constitute a comprehensive impact assessment.

Across Europe, the alignment between monitoring mechanisms and strategic goals is increasing. While many education systems have established data collection frameworks, their integration with broader policy goals varies. Several systems – Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Ireland and Croatia – have established quantitative targets linked to international indicators. Others, such as Spain and France, rely more on national benchmarks and structured intervention plans. In some cases, comprehensive monitoring exists without clearly defined numerical targets, with systems opting instead for qualitative approaches and stakeholder input.

At the same time, structured evaluations of policy impact remain limited. Many existing evaluations concentrate on implementation processes or participation rates rather than learning outcomes. As strategic frameworks mature, education systems may be better equipped to evaluate the causal effects of policy interventions and enhance the evidence base for future reforms.

([69]) Administrative Monitoring Report on the implementation in 2022 of 2021–2030 National strategy for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma.

([70]) Monitoring Framework of the Strategy for education policy of the Czech Republic 2030 – Evaluation.

([71]) Summary of the survey on the Mathematics and French Plans (2023).

([72]) Report on the implementation of the Croatian National education development plan for the period until 2027.

([73]) Summary of the main results of Cyprus's Functional literacy programme per school year.

1.5. Summary

Addressing underachievement in basic skills remains a key policy priority across European education systems. While progress has been observed, ongoing challenges suggest that further refinement of structured policies with measurable targets may contribute to ensuring equitable access to quality education and effective interventions.

The findings in this chapter show that the majority of the education systems have adopted at least one top-level strategic policy framework aimed at improving basic skills outcomes. Broader policy frameworks and dedicated policy initiatives represent complementary approaches. While broader frameworks align education systems with long-term objectives, dedicated policy initiatives are often designed to address more immediate learning deficits among specific groups. By combining these approaches, education systems seek to establish more inclusive and effective pathways for all learners.

Policy frameworks integrate prevention, intervention and compensation measures to varying degrees. Prevention measures focus on early identification of learning difficulties and support for inclusive teaching. Intervention frameworks provide targeted instruction, mentoring and adapted learning. Compensation aims to address socioeconomic barriers and promote continued engagement in education. Effective integration of these components may enable timely identification of learning needs, personalised responses and a sustained re-engagement with learning. The success of these measures also depends on strong monitoring mechanisms, high-quality teacher training and inter-sectoral cooperation. Many systems have introduced professional development programmes to equip teachers with the skills needed to support students at risk of underachievement.

Dedicated policy frameworks that address literacy, mathematics and socioeconomic inequalities demonstrate the importance of context-specific responses. Literacy-related policy initiatives often focus on fostering a reading culture and building literacy partnerships, while mathematics initiatives tend to include small group instruction and extended learning time. Science as a subject area, however, appears to receive comparatively less attention in dedicated initiatives, which may suggest an opportunity for further policy development in this area.

Efforts to modernise learning environments, enhance curriculum relevance and promote digital inclusion are common across policy frameworks. Many systems also emphasise collaboration between schools, families and external stakeholders, recognising the role of community-based support in addressing learning gaps.

A number of policy frameworks include explicit quantitative targets aligned with EU benchmarks, particularly the goal of reducing the proportion of low-achieving students in international assessments such as PISA and PIRLS to below 15 % by 2030. These objectives indicate a shift toward more outcome-driven policy development. However, impact evaluations remain limited. Strengthening evaluation practices may enhance accountability, support policy learning and ensure that interventions remain responsive to emerging needs. As strategies evolve, reinforcing the link between policy design, implementation and impact assessment will be essential to sustaining progress in tackling underachievement in basic skills.

Chapter 2: Organisation of instruction

This chapter examines one of the fundamental attributes of students' educational experience: the organisation of instruction. In this report, this topic is analysed by looking primarily at:

- regulations on the amount and flexibility of instruction time available to students dedicated to basic skills;
- regulations on the length of the total amount of instruction time per day, or the length of the formal school day;
- regulations and recommendations on the grouping of students for educational experience and instruction.

The amount of instruction time available to students is an important factor in their learning process. Existing evidence suggests that the quality of instruction and the time available for learning can have a positive effect on student achievement (Lavy, 2015; Andersen, Humlum and Nandrup, 2016; European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a). Research has also shown how the increase in the amount of instruction time allocated to a specific discipline can help to raise students' interest levels in that subject, and subsequently improve performance (Traphagen, 2011; Blank, 2013; Jensen, 2013). The correlation between instruction time and performance is not, however, unequivocal as other important elements must be factored into the equation; these include the quality of instruction and the time available for learning outside school. The positive relationship between increased instruction time and student achievement is, in effect, more apparent when the increase is accompanied by support measures provided to low-achieving students (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a). Some evidence also points towards a 'ceiling effect', which means that there are limits to the effective increase of instruction time (Yeşil Dağlı, 2019).

Besides the organisation of time between the different subjects, the organisation of students' overall time spent in school has also received increasing attention in recent years. A concept gaining ground is that of 'all-day schools', which refers to the availability of longer school days for students. The aim of all-day schools is to provide an enriching learning environment to all students during a full day or a longer school day whereas in 'half-day' schools, access to learning activities outside of school hours often depends on family circumstances and resources. Research projects have been focusing on the impact of all-day schools especially in Germany, where they were introduced in the early 2000s. However, research is somewhat inconclusive regarding the overall impact of all-day schools. While some studies found small positive effects of attending all-day schools on students' achievement (Schuepbach, 2015; Seidlitz and Zierow, 2022), analysing the impact of this system on educational inequalities produced mixed results (Fischer, Theis and Zücher, 2014; Seidlitz and Zierow, 2022).

In addition to time, an important organisational element of school instruction concerns the grouping of students. An important topic in this regard relates to the effects of class size on student achievement. Research on class size also points to different directions (Leuven and Oosterbeek, 2018). Some argue that reducing class size has no effect on student achievement (Filges, Sonne-Schmidt and Nielsen, 2018), or has only short-term positive effects (Bressoux, Lima and Monseur, 2019). At the same time, other research concludes that lowering the student/teacher ratio, thus increasing educational spending per student, has positive effects on student achievement in the long run, and can have longer-term benefits even reaching into adulthood (Fredriksson, Öckert and Oosterbeek, 2011; Jackson, Johnson and Persico, 2016; Bouguen, Grenet and Gurgand, 2017).

However, the grouping of students can also be done in a flexible, temporary manner, which might render traditional notions of class size obsolete (Leuven and Oosterbeek, 2018). An important concept in this regard

is differentiated instruction – that is, when teachers adjust their lessons to all students' learning needs. When differentiated instruction is applied, students with diverse needs are not separated into different settings or classes, but their grouping is adapted to their learning level and to the given situation or subject. Evaluations of differentiated instruction are generally positive concerning its impact on students' overall achievement levels and on the competences of both low- and high-achieving students (Valiandes, 2015; Bal, 2016; Ziernwald, Hillmayr and Holzberger, 2022; Groenewald *et al.*, 2024). Hence, this chapter will also discuss related reforms as the last topic related to the organisation of instruction.

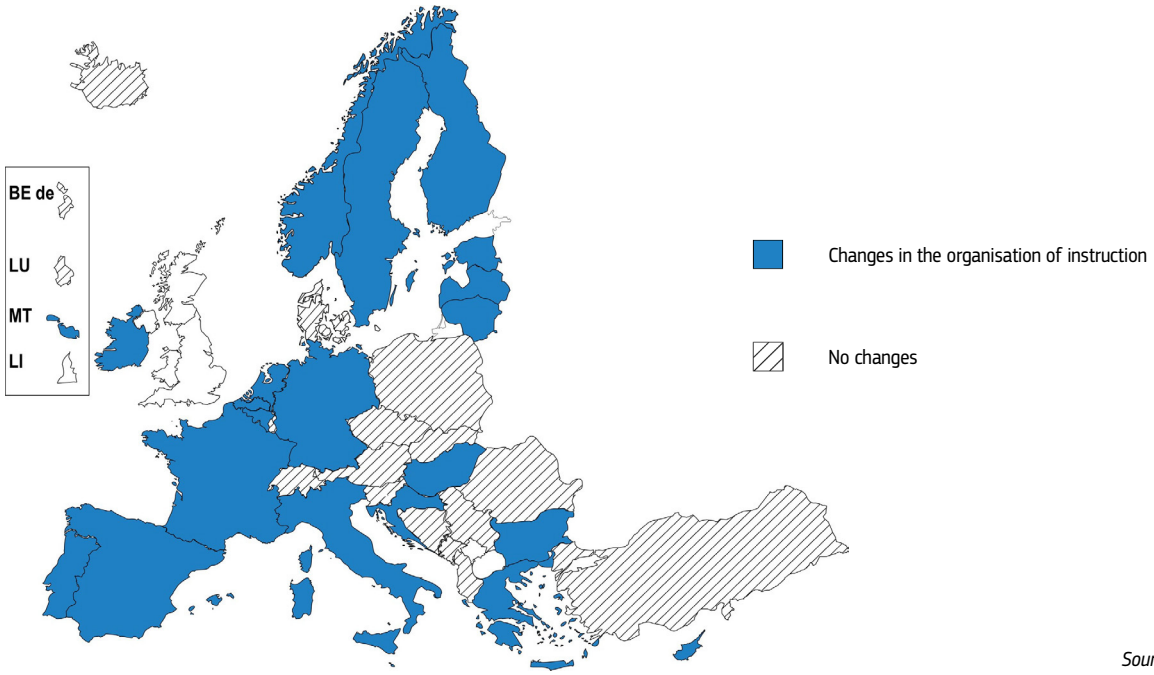
2.1. Policy changes since 2020/2021

Against this background, this chapter examines policy changes with regard to the organisation of instruction since the 2020/2021 school year. It focuses on changes in top-level regulations, recommendations and guidelines that were still in place in the year 2024/2025.

Figure 2.1 summarises the extent of changes in this period. As the figure depicts, changes in the organisation of instruction took place in the majority of education systems (21). Figure 2.2 further specifies the nature of these changes, by the themes discussed in the introduction of this chapter: instruction time, the organisation of the school day, class size and differentiated instruction. The last category of the figure refers to a case of school autonomy: when top-level funding aims to ensure that the reorganisation of instruction is possible, but schools and/or local authorities have autonomy in deciding exactly how.

As shown in Figure 2.2, the most common changes in the organisation of instruction in the analysed period concerned instruction time: the amount and flexibility of the time that can or should be devoted to teaching subjects linked to basic skills.

Figure 2.1: Changes in the organisation of instruction between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025, ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific notes

Bulgaria: changes only concern ISCED 2.
Ireland, Greece and **Malta**: changes only concern ISCED 1.

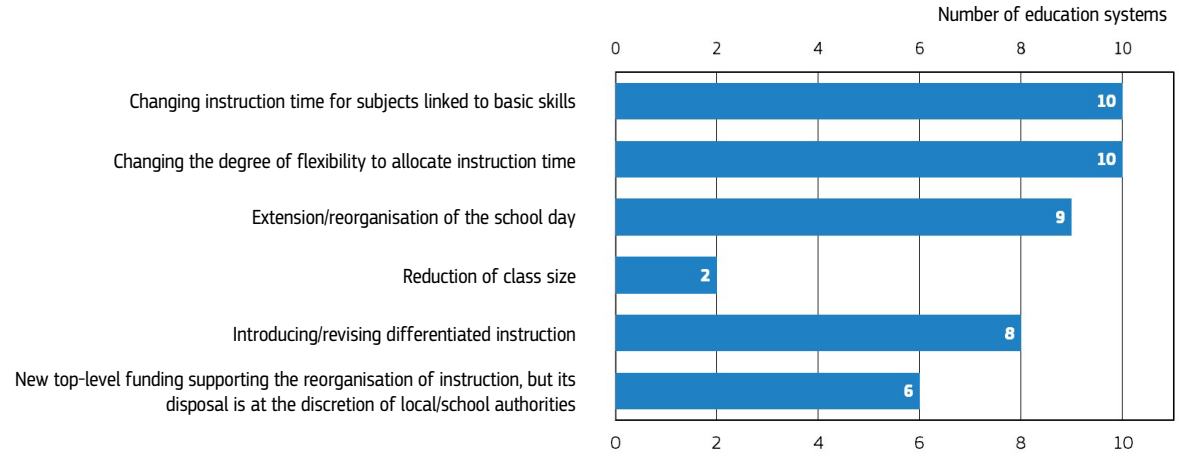
Such changes took place in 16 education systems overall; six education systems changed the amount of instruction time and six changed the degree of flexibility of time allocation, while four education systems have implemented both types of change at the same time (the figure refers to changes in the two categories separately). Regulations on the length of the total amount of instruction time per day, or the length of the formal school day, changed in nine education systems.

Changes related to defining the class size or the students/teacher ratio were adopted in only two education systems, while regulations or recommendations concerning differentiated instruction were newly adopted and/or implemented in eight.

Six education systems introduced new funding frameworks supporting the overall goal of improving basic skills, giving autonomy to schools for designing the most appropriate measures. These programmes include the Language Action Plan in the Flemish Community of Belgium, the *Startchancen* programme ([74]) in Germany, the 'Our school, let's create it together' programme ([75]) in France, the Masterplan on basic skills ([76]) in the Netherlands, the fourth generation of the Programme for Priority Intervention Educational Areas (TEIP4) ([77]) targeting disadvantaged schools in Portugal, and special government grants for measures promoting equality and non-discrimination in education for 2024–2027 in Finland ([78]) – where this grant can be used to hire co-teachers, divide teaching groups or organise split lessons.

Most changes concern both primary and lower secondary education. While there are slightly more reforms in primary education, there are only a few differences between the two levels. These differences will be discussed related to the detailed measures. Similarly, differences between the areas of basic skills (reading, mathematics and science) will be analysed below.

Figure 2.2: Number of education systems implementing changes in the organisation of instruction between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025, ISCED 1-2, by sub-category



Source: Eurydice.

([74]) Startchancen-Programm - BMFTR.

([75]) Notre école, faisons-la ensemble | éduscol | Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche | Dgesco.

([76]) Masterplan on basic skills, Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023.

([77]) Order 7798/2023.

([78]) Special government grant for measures promoting educational equality and non-discrimination in early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and basic education for 2024–2027 – OKM – Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland.

2.2. The organisation of students' time

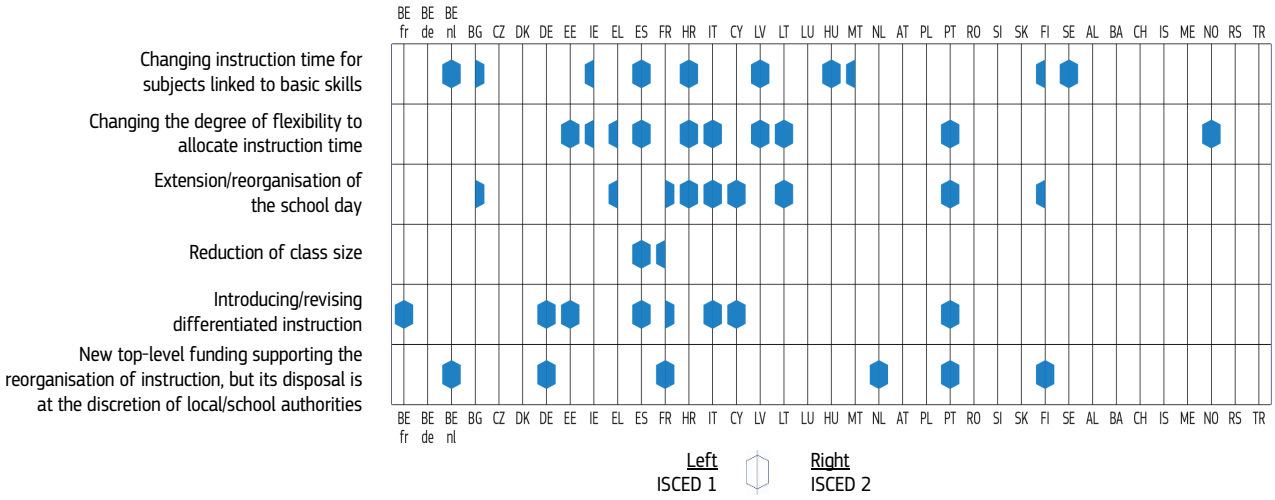
As discussed above, the first aspect of the organisation of instruction is the organisation of students' time, which concerns the time devoted to specific subjects or competences, the flexibility of instruction and the overall time students (can) spend in school. These are the aspects where changes have been more frequent in the analysed period, compared with the revisions of regulations or recommendations concerning the grouping of students.

Figure 2.3 shows in detail the areas of reform in each European education system participating in this report. Since 2020/2021, most education systems have been moving towards devoting more instruction time to basic skills; increasing flexibility, thus giving more autonomy to schools for organising instruction; and creating the conditions of an extended school day.

Concerning the **amount of instruction time** devoted to basic skills, there are two main types of reform: (1) changing instruction time for all subjects linked to basic skills; and (2) concentrating on one particular area of basic skills, notably reading or science literacy.

The first approach exists in Bulgaria, Ireland, Croatia, Hungary and Finland. These countries have changed the minimum required instruction time for all or most subjects linked to basic skills at one or both analysed education levels. Changes in Bulgaria concern only lower secondary education, while reforms in Ireland and Finland are related to primary education. Among these education systems, Hungary is the only one lowering instruction time instead of increasing it. Several of these changes are also linked to curricular reforms (see Chapter 3).

Figure 2.3: Changes in the organisation of instruction between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025, ISCED 1-2, by education system and sub-category



Source: Eurydice.

The second approach was taken by the Flemish Community of Belgium, Spain, Latvia, Malta and Sweden. The Flemish Community of Belgium, Spain and Malta developed specific policies aiming to increase students' **reading** time. The Flemish Community of Belgium developed a comprehensive Reading action plan with measures concerning not only instruction time, but also assessment, learning support and teacher training (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this report). One of the initiatives is the Flanders Reading Day ([79]). In Spain, the amended Law on Education ([80]) establishes that all schools should dedicate daily time to reading, and that teaching reading should be mainstreamed across all subjects ([81]). Malta concentrates on the reading skills of primary education students. Its National Education Strategy 2024-

([79]) Flanders Reading Day.

([80]) Law 2/2006 on Education, amended by Law 3/2020.

([81]) Royal Decree 217/2022, establishing the organisation and minimum standards for compulsory secondary education.

2030 ([82]) foresees the incremental increase of reading time across the early years (pre-primary and beginning of primary education).

Latvia and Sweden increased instruction time for **science** subjects, at both the primary and lower secondary levels. In Latvia, primary students have more science lessons and 2 hours less of literature per week. At the lower secondary level, the technology and computer science subject was introduced with a significant number of hours. In Sweden, teaching time has been increased by a total of 50 hours in science subjects in compulsory education.

However, it is not only the amount of instruction time that has increased since 2020/2021, but also its **flexibility**. In education systems with related reforms (Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Norway), schools are gaining more autonomy in organising the time devoted to teaching basic skills. In Greece, flexibility is introduced through the addition of flexible modules, the Skills Labs (see country example). In Latvia and Norway, schools can freely decide on the content of 10 % of the total teaching time; in Portugal this amounts to 25 % and in Lithuania to 30 %.

Skills Labs in **Greece** is an innovative, dynamic, didactic educational initiative, which involves adding new thematic units, focused on skills, to the compulsory curriculum from pre-primary to secondary education, using modern and innovative learning methods ([83]). The basic principle of the Skills Labs is to combine the cognitive aspects of the curriculum with the development of students' basic competences, helping them grow into free and responsible citizens. The goal of the Skills Labs is to enhance the students' soft skills, life skills and technology and science skills. While teachers need to include all thematic units as defined by the legislation, they can adapt the content and methods depending on students' learning needs.

In many education systems, the flexibility of instruction is not only related to time, but also to flexible organisation in general, thus to the flexible grouping of students as well. In Estonia, Spain, Italy and Portugal, flexibility extends to many other aspects of the learning experience in the classroom. These examples will be discussed in the next section, in relation to new developments concerning the grouping of students.

The last aspect of the organisation of students' time is the **extension of the school day**. Among the education systems that have implemented changes in this category (see Figure 2.3), most have converted to – or are in the process of converting to – an all-day school model. The exception is Bulgaria, where changes implemented in lower secondary education result in a slightly shorter time spent in school. In addition, in Finland, the implemented changes only slightly increase students' time in school.

In Greece, the extended, full-time school day was introduced in primary education in 2022 ([84]), where the afternoon includes three distinct zones: midday meal and nutrition education, study and preparation, and school clubs. In France, after a pilot project in 2023/2024, extended provision (*accueil élargi*) from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. was generalised in disadvantaged lower secondary schools from the 2024/2025 school year ([85]). In Lithuania, in the framework of the programme 'Implementing inclusive education', schools have been able to apply for special funding to reorganise the educational process and implement a full-day school model since 2024.

In Croatia, Cyprus and Italy, pilot projects are ongoing, aiming to evaluate new educational models. In Croatia and Italy, these projects precede potential major reforms (see country examples). In Cyprus, additional STE(A)M teaching is implemented in 12 primary and three lower secondary schools on a pilot basis.

([82]) Visioning the Future by Transforming Education: National Education Strategy 2024-2030.

([83]) Curriculum framework for Skills Labs in nursery, primary and secondary schools, Government Gazette, B 3567/2021.

([84]) Law 4957/2022, Article 371 on an upgraded all-day primary school and kindergarten programme.

([85]) Accueil élargi 8h-18h | éduscol | Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche | Dgesco.

In **Croatia**, the experimental programme called 'Primary School as a Whole-day School – A Balanced, Fair, Efficient, and Sustainable Education System' ([86]) is conducted in 62 schools over four school years (2023/2024 to 2026/2027). It aims to provide a fact-based foundation and arguments for justifying the implementation of the proposed framework and work model of primary schools (ISCED 1-2) as whole-day schools throughout Croatia. The experimental programme also includes an increased number of hours dedicated to subjects linked to basic skills. Rather than focusing on individual subjects, it targets key educational areas, especially essential literacy skills – language and reading, mathematical and scientific literacy, and their integration. In the experimental implementation, flexible scheduling is also allowed.

In **Italy**, part of the investment in the framework of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) is devoted to refurbishing old and building new school canteens in order to support the move towards full-time schooling ([87]). Several projects are in development, including the extension of school hours to afternoon activities that will contribute to enhancing students' learning experiences and providing opportunities for the recovery of basic skills. In addition, among the 'South agenda' initiatives ([88]), the pilot project 'Caivano' involves more than 2 000 schools in Southern Italy to transform them into educational hubs and strongholds for the development of local communities, envisioning the enhancement of basic and cross-disciplinary skills and laboratory activities to keep schools open beyond regular hours.

2.3. The grouping of students

The second aspect of the organisation of instruction concerns the grouping of students. The two topics discussed in this chapter, as was mentioned above, are the reduction of class size and the introduction of differentiated instruction. The latter relates to the flexible grouping of students in a temporary manner.

As was shown in Figures 2.2 and 2.3, the **reduction of class size** was not a favoured policy measure of European education authorities in the period between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025. Only Spain and France changed legislation in this regard. In Spain, the amended Law on Education ([89]) emphasises the need for individualised attention to students of primary education, particularly in socially disadvantaged environments. In such environments, adjusting the student/unit ratios is defined as a means to support such individualised attention. Several autonomous communities have opted for reducing class sizes at both the primary and/or lower secondary levels (e.g. Madrid and La Rioja). In France, the class size for the last year of pre-primary and the first two grades of primary education was reduced and limited to 24 pupils; the implementation took place gradually from 2020/2021 to 2023/2024. In addition, in priority education areas, the number of pupils in the same grades is further limited as part of a class-splitting measure. Split classes are designed to tackle educational difficulties. They benefit from extra supervision and give pupils more time to learn basic skills. Impact evaluations from the first stages of implementation highlight positive results, especially for first grade pupils with learning difficulties in mathematics ([90]).

An increasing focus on **differentiated instruction** and the flexible grouping of students has been a more prevalent policy measure adopted since 2020/2021. Several reforms move towards an increasing flexibility in the organisation of instruction, including a more flexible grouping of students, in order to address individual learning needs and levels. Most measures discussed in this section concern both primary and lower secondary education; in France, the related measure is implemented in lower secondary education only.

One of the instruments facilitating differentiated instruction and flexible groupings is the introduction of co-teaching: bringing a second teacher or a teaching assistant into the classroom (see also Chapter 6 for more details). In the French Community of Belgium, schools benefit from additional resources to ensure the presence of additional staff in the classroom for

([86]) Primary School as a Whole-day School – A Balanced, Fair, Efficient, and Sustainable Education System, Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia, 2023.

([87]) Canteens – FUTURA.

([88]) Reducing territorial gaps – FUTURA.

([89]) Law 2/2006 on Education, amended by Law 3/2020.

([90]) Évaluation de l'impact de la réduction de la taille des classes de CP et de CE1 en REP+ sur les résultats des élèves et les pratiques des enseignants / Sandra Andreu , Linda Ben Ali, Laurent Blouet, Pascal Bressoux, Axelle Charpentier, Isabelle Cioldi, Aurélie Lacroix, Laurent Lima, Fabrice Murat, Danae Odin-Steiner, Christelle Raffaëlli, Thierry Rocher, Ronan Vourc'h - Portail des publications de la DEPP, Working document N° 2021-E04, French Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2021.

several hours each week. The regular and occasional presence of this second person provides an opportunity to regulate learning, give more focused attention to each student, diversify methodologies, increase interactions between students and teachers, facilitate the implementation of collective projects and, in general, offer a calmer working environment. Similarly, Extremadura (Spain) opted for the educational practice of co-teaching as a method to provide personalised attention to students with learning difficulties and to raise the levels of educational success in compulsory education. In Cyprus, assistant teachers provide remedial teaching to students with learning difficulties in the classroom. Cyprus also introduced a Differentiated Instruction Guide ([91]) in 2022 (see Chapter 6).

Another possibility is the creation of flexible groups within classes that continue their learning experience in smaller settings, adapted to their needs. France, for example, adapted the organisation of teaching to the needs of each student by setting up smaller groups in mathematics and French in grades 6 and 7 (lower secondary education), with a reduced number of students in each (temporary) group.

As was mentioned above, in Estonia, Spain, Italy and Portugal, the flexibility of instruction time goes together with an increased flexibility of the general organisation of classroom teaching. In Estonia, the amendments of the national curriculum for basic schools provide greater flexibility for schools to organise learning through the school curriculum, for example by differentiating teaching, selecting study content and offering elective courses that consider the specific needs of students and the region. Similar directions were also taken in Spain, Italy and Portugal (see country examples).

In **Spain**, according to Royal Decree 217/2022 establishing the curriculum for compulsory secondary education ([92]), educational administrations in the autonomous communities are responsible for regulating diversity-oriented organisational and curricular measures that enable schools to autonomously adopt a flexible organisation of instruction suited to their students' characteristics. These measures include curricular adaptations, the integration of subjects into domains, flexible grouping, class splitting, elective subject offerings, reinforcement programmes and personalised support measures for students with specific educational support needs.

In **Italy**, funding is made available in the NRRP framework to transform all Italian schools (8 000) into modern learning environments where space, technology, furnishings and teaching all contribute together to enhancing education with a flexible and student-tailored approach. In these 'Next Generation Classrooms' ([93]), instruction time can be adjusted to allow for more flexible and modular teaching schedules. This also enables varied pacing, differentiated instruction and more adaptable learning experiences based on students' needs. The environment supports a dynamic approach to time management, facilitating both individual and collaborative learning.

In **Portugal**, in the framework of creating 'dynamic classes', schools can, at certain times during the school day, regroup students based on their learning levels. This allows for the creation of specialised groups aimed at supporting students who need more time or a different learning pace in subjects where they previously underperformed. Additionally, groups can be formed in specific subjects to help students develop their skills according to an individually tailored learning plan. Schools have the autonomy to redistribute the time and workload among the different areas of the curriculum according to students' needs, to create new subjects, to implement different organisation of classes or groups of students and to create a tailored curriculum for a specific group of students aiming to address underachievement ([94]).

([91]) Cyprus's differentiated instruction guide, 2022.

([92]) Royal Decree 217/2022, establishing the organisation and minimum standards for compulsory secondary education.

([93]) Piano Scuola 4.0, Italian Ministry of Education.

([94]) Ministerial Implementing Order no.181/2019, Ministerial Implementing Order no. 306/2021, 1.2.3. Dynamic classes | School+.

2.4. Summary

This chapter analysed educational reforms related to the organisation of instruction taking place between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025. As the chapter demonstrated, top-level education authorities implemented changes in this period in more than half of the European education systems analysed in this report. Differences between education levels have been marginal, showing that education authorities have targeted both primary and lower secondary students.

Changes in the organisation of instruction aiming to tackle underachievement in basic skills have generally taken the direction towards increasing students' time spent in school, either through dedicating more time to subjects linked to basic skills, or even expanding the length of the school day. While some education systems implemented changes for all subjects linked to basic skills, others concentrated on specific areas, notably reading or science literacy.

In addition to the amount of instruction time, reforms of the organisation of instruction have most often brought about increasing flexibility and more autonomy given to schools in organising teaching. In more than a quarter of European education systems, schools have become more autonomous in defining part of the instruction time dedicated to given subjects and/or in organising the work and the grouping of students in the classroom. Often, flexibility has increased in both dimensions at the same time and several education systems are creating the conditions of and encouraging differentiated teaching.

It should be pointed out that this chapter analysed only the latest changes; it does not provide the overall picture on the organisation of instruction in all European education systems. Nevertheless, it shows the main trends on how European countries have recently responded to the decline in basic skills demonstrated by international assessment surveys.

Chapter 3: Curriculum changes

School curricula play a central role in delivering quality and inclusive education and supporting skills development. They detail programmes of study, learning content and objectives, attainment targets, guidelines on pupil assessment and syllabuses. More than one type of curriculum or steering documents may be in force in an education system, and these may contain advice, recommendations or regulations. Whatever the level of obligation that schools and teachers have to comply with, all curricula establish the basic framework within which schools develop their own teaching to meet their students' needs.

Education authorities across Europe regularly review and revise the goals and content of school curricula, to respond to the evolving needs of society and learners, address emerging policy issues and reflect shifting pedagogical paradigms (Priestley *et al.*, 2021; Shimizu and Vithal, 2023). Planning, designing and delivering new or revised curricula is a complex process that often strives to achieve multiple and interlinked objectives (Gouëdard *et al.*, 2020). Changes to improve the effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum may involve reviewing subject content and attainment targets, reducing curriculum overload and supporting engagement through innovative teaching and cross-curricular learning in relation to STEM disciplines (OECD, 2020, 2024). Curriculum reform is also an important policy tool in support of the development of key competences and basic skills (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture *et al.*, 2022).

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and in response to declining results in international surveys, researchers have also argued that an important way to improve student performance is to revise the curriculum and to 're-center it on the basic subjects, to clarify the learning goals, and to improve its sequencing' (Crato and Patrinos, 2025, p. 11). Furthermore, provisions for personalised and flexible learning can make the curriculum more inclusive and support students at risk of underachievement, while retaining coherence and avoiding stigmatisation (OECD, 2021a).

In line with research findings, the European Commission staff working document on Pathways to school success (European Commission, 2022a) emphasises the importance of relevant and stimulating curricula that support personalised teaching and learning and allow for a variety of teaching methods. Furthermore, the Action plan on basic skills (European Commission, 2025, p. 4) notes that 'in many systems, curricula have regularly been expanded in response to new societal demands, leading to neglected basic skills'. It also points out that 'striking a better balance between curriculum breadth and focus on basic skills' is an important condition for improving educational outcomes.

This chapter will therefore focus on changes ([95]) to the top-level curricula that have been introduced since the 2020/2021 school year with the objective of supporting basic skills development and reducing underachievement. Despite the diversity of reported measures, several significant trends in recent curriculum reforms can be observed. They concern four broad types of measures:

- revision of attainment targets;
- reduction of curriculum content;
- inclusion and individualisation;
- focus on STEM education and innovative teaching.

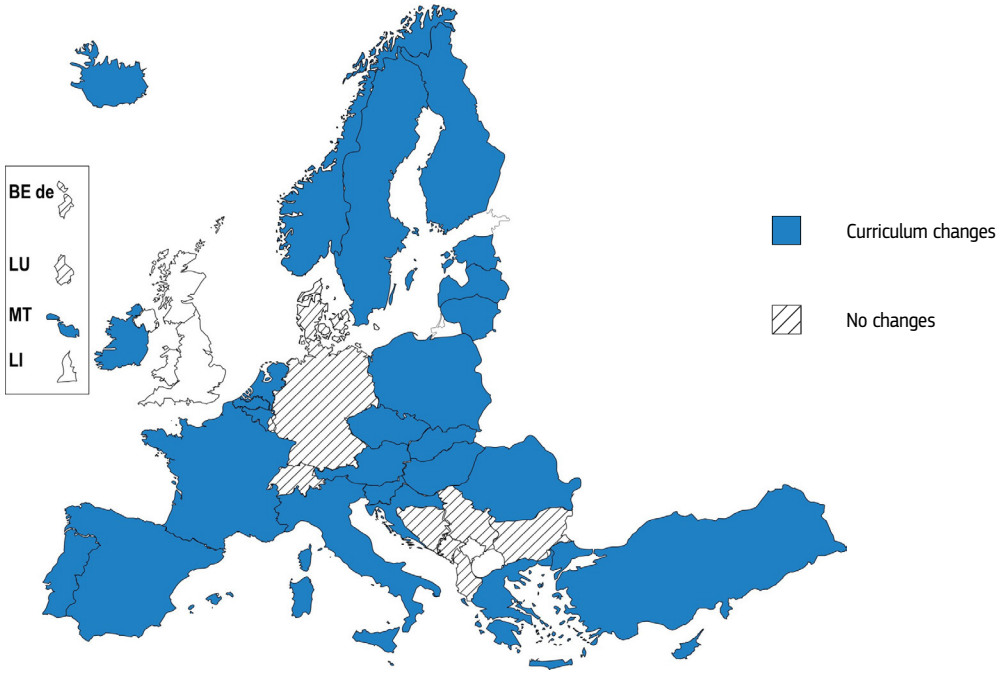
([95]) The term 'curriculum change' refers to any type of revision, transformation or modification of the top-level curriculum.

3.1. Curriculum changes since 2020/2021

Figure 3.1 shows that the majority of European education systems (27) have undertaken curriculum changes that aim to address underachievement in basic skills. However, the extent, focus and degree of implementation of these changes differ. Moreover, in some cases it is difficult to separate the specific goal of tackling underachievement from broader policy intentions, such as improving the quality and equity of education.

Most education systems, except the French and Flemish Communities of Belgium, report changes in both primary and lower secondary education. When specific changes concern one education level, this will be highlighted in the analysis. In terms of differences between the three basic skills (literacy, mathematics and science), the great majority of curriculum modifications refer to mathematics and science. Country examples are provided as illustrations of recent revisions and do not represent an exhaustive list of all curriculum developments.

Figure 3.1: Curriculum changes that aim to reduce underachievement in basic skills between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025, ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

The term 'curriculum change' refers to any type of revision, transformation or modification of the top-level curriculum.

Country-specific notes

French Community of Belgium: changes concern only ISCED 1.
Flemish Community of Belgium: changes concern only ISCED 2.

3.2. Revision of attainment targets

Attainment targets or goals are an important part of every curriculum as they define what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do on completion of a level or learning module.

To support basic skills development and address underachievement, some education authorities in Europe revise attainment targets to make them clearer and more focused.

For instance, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, curriculum changes emphasise the quality and not the quantity of the new attainment targets. Priority is given to the attainment targets related to the most crucial key competences, namely competences in Dutch, other languages and mathematics, science and technology.

In Iceland, the overall goal is to make the core primary curriculum more accessible and clearer to teachers, schools, students and parents, along with supporting more effective assessment. The changes are extensive, but the main focus is on simplifying and making goals clearer and, in some cases, more fact- and knowledge-based.

Similarly, in **the Netherlands**, in 2024 the core objectives for Dutch language and mathematics were revised to make them clearer. In **Romania** the graduate training profile adopted in 2023 focuses on 'learning essentials'. In **Sweden**, curriculum review proposals ([96]) were submitted to the government in February 2025. These proposals are based on the principle that teaching in the early years should above all be about basic facts and skills that give the students a necessary basis for continued learning. As students get older, more complex theoretical abilities such as reflecting, analysing and drawing conclusions can take up more space.

In Spain, Royal Decrees 157/2022 ([97]) and 217/2022 ([98]), which regulate the curricula for Primary and Compulsory Secondary Education respectively, define an 'Exit profile' for students. It identifies the key competences that students must acquire by the end of compulsory education. It also includes operational descriptors that provide guidance on the expected level of performance upon finishing primary and secondary education. This approach ensures that educational outcomes are clearly defined, aligning teaching practices with the competences necessary for students' academic and personal development.

3.3. Reduction of curriculum content

Curriculum revisions that aim to contribute to tackling underachievement may also involve reducing the curriculum content, especially theoretical concepts, focusing instead on basic knowledge and skills and promoting deeper learning.

For instance, in the French Community of Belgium, the revision of the core curriculum framework has brought a particular focus on foundational knowledge, especially in the early years of primary education (grades 1 and 2). In Hungary, the main objective of the 2020 changes in the National Core Curriculum is to decrease student workload. This is done by reducing the number of scientific concepts in subjects related to basic skills and lowering the amount of instruction time (see Chapter 2). In Cyprus, recent reductions of curriculum content in Greek language, mathematics and science were undertaken to provide a focus on literacy, learning to learn and scientific inquiry. In Malta, a revision of the syllabi and learning outcomes is ongoing, to address overloading and overlapping, and to promote deep learning and sustain long-term memory.

In **Poland**, there has been a reduction of theoretical or encyclopaedic knowledge (by about 20 %) in favour of developing skills. This was done by revising requirements that were considered impossible or difficult to implement in school practice. The amount of theoretical material to be learned was reduced to enhance the development of basic skills and increase motivation to learn by fostering a positive attitude among students toward personal learning.

3.4. Inclusion and individualisation

Other curriculum revisions aim to ensure that all young people reach their full potential by making the curriculum more inclusive and tailoring education to the specific needs of students. Concrete measures include strengthening the support provided to students at risk of underachievement and extending measures accompanying students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (see also Chapters 2 and 5).

([96]) Knowledge for all: New curricula focusing on teaching and learning.

([97]) Royal Decree 157/2022, establishing the organisation and minimum standards for primary education.

([98]) Royal Decree 217/2022, establishing the organisation and minimum standards for compulsory secondary education.

In **Spain**, Royal Decrees 157/2022 ([99]) and 217/2022 ([100]), which regulate the curricula for Primary and Compulsory Secondary Education respectively, establish that 'Educational administrations will develop guidelines for schools to create reinforcement or enrichment curriculum plans that will enable the improvement of the competence level of students who require it'.

The autonomous communities develop this general measure. For instance, in Andalucia, reinforcement programmes may be applied at any point during the academic year, as soon as difficulties are identified. These programmes concern students who:

a) have not advanced to the next grade level;

b) while progressing to the next grade, did not pass one or more subject areas from the previous year;

c) present learning difficulties that justify their inclusion in the programme;

d) have specific educational support needs that prevent them from effectively advancing in their learning process ([101]).

In **Lithuania**, the 2022 curriculum update establishes that low-achieving students 'shall have a plan for the improvement of his/her individual learning achievements and shall be given the necessary learning support and a description of the procedures for the provision of support to pupils' ([102]).

In Croatia, the experimental programme 'Primary School as a Whole-day School – A Balanced, Fair, Efficient, and Sustainable Education System' ([103]) is expected to bring about an overall increase in achievement and a reduction of disparities among different student groups. The programme includes adjustments in the curriculum such as the increase of instructional hours for Croatian language and mathematics and the introduction of the new subjects Natural history, Society and community, Practical skills, Information and digital competences and The World and I.

In Iceland, curriculum changes aim to ensure that children with a native language other than Icelandic and other multilingual children receive an education that prepares them for active participation in society and further learning. The curriculum chapter 'Icelandic as a second language' was revised to align with the language framework of the Council of Europe. New curriculum chapters that focus on cultural skills and competence were also added.

3.5. Focus on STEM and innovative teaching

Several recent curriculum changes aim to reorganise study subjects by placing an emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education and innovative and engaging teaching methods.

In Ireland, STEM becomes a distinct curriculum area in primary education, with the objective of adopting a more integrated approach to STEM learning. In Italy, the new STEM guidelines focus on innovative teaching methods based on problem-solving and inter- and multidisciplinary approaches. In France, the study programmes for science and technology were revised to better distinguish between the school years at the end of primary and the beginning of lower secondary education, and to clarify the expected learning outcomes to teachers, the majority of whom do not have scientific backgrounds.

In **Portugal**, the new primary and lower secondary education Mathematics Essential Learning ([104]) or core curriculum was adopted in 2021. It takes a 'Mathematics for All' perspective and identifies six transversal mathematical skills: problem-solving, mathematical reasoning, mathematical communication, mathematical representations, mathematical connections and computational thinking. The development of statistical literacy and probabilistic reasoning, algebraic thinking, spatial reasoning, number sense and mental calculation are now valued throughout primary and lower secondary education. These skills are intended to provide young people with tools to deal mathematically with complex situations in various contexts.

In Slovenia, the new curricula for science and mathematics place greater emphasis on experiential learning in the immediate environment, outdoor teaching, practical and experimental work, as well as the thoughtful introduction of inquiry-based learning from grades 1 to 3.

([99]) Royal Decree 157/2022, establishing the organisation and minimum standards for primary education.

([100]) Royal Decree 217/2022, establishing the organisation and minimum standards for compulsory secondary education.

([101]) Decree 102/2023, which establishes the organisation and minimum standards for compulsory secondary education in the Autonomous Community of Andalucía.

([102]) Curriculum for pre-primary, primary and general lower and upper secondary education.

([103]) Primary School as a Whole-day School – A Balanced, Fair, Efficient, and Sustainable Education System, Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia, 2023.

([104]) Legislative Order no. 8209/2021, 19 August and Summary of the curricula's Mathematics Essential Learning.

3.6. Summary

Since the 2020/2021 school year, the majority of European countries have undertaken curriculum revisions that aim to support the development of basic skills and improve achievement. While the reported measures are wide-ranging and often pursue multiple objectives, several recurring themes can be observed. Most commonly, education authorities aim to improve the curricula by clarifying attainment targets and making them more focused on essential skills, reducing curriculum content to avoid overload and supporting deeper learning. Other frequently cited changes refer to making the curriculum more inclusive and strengthening the support to students at risk of underachievement and increasing the focus on STEM subjects and promoting innovative teaching methods.

Although the impact of these curriculum changes has not been evaluated yet due to their recent implementation, evaluation studies are being planned in some systems. Typically, such evaluations will be undertaken through analysis of student assessment results, school evaluation reports and outputs of research projects. Evaluation work is and will sometimes be done by specific institutions, such as the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, or through online platforms for collecting feedback, for example from teachers, on recent curriculum changes in Türkiye.

Chapter 4: Assessing learning needs

Every student is an individual and their learning needs are bound to be somewhat different from that of their peers. This has potentially important consequences. The current learning provision may satisfy the needs of some students but not those of others. If the learning needs in the classroom vary greatly and are not satisfactorily met for all, it means that at least some students do not get the most out of the learning process. This is likely to result in students underperforming and, in extreme cases, in leaving school early. All this highlights the importance of establishing what the learning needs of each student are, understanding why a student may be underperforming and proposing the best possible action plan for each student. Thus, assessing the learning needs of students is an essential goal of educational practice.

It is important that assessment be systematic, continuous and timely. Student assessment plans that are comprehensive, in line with contemporary developments (e.g. digitalisation) and interlinked with other measures (e.g. curriculum changes or learning support measures), serve student needs better. Equally, if learning gaps are not identified and dealt with as soon as they occur, they are bound to grow over time. The early detection of learning gaps has multiple advantages. Smaller learning gaps are easier to close and learning alienation is less likely to occur. There are secondary benefits too. As the European Commission's staff working document explains, 'the feedback given through assessment has an important impact on the learner's motivation, self-esteem and awareness of their own learning process – thus impacting also their well-being' (European Commission, 2022a).

Assessments in schools take a variety of forms using various tools. Regarding the specific purpose of student assessment, educational researchers distinguish between summative, diagnostic and formative aspects of assessments. The summative aspect of school assessments mainly concerns the evaluation of student learning, skill acquisition and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period. The main examples of large-scale summative assessments refer to certified exams and national tests. Certified exams are final examinations that result in the award of a qualification following completion of a particular stage or a full course of education, for instance at the end of primary or lower secondary education. National tests are examinations carried out under the responsibility of top-level (usually national, but sometimes regional) education authorities. They can be used for various purposes: to evaluate the attainment of students, monitor schools or identify learning needs.

Summative assessments have an important impact on students' school careers (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a). Together with diagnostic tests, they play an essential role in identifying individual problems and learning needs, which is necessary for subsequently developing effective student support. On a broader scale, the outcome of these assessments provides the basis for 'the placement of students, the award of qualifications, monitoring achievement and progress, and holding teachers, schools, school districts, states, and nations accountable for the quality of the public services they provide' (James, 2010, p. 161). Furthermore, they serve as a valuable guide for the allocation of resources and decision-making regarding future school programmes (EACEA/Eurydice, 2009).

While summative assessments are essential pedagogical tools for measuring student performance and designing appropriate support measures, they are not perfect. National tests have come under particular scrutiny. Proponents point out that large-scale uniform assessments are important for students and for authorities, because they enable the monitoring of education outcomes and allow comparability between schools, regions or across time. Critics, on the other hand, argue that too many resources are devoted to a large-scale yet narrow subject-range assessment. National tests tend to cover only a limited portion of

the curriculum, thus prioritising some courses, topics or skills over others (Eklöf and Nyroos 2013). Moreover, studies have shown that when a test is perceived as very important, such as in the case of final exams, students may experience higher levels of motivation, but they also experience higher levels of anxiety, which in turn can be detrimental to their performance. Low achievers seem to be especially affected by such anxiety. Finally, school subjects also play a role, with assessments on mathematics being perceived as relatively more stressful (Eveleigh, 2010; Eklöf and Nyroos, 2013).

Diagnostic assessment tools 'provide information about students' mastery of relevant prior knowledge and skills within the domain as well as preconceptions or misconceptions about the material' (Ketterlin-Geller and Yovanoff, 2009). Teachers and education authorities can use this information to better respond to students' needs. Diagnostic assessment tests usually take place before instruction starts at the beginning of a new subject or course or when occasions arise where students' level is unknown.

Formative assessment refers to various methods teachers use to conduct evaluations of students learning needs, academic progress and comprehension during instruction. An example of formative assessment is the constant monitoring of a student's participation in class or homework assignments. Even though the formative aspect of student assessment has gained much recognition in educational research (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Ozan and Kıncal, 2018; Muho and Taraj, 2022), policy reforms at the national level (or the equivalent top-level) are relatively more likely to target national exams or diagnostic assessment. As a result, formative assessment measures are beyond the scope of this chapter ([105]).

The chapter is divided in four sections. The first focuses on whether top-level education authorities have introduced new assessment tools to capture and tackle underperformance in reading literacy, mathematics or science (Figure 4.1). Figure 4.2 summarises how many education systems have adopted new national tests, diagnostic assessment tools or funding for such tools and how many have adopted other relevant assessment tools. Finally, Figure 4.3 provides a detailed breakdown of the new assessment tools per education level and education system. The second section casts a closer look at the recent (i.e. between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025) changes concerning diagnostic assessment. The third section looks at changes in national exams. The fourth section summarises the main findings of the analysis.

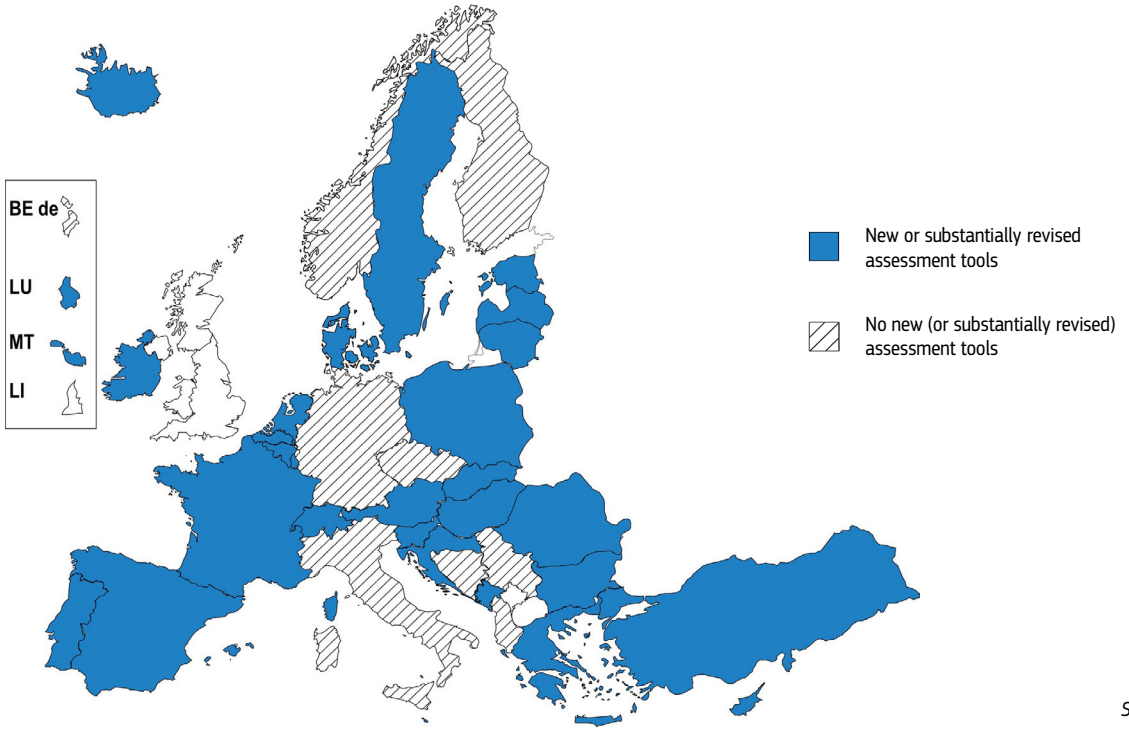
4.1. Policy changes since 2020/2021

Declining student performance in basic skills as expressed in the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study (see Figure 1) has alerted policymakers at the national and European levels to the need to take action (European Commission, 2025d). To raise student performance, it is necessary to identify any learning gaps, which means that increased attention needs to be paid to student assessment.

As shown in Chapter 1, many strategic frameworks adopted since 2020/2021 include measures aimed at strengthening assessment practices as part of broader agendas for improving school success. Likewise, support for teachers (see Chapter 6) and families (see Chapter 7) has been a recurring component of these strategies, ensuring that the assessment tools are well integrated into everyday teaching and learning environments. This section examines if and what changes related to student assessment have taken place between the school years 2020/2021 and 2024/2025.

([105]) Although top-level formative assessment reforms are indeed possible, formative assessment changes are relatively more likely to be decided at the school or local level, which are beyond the study's scope.

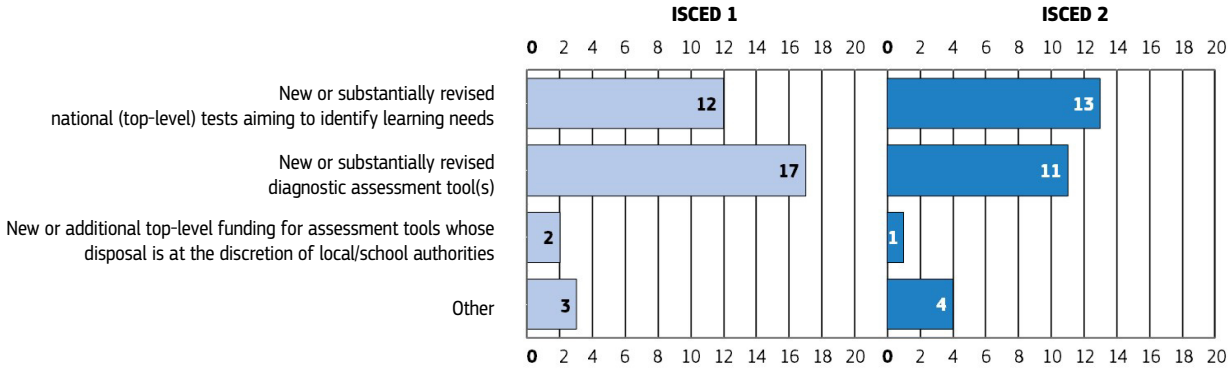
Figure 4.1: New or revised tools for assessing the learning needs of underperforming students (2020/2021 to 2024/2025), ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

No fewer than 28 European education system reported that since 2020/2021 they have either introduced new assessment tools or revised existing ones. Put differently, about three quarters of the education systems studied here have introduced substantial changes in at least some of the assessment tools used to capture underachievement in basic skills.

Figure 4.2: Number of education systems with new or revised tools for assessing the learning needs of underperforming students (2020/2021 to 2024/2025), ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

Figure 4.2 provides more detailed information. It displays how many education systems have introduced new types of assessment tools per education level. Thus, it allows us to see that in primary education, the reform has mainly targeted diagnostic assessment tools. In particular, 17 education systems, or nearly half, have a new or a substantially revised diagnostic tool. The second most common change are national tests for identifying learning needs, which have been introduced or revised in 12 education systems. Only three education systems reported other types of assessment tools (such as using administrative data or

new analysis tools), and just two indicated that there is additional funding for assessment tools, but the details are decided at the local or school level.

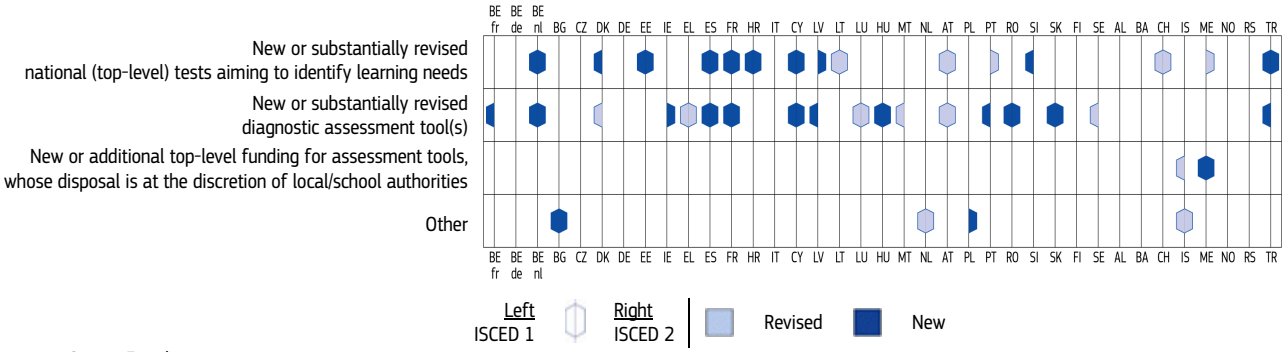
In lower secondary, the ranking order of the policy changes is somewhat different. The first most common policy novelty in assessment tools is the introduction or revision of national tests (Figure 4.2). The adoption of new or revised diagnostic assessment tools comes a close second. Other assessment tool innovations were reported by four education systems, and only one education system indicated that there is new funding for making changes in the assessment tools, but it is up to the local or school levels to decide how exactly to use it.

In sum, it would appear that education authorities have paid a little more attention to primary education in the sense that they have reported relatively more assessment tool changes at this level compared with lower secondary. Second, Figure 4.2 highlights that interventions in terms of diagnostic assessment are more likely to take place in primary schools than in lower secondary. Third, new or revised national tests have been introduced by nearly a third of the education systems, usually to both primary and lower secondary education levels.

Overall, the data suggests that Europe is taking action as far as student assessment goes. It indicates that many education authorities have recently taken measures to improve their capacity in evaluating students' learning needs. Furthermore, the focus on diagnostic assessment, especially in primary education, underscores the importance of identifying any learning challenges early in school life.

Figure 4.3 breaks down the available Eurydice data even further. It illustrates the types of assessment-related measures adopted by education systems per ISCED level. Consequently, it also shows whether education systems adopted one measure or more. Finally, Figure 4.3 reveals whether the policy interventions included the introduction of new assessment tools or the revision of existing ones.

Figure 4.3: New or revised tools for assessing the learning needs of underperforming students per education system (2020/2021 to 2024/2025), ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

In most countries, the education authorities decided to introduce new assessment tools rather than revise any preexisting measures. Starting with the most common reform area, the diagnostic assessment tools, Figure 4.3 indicates that 12 education systems introduced new tools, while six revised the ones they already had. In the case of national tests, 10 systems developed new ones, while five revised existing tests. Finally, it is worth pointing out that nine education systems adopted both a new or revised national test and a diagnostic assessment tool, whereas 15 adopted one or the other. The next section looks a bit closer at these changes since 2020/2021, starting with the policy measures concerning diagnostic assessment and followed by those related to national exams and data collections.

4.2. Diagnostic assessment

As shown in Figure 4.3, no fewer than 18 education systems took measures related to diagnostic assessment in primary or lower secondary schools. This is quite considerable given that in 2020/2021, only 13 education systems reported having compulsory top-level testing with the objective of identifying individual learning needs in mathematics, and only seven in science (see Figure 6.1 in European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a, p. 110). It is impossible to list all the reforms and details here, but it is useful to single out a few, highlighting some of the latest developments while showcasing what can be a source of inspiration and learning for education practitioners and policymakers.

Reforms in the diagnostic assessment to address underachievement in basic skills can be grouped in the following broad categories: reforms related to (1) policy growth, (2) methodological development and (3) specific target groups. The first group refers to policy measures where either diagnostic assessment was introduced for the first time or where it has been extended to other ages, school grades, subjects, regions, etc. In short, it refers to the expansion of diagnostic assessment. The second group refers to any type of methodological development, be it a new assessment method, a revised battery of questions or other new tools for conducting diagnostic assessments. The last group refers to reforms in diagnostic assessment that focus mainly, if not exclusively, to specific target groups, such as dyslexic students or students with a migrant background. It should be noted that these reform groupings are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. It is possible and indeed plausible that a particular reform fits at least partially into more than one category.

Most countries that have indicated changes in their diagnostic assessment framework fall under the category of policy growth. More specifically, Ireland, Greece, France, Spain, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia have either developed diagnostic assessment further or introduced a form of diagnostic assessment that did not exist prior to 2020/2021.

In **Greece**, there are national diagnostic exams on reading and mathematics in the sixth grade of primary school and in the third grade of lower secondary schools. These exams serve as feedback regarding the achievement of the goals set in the curriculum. In turn, this feedback guides the development of policy interventions on teaching materials, learning approaches, inclusive and compensatory education practices and on training courses related to student learning difficulties. In 2024, there was an update in the diagnostic assessment question battery, including open-ended questions relating to the development of critical thinking ([106]).

In **France**, diagnostic assessment reforms started in 2020/2021 in secondary education and two years later they extended to primary education. Diagnostic assessment is part of a much wider evaluation exercise. All schools are evaluated every five years and the evaluations are conducted in two stages, internal and external. During the first, the school community conducts an evaluation of its own actions on the following thematic areas: (a) teaching and student learning, (b) student well-being and school climate, (c) school actors and school function and (d) school's institutional standing and partnerships. Student achievement in basic skills is addressed as part of the first thematic area ([107]).

In **Slovakia**, the reform introduced a counselling system that operates on five levels linking student assessment with student support. Before deciding on support measures, an assessment is carried out at the first level in school by educational staff (e.g. a teacher), at the second level in school by specialist staff (e.g. a school psychologist), at the third and fourth levels in counselling and prevention centres, and at the fifth level in specialised counselling and prevention centres. At the first and second levels, educational or preliminary assessments allow for the early detection of students' needs and the immediate provision of support through appropriate measures. At the higher levels, more comprehensive assessments are carried out. The reform eliminates the need for pupils to wait to reach a counselling centre (which could take several weeks or even months) before receiving support. After completing a comprehensive and specialised assessment, the counselling centre can propose additional support measures that address the specific needs of the student.

The case of Hungary is a good example of a reform applied across multiple categories, namely policy growth and methodological development. The assessment of basic skills started in Hungary 2001. Initially, it focused on assessing the effectiveness of schools and gradually expanded to providing information on the individual students' progression. Whereas until 2021 diagnostic assessment covered only reading and mathematics in some grades, now it covers all grades in primary and lower secondary

([106]) National exams of diagnostic assessment, Institute of Education Policy, 2024.

([107]) L'évaluation des établissements, Conseil de l'évaluation de l'école, 2024.

education and has been extended to other subjects, such as foreign languages and science. In 2022, the assessment system was moved to a digital platform ([108]).

Changes in the methodology, broadly defined, of diagnostic assessment have also been introduced in several education systems, namely in the Flemish Community of Belgium, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, Portugal and Sweden. The nature of methodological changes is quite broad, ranging from the adoption of digital platforms and tools (Flemish Community of Belgium, Hungary) and new evaluation systems (Latvia, Malta) or psychometric methods (Portugal) to new definitions of key concepts (Sweden).

In **Sweden**, the assessment support in reading and writing development in grade 1 is getting a new structure. The 'Simple View on Reading', which is the definition of reading used by the National Agency of Education, will be highlighted more clearly in the assessment material. The new definition describes reading as the product of two factors, decoding and comprehension, both of which are necessary for the student to progress. In the school year 2025/2026, the new assessment material will be tested in a pilot. Following feedback from the teachers, necessary revisions will be carried out before the full rollout. The new assessment system will become compulsory on 1 July 2026 ([109]).

The last group of reforms on diagnostic assessment concerns policy measures where the target population are usually specific student groups. For instance, in Denmark the target group is dyslexic students. From 2022/2023 a dyslexia risk test has been made compulsory for grade 1 (and preschool) pupils who show signs of specific reading difficulties, thus helping dyslexic children to get the support they need as early as possible. Other student groups are also likely to face difficulties for reasons beyond their control. For instance, newly arrived students with refugee status or migrant backgrounds may face learning difficulties, especially if they have no or little previous knowledge of the language of instruction. Several countries have diagnostic assessments in place exactly for such purposes, aiming to capture potential learning problems among students with a migrant or refugee background. Austria, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Iceland are among the countries that recently undertook reforms in this area.

Austria's 'MIKA-D' is a standardised measurement method for determining the German-language competence of pupils with German as a second language. By applying MIKA-D, the school management determines the ordinary or extraordinary status of these pupils and, if necessary, places them to the language support measures (German remedial class or remedial course) ([110]). Since April 2019, MIKA-D has been available for nationwide use and is now compulsory. It was evaluated in 2021 and subsequently adapted in 2023. MIKA-D testing takes place in the first two weeks of the school year, when the extraordinary students have completed the summer school, and during the year in German remedial classes ([111]).

In **Cyprus**, the Greek language remedial learning programme *Ellinomatheia* aims to measure and evaluate the level of Greek language proficiency of pupils attending public primary schools who need language learning support. Diagnostic assessment takes place at the beginning and at the end of the language support programme. Two groups of pupils participate in the initial assessment. The first group are pupils in grade 1 who are already in support and who will continue receiving support in the following school year(s). The second group are pupils in grades 1 to 6 who will join the support programme from the next school year onwards. The final assessment evaluates the level of Greek language proficiency of children who have completed their participation in the remedial teaching programme ([112]).

In **Luxembourg**, diagnostic assessment in primary education takes place by interviewing both the child and their family, to collect information about the child's background and any previous educational experience. The interview also includes a series of structured observations, exercises and other game-like interactions to assess different aspects, depending on the child's age (gross motor skills, fine motor skills, graphomotor skills, familiarity with the alphabet, mathematical skills, ability to read or write in German, French or English but also in the child's mother tongue). If there is suspicion of learning difficulties or deficits, the child is referred to specialists for a professional diagnosis ([113]).

([108]) National competence assessment and digital switchover in Hungary.

([109]) Review of the mandatory mapping and assessment material, 2024.

([110]) Children who do not have a sufficient command of German to follow regular classes are admitted as 'extraordinary' students for an initial period of up to 12 months. The school head may extend this status for another 12 months.

([111]) Deutschförderklassen und Deutschförderkurse, Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2024.

([112]) *Ellinomatheia* programme, Centre of Educational Research and Assessment, 2025.

([113]) Loi du 14 juillet 2023 relative à l'accueil, à l'orientation, à l'intégration et à l'accompagnement scolaires des élèves nouvellement arrivés, Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, 2023.

4.3. National exams and data collections

National exams or equivalent top-level data collections are also a very important source of information for assessing students' performance and learning needs. Such data collections typically provide high-quality education system-wide data that allow cross-sectional and/or over-time data analyses. Good data collections and subsequent analyses are indispensable in the fight against underachievement. While many European countries make use of international surveys such as the OECD PISA Survey, many have their own data collections in place. This section casts a look at the recent reforms affecting national exams and other forms of national data collections such as administrative data. According to Figure 4.3, this applies to 15 education systems.

In most cases, the reform concerns policy-growth measures. Similar to the previous section, the term means reforms that either introduce the national exams for the first time or extend them to more grades or subjects. A couple of typical cases are presented in some detail in the text box. In general, the reforms have made the national exams compulsory, usually taking place at the end of primary school and/or lower secondary. The subjects covered differ across education systems, but virtually all of them cover reading, mathematics and science.

In **Croatia**, national exams were introduced in 2021/2022 in primary schools as a new nationwide method of assessing students' knowledge. National exams are standardised external assessments aimed at determining students' achievements in fundamental knowledge and competences, including in the mother tongue (Croatian and national minority languages where applicable), mathematics and natural sciences, in key parts of the educational cycles (fourth and eighth grade of primary school). These exams are conducted by educational institutions to obtain valid, objective and reliable information necessary for internal monitoring and quality improvement of school performance. The National Centre for External Evaluation of Education is in charge of conducting national exams in cooperation with schools. The results of the exams are used for self-evaluation of schools, leading to enhancements in the overall quality of the education system, enabling measures to be taken at all educational levels – from individual schools to educational policy ([114]).

In **Latvia**, the form of the exam has been changed and the content adapted to new requirements. Following the reform, the exam tests not only knowledge, understanding and skills, but also the ability to solve complex problems. From 2024/2025, grade 9 graduates will have to take an interdisciplinary national test, which will include the content of the social and civic, natural sciences and technology learning areas ([115]).

In addition to policy-growth reforms, there are a few education systems that introduced reforms focusing more on the methodology of the national exams, such as Poland, Portugal or Switzerland. Poland's measures are a response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led a large number of refugees seeking shelter in Poland. Polish schools had to suddenly accommodate a significant number of Ukrainian students whose knowledge of Polish was limited or non-existent (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022c). The authorities' efforts to integrate these students in the school system also led them to make necessary adaptations to the organisation of the national exams (see text box). Portugal's and Switzerland's national exams reforms were more about general improvement and staying up to date. For example, Portugal has improved the design of the exams, combining responses in paper and digital formats and making other changes enabling the production of data suitable for comparisons over time ([116]).

In **Poland**, special measures have been introduced to allow Ukrainian students whose families fled to Poland to effectively participate in the national exams. The measures are the following: (1) in Polish language and mathematics, the exam sheet is specific for foreign students, the instructions are provided in two languages (Polish and Ukrainian) and the assessment rules are modified accordingly; (2) in the assessment of the foreign language, the exam sheet remains the same, but the instructions are given in both Polish and Ukrainian; (3) in the Polish language exam, if a student uses the option for additional time, they can take the exam in a separate

([114]) National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, 2024.

([115]) Regulations on State Basic Education Standards and Sample Basic Education Program, Cabinet of Ministers, 2022.

([116]) Portugal's external student assessment (Decree no. 2-A/2025, 3 March (section III)).

room. The student is allowed the aid of a teacher who can read out the exam sheet in Polish and/or Ukrainian; (4) during the exam, a specialist (e.g. psychologist) can be present if it is necessary to obtain proper contact with a student or provide them with psychological support; and (5) if necessary, an interpreter can explain the exam rules to the students just before the exams begin ([117]).

For students who are citizens of Ukraine and who arrived in Poland after 24 February 2022 as a result of the war, the grade 8 exam in the school year 2024/2025 is conducted only in mathematics and a modern foreign language ([118]).

Last but not least, it is worth singling out the case of the Netherlands, because it is one of the countries using administrative data to monitor student cohort performance progress ([119]). In particular, the reform refers to additional funding made available in 2022/2023 for the development of the National Cohort Study on Education. The study provides two different types of reports: the regular reports and learning growth reports. The regular reports are prepared for all secondary schools in the country, relying on freely available secondary data from the Dutch Central Statistical Office and the Education Executive Agency. The learning growth reports present evidence on the student cohort's learning development and combine secondary data with primary data provided from the school. To get access to this data, school boards must register in advance ([120]). It is worth noting that schools remain the owners of the student data.

4.4. Summary

This chapter looked at an essential aspect in the fight against underachievement in basic skills, namely student performance assessment. It was argued that effective assessment is necessary to address underperformance and provide support when and where it is needed.

The Eurydice data collection focused mainly on post-2020 reforms in diagnostic assessment practices and in national exams. We found that 28 European education systems introduced new assessment tools or revised existing ones. The number of reforms was fairly stable across education levels, with one important exception. Significantly more education systems recently undertook reforms in the diagnostic assessment tools in primary education, compared with lower secondary. Thus, 17 education systems made changes in their diagnostic assessment tools in primary education, as opposed to 11 in lower secondary. Regarding reforms in the national exams, we found that 12 education systems made changes in primary education and 13 in lower secondary. The results indicate that diagnostic assessment in European education systems is now significantly more common than it was a few years ago (see European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a, p. 110). The spread of national exams is relatively more modest, but still noticeable. More national test means, on the one hand, more comparable and reliable data but, on the other, also probably means more pressure and stress for students.

Naturally, reforms in Europe have been diverse, but it is possible to classify them in three broad categories: policy growth, methodological development and those targeting specific student populations. Most reforms belong to the first category, which means that the adopted measures, especially those related to diagnostic assessment, aimed at establishing or consolidating diagnostic assessment and/or national exams. The adoption of new concepts and definitions is an example of a methodological reform, while adapting national exams and diagnostic assessment to capture the learning needs of students with a migrant background is an example of group-specific reform.

([117]) Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of March 21, 2022 on the organization of education, upbringing and care of children and youth who are citizens of Ukraine, Journal of Laws, 2023.

([118]) Law of 12 March 2022 Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine, Journal of Laws, 2024.

([119]) There are plans to introduce a mandatory student monitoring system with standardised tests in lower secondary education, but at the time of writing no such measures have been adopted.

([120]) National Cohort Study on Education reports.

Chapter 5: Reinforcing learning support

As soon as education practitioners have the results of the formative, summative or diagnostic assessments in hand, they can start preparing to help the students who need support in literacy, mathematics or science. Similarly, thanks to student assessment data, often deriving from national or international exams or surveys, education authorities can plan which educational resources need to be strengthened, along with when and where.

Following Chapter 4 on student assessment, Chapter 5 looks at top-level student support measures. It focuses on direct support measures that are distinct from measures targeting teachers' professional development and instructional capacity (see Chapter 6) or from overarching strategic planning at the system level (see Chapter 1). Given that learning support encompasses a wide range of possible interventions and tools, and that an exhaustive treatment is not possible here, the chapter focuses on a selection of potentially impactful policy measures. Chapter 5 explores whether between 2020/2021 and 2024/2025 national education authorities (1) have adopted a new learning support policy framework, (2) made new funding available for learning support measures, and (3) adopted one-to-one or small group tutoring.

Personalised tutoring has been extensively studied as a means of supporting students who underachieve in basic skills. According to a meta-analysis (Nickow, Oreopoulos and Quan, 2020), personalised tutoring significantly improves literacy and numeracy outcomes, particularly for young learners in primary education, where foundational skills are established. Early intervention through tutoring is crucial, as it can prevent learning gaps from widening while students progress through school (Dietrichson *et al.*, 2017a). The most important aspect of a tutoring arrangement is tailoring the educational support to the individual needs of the student. In other words, it is not so much the student that needs to adapt to the exigencies of the instructor, but the instructor who must adapt to the specific learning needs and pace of each student. As a result, it is a relatively expensive support measure (in terms of teaching resources per student), but also one of the more effective.

Various models of tutorials exist. They range from strictly individual arrangements to small group teaching, from volunteer-led (parents, university students, etc.) programmes to professionally administered school initiatives. The latter approach, i.e. in-school tutorials provided by specially trained professionals during the school day, appears to be the relatively more effective approach (Nickow, Oreopoulos and Quan, 2020; European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a). It is worth mentioning that while in-person tutoring seems to be the norm, online tutoring – already widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic – also seems to be effective (Carlana and La Ferrara, 2021; Gortazar, Hupkau and Roldán-Monés, 2024).

In addition to the provision of one-to-one or small group teaching, the Eurydice Survey asked if national authorities also intensified their student support efforts in other ways. First, it asked whether top-level authorities made money available for learning support. Whereas in some countries the education system is more centralised, in others (e.g. the Netherlands) it is more decentralised. Thus, it is possible that national authorities pay schools to boost their efforts on learning support, without directly prescribing them to do so. Second, educational authorities do not only design or invest in individual measures. They also provide an overall regulatory framework within which the different measures are managed and coordinated. Thus, it is possible that the national education authorities have devised a new policy framework on learning support. This would suggest increased attention to the problem of underachievement in basic skills and is another important aspect of the current chapter.

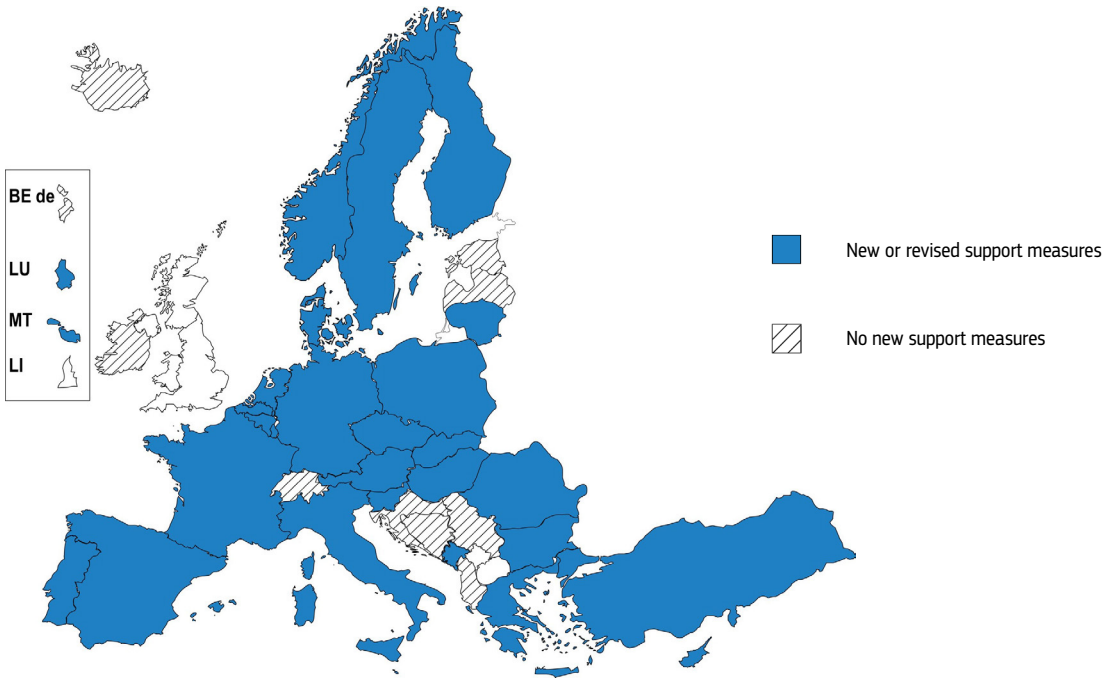
Chapter 5 is structured as follows. Section 5.1 summarises whether European countries have adopted

any new measures in basic skills learning support. Figure 5.1 reveals which countries have done so, while Figure 5.2 breaks down, per education level, how many countries have adopted a new policy framework, personal or small group tutoring during and outside the school day or how many have made additional funding available. Figure 5.3. provides a more detailed overview of the adopted measures per education system. Sections 5.2 and 5.3 present the findings on personal / small group tutoring and on the new national policy framework, respectively, in some detail. Case studies in shaded text boxes showcase the different types and cases of learning support in real-life situations. Thus, they help the reader to go beyond abstractions, but can also serve as an inspiration source to practitioners and policymakers.

5.1. Policy changes since 2020/2021

Figure 5.1 shows that the great majority of European education systems adopted new policy measures in the years 2020/2021-2024/2025 to strengthen learning support for reading, mathematics or science. Specifically, 27 education systems reported new learning support measures in primary and/or secondary education while only 10 did not. At the same time, most education systems in this latter group have had learning support measures in place since before 2020/2021 ([121]) (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a).

Figure 5.1: New or revised measures reinforcing learning support in basic skills (2020/2021 to 2024/2025), ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific notes

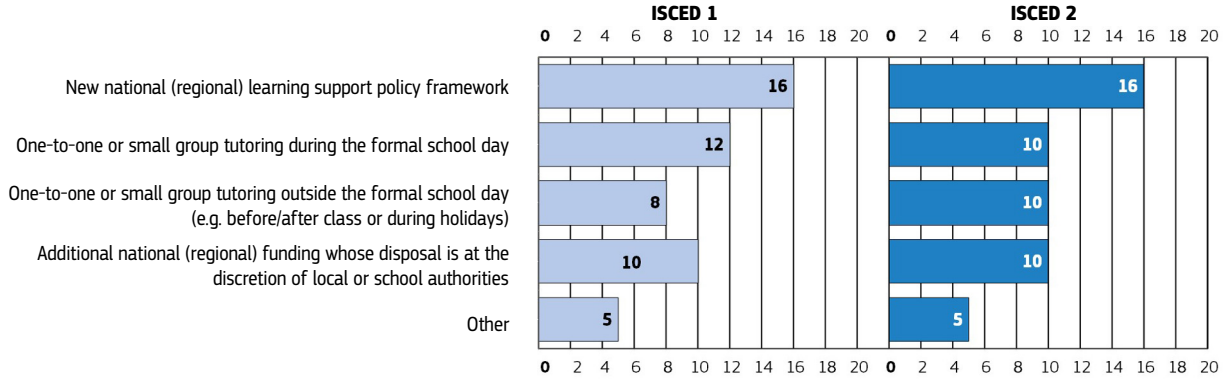
Cyprus and **Montenegro**: new support measures only in ISCED 1.
Greece: new support measures only in ISCED 2.

Figure 5.2 illustrates how many education systems adopted each of the support measures investigated here and also looks at differences across education levels. Starting from the latter, we notice that there are hardly any differences between primary and lower secondary education. In most countries, the policy change concerns the introduction of a new policy framework, followed by increased financial investment for learning support and personal / small group tutoring during the school day. In fact, the differences

([121]) The exceptions are the German-speaking Community of Belgium and Albania, see Figure 6.2 on p. 113 and Figure 6.3A on p. 164 (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a).

in the population of the last two categories is marginal and they vary only slightly between education levels. Thus, in primary education there are 12 education systems introducing personal / small group tutoring during the school day and 10 that provide additional funding for learning support. In lower secondary, the numbers for the same categories are 10 and 10, respectively.

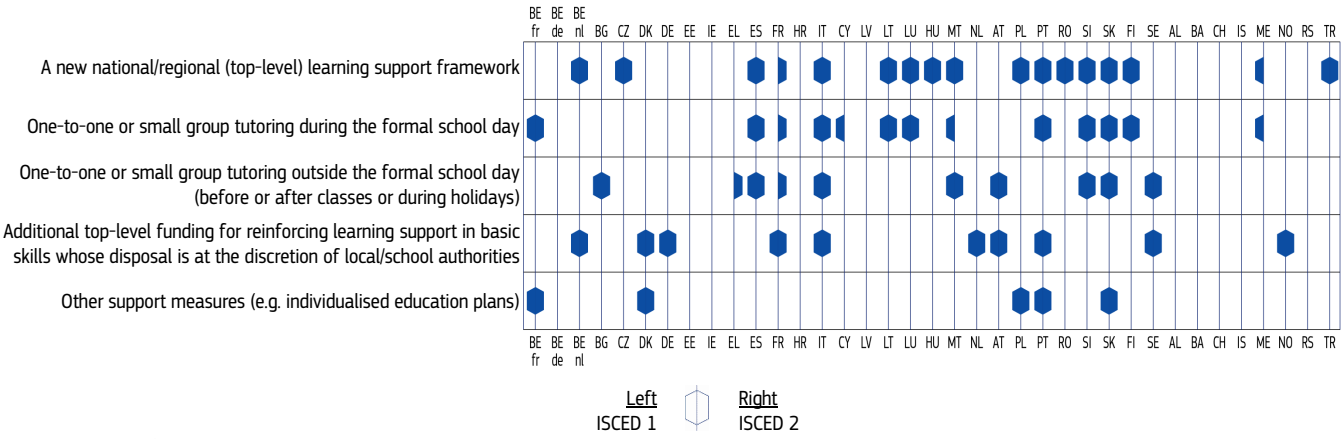
Figure 5.2: Number of education systems with new or revised measures reinforcing learning support in basic skills (2020/2021 to 2024/2025), ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

Looking at Figure 5.2, about half of the education systems adopted one-to-one or small group tutoring in 2020/2021 or later. In primary education, in 12 education systems the new measures concerned tutoring during the school day and in eight outside the school day (i.e. after classes or during school holidays). In lower secondary schools, the offers of new personal / small group tutoring are evenly divided between providing them during the school day and outside the school day. However, Figure 5.2 does not show if it is the same education systems that introduced small group teaching during the school day and outside the school day or if they are different. This information is depicted in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3: New or revised measures reinforcing learning support in basic skills per education system (2020/2021 to 2024/2025), ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

As Figure 5.3 illustrates, 17 education systems (slightly less than half) introduced small group or personal tutoring in primary or lower secondary education. If we look at each measure separately, the following picture emerges:

- tutoring during the school day only: seven education systems (two of which only in primary education);
- tutoring outside the school day only: four education systems (and one only in lower secondary);
- tutoring during and outside the school day: six education systems (one of which only in lower secondary and one only in primary for tutoring during the school day).

Seventeen education systems introducing personal or small group tutoring is not far off from the ceiling of 18 shown in Figure 5.2. However, a closer look at the data is necessary. Whereas almost half of education systems recently introduced tutoring to address underachievement in basic skills in either primary or lower secondary schools, only a handful did so in both. Furthermore, only a third of the total number of education systems introduced tutoring in primary education and only about a quarter in lower secondary.

Nevertheless, we should not ignore the fact that 10 systems made additional funding available to schools for strengthening learning support, while leaving it to them to decide how exactly to do it (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). Thus, it is possible that more schools have recently decided to introduce personal or small group tutoring, which would have an impact on the final number of education systems with such measures in place.

Figure 5.3 contains one more interesting piece of information. The great majority of countries did not report just one measure to strengthen learning support, but at least two. Hence, while 10 education systems reported one recently adopted measure, 10 reported two and seven reported three or more. The following sections look a bit closer at the content of the different support measures, starting with the most frequently reported: one-to-one or small group teaching. Details on how tutoring initiatives are aligned with teacher training strategies and classroom practice can be found in Chapter 6. In addition, Chapter 7 highlights how family involvement is integrated in several of the national programmes referred to below.

5.2. New policy frameworks

The second most populous category of new learning support measures since 2020/2021 relate to policy framework development. As indicated in Figure 5.2, 16 education authorities reported that they had made changes to their policy framework, that they revised it or that they developed a new one. But what exactly does 'policy framework' mean? As (Lakhno, 2023) demonstrates, the term is widely used yet remains nebulous and ill-defined, meaning different things to different people. The definition she proposes, which is also adopted here, is rather general: 'Policy frameworks are general structures, often encapsulated in documents or established practices, that provide institutions a guiding architecture for policy action across one or multiple policy areas' (Lakhno, 2023, p. 103) ([122]).

Our qualitative analysis revealed that the 'guiding architecture' differs from one education system to the next, reflecting the diversity of the different new institutions, strategies (see Chapter 1), action plans, programmes or other policy initiatives dealing with underachievement. Hence, the current section provides an overview of a selection of interesting policy framework changes.

Luxembourg adopted new legislation aiming to strengthen the coherence of the support provided to students with specific educational needs (SEN) in primary and secondary education. The new legislation introduces support teams for SEN students at the high school level. It restructures inclusive education to simplify collaboration among the various stakeholders and create synergies between the support and assistance systems within the school system. At the primary education level, this text introduces the new position of assistant for students with specific educational needs, who will support specialised teachers for children with specific needs in their daily activities. Furthermore, the responsibilities of the different stakeholders, student support measures and implementation timeline are now more clearly defined.

([122]) Policy frameworks on learning support were also analysed in the Eurydice report *Increasing achievement and motivation in mathematics and science learning in schools* (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a), Chapter 6.

In addition, Luxembourg created a new public administration called 'National Service for Inclusive Education', whose main mission is to promote inclusive education by ensuring the development of the system and networking among the various stakeholders involved in the support of students ([123]).

Czechia, Spain, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Finland and Montenegro are just some of the countries that adopted a new policy framework for strengthening learning support for students. Czechia, for example, has developed a new guiding framework for language learning for students whose first language is not Czech (see also Chapter1, Section 1.2). The policy framework describes, among other things, the target groups, organisation, financing, time framework, content of the language support and assessment, as well as the role of regional and local authorities (see also Chapter 6) ([124]). Spain's new framework encompasses two programmes (Territorial Cooperation Programme for Strengthening Mathematical Competence and Territorial Cooperation Programme for Strengthening Reading Competence) with three new policy actions aiming, first, to attend to the students' learning needs in a more personalised way and, second, narrow the gender gap in mathematics and reading literacy. The actions are the following: (1) create small group teaching, (2) support students with learning difficulties and (3) offer reduced working hours to mathematical competence plan coordinators and reading plan coordinators in schools ([125]).

Finland plans to overhaul its support system at all school education levels, due to declining student performance in basic skills and the growing number of students in its learning support schemes. In particular, the reform (planned to enter into force in August 2025) aims to:

1) clarify and unify the forms of support, so that the support measures are nationally uniform and to ensure sufficient resources;
2) ensure that pupils have equal opportunities to receive support, as individuals or as members of a particular group;
3) reduce the administrative work of the teaching staff by cutting the number of documents needed in support evaluation, decision-making and planning.

The government plans to support education providers with EUR 100 million annually ([126]).

5.3. Personal or small group tutoring

The qualitative data analysis shows that the heading 'tutoring' includes a wide range of new learning support programmes and measures. They range from more typical small group classes (e.g. Cyprus, Slovakia, Slovenia) to larger summer schools (Flemish Community of Belgium and Austria) and from tutoring only during official school hours (French-speaking Community of Belgium, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal and Montenegro) to tutoring only outside school hours (e.g. Bulgaria, Greece and Sweden). Newly introduced tutoring outside school hours usually means after the normal school day, but it can also mean during the school holidays, especially the summer holidays, as is the case in Flanders (Belgium), Austria and Sweden. The underlying rationale is that tutoring outside school hours does not disrupt regular schooling. Furthermore, school holidays offer free time which underachieving students can use to catch up. Nevertheless, as already mentioned in the introduction, empirical studies favour tutoring during school hours, as a relatively more effective method.

While one-to-one and small group tutoring are expected to help students improve their performance, sometimes they are also tied to broader objectives, such as preventing early school leaving (e.g. Spain) or reducing regional inequalities (e.g. Italy). In any case, all measures have in common the explicit or implicit goal of creating an inclusive learning environment in line with inclusive pedagogy goals and methods (see also Chapter 6). The aspiration is that no student shall be left behind, thus reducing the risk of educational alienation and of dropping out of school. Hence, in Europe one can find measures in the form of language support for children with migrant backgrounds, as in the case of Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus or Slovenia, or the provision of psycho-pedagogical support when and where needed, as in Cyprus, Portugal and other countries. In many cases, these approaches are implemented in collaboration with families and local communities (see also Chapter 7 for policies supporting parental involvement in tutoring).

([123]) Law of 30 June 2023, Official Journal of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, 2023.

([124]) Methodological material for the provision of free language training in preschool and primary education, Czech Ministry of Education 2025.

([125]) Territorial Cooperation Programme for Strengthening Mathematical Competence and Territorial Cooperation Programme for Strengthening Reading Competence, 2024.

([126]) Government proposal to Parliament for an act amending the Basic Education Act, 2024.

The idiosyncratic nature of the different measures reported is ideal for presenting them as case studies rather than simply trying to group them together. Hence, this section includes as many country examples as possible. Without being exhaustive, the current selection aims to highlight the diversity of the different measures, showcasing at least one example of every type of measure. The country examples start with Spain, which is perhaps more typical in the sense of promoting one-to-one tutoring, followed by country examples from France, Portugal, Austria and Slovenia.

In **Spain**, the 'Programme for Orientation, Progress, and Educational Enrichment' includes, among other elements, a one-to-one tutoring plan to provide specialised attention to students with specific educational support needs. It is part of a broader national initiative targeting schools with high concentrations of socioeconomically vulnerable students (see Chapter 1). The programme was developed in the context of meeting the European Education Area targets for 2030 ([127]). The programme responds to the need to improve educational success and to guarantee the retention of students in publicly funded schools with a high concentration of vulnerable (in terms of socioeconomic background) students. The governing framework is a national regulation. Its implementation is left to each autonomous community, which receives funding for this purpose and is also responsible for developing further regulations, always on the basis of the national regulation ([128]).

As shown in Figure 5.3, several countries have recently adopted new measures offering small group teaching to address underachievement. Usually, the measures apply to all three basic skills, but tutoring on literacy tends to be more common than on mathematics and science, while tutoring on mathematics tends to be more common than on science subjects. As a result, the education authorities were relatively more likely to provide qualitative data on literacy measures, some of which are presented below.

In **France**, small group tutoring takes the form of homework aid. The programme *Devoirs faits* (translating as 'homework is done') is implemented in secondary schools. Lower secondary school students benefit from a dedicated time period during which they can find the help they need to complete all or part of their homework. Even though it is not a remedial course, *Devoirs faits* provides the opportunity to explain again to the students what they learned in class, so that they can complete their homework. This particular support also helps students organise their personal work and how to develop their autonomy. In grade 6, the support programme is mandatory for all students and takes place during the school day. In grades 7, 8 and 9, the support programme is optional and takes place after the end of the school day. On average, a secondary school student receives 2.5 hours per week of homework support ([129]).

Tutoring on literacy is normally available to all students who are likely to need it, but in some countries it also targets specific groups of students. Thus, in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Slovenia, the focus is particularly on students with a migrant background, even though the tutoring is not necessarily limited to them.

In **Portugal**, the 'Multidisciplinary Support Teams for Inclusive Education' are a specific organisational resource with a recognised role in supporting learning and inclusion. The diversity of professionals that work in the team allows a holistic intervention involving tutoring sessions in teams composed by teachers and other specialised staff, such as psychologists, speech language therapists, mediators or special education needs staff. This measure aims to extend specific tutorial support to preventive psycho-pedagogical tutoring for learners who have not yet repeated a grade but may be exhibiting learning difficulties. The goal is to develop learners' metacognition, self-regulation and social and emotional skills. These tutorials, starting already in primary education, follow the logic of early intervention to prevent school failure and grade repetition. They are organised by teachers or other specialised staff, based on the hourly credit of specific tutorial support ([130]).

In Cyprus, Greek-language tutoring is for groups of no more than five students. Similarly, in Slovakia, tutoring outside of school hours is provided either individually or to groups of two to five students ([131]), while tutoring during the school day takes the form of help by teaching assistants and of 'enhanced language education' ([132]). In Slovenia, the number of Slovenian-language hours taught to small groups of students whose mother tongue is another language depends on the number of such students in the school. The higher the number, the more language support hours are offered. The goal of this measure is not only to

([127]) See the Strategic Framework of the European Education Area for more on the targets.

([128]) Resolution on the Agreement of the Sectoral Education Conference of 30 July 2024, Secretary of State for Education, 2024.

([129]) Devoirs faits, French Ministry of Education, 2025.

([130]) Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 140/2024, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2024.

([131]) Provision of tutoring and targeted learning.

([132]) A catalogue of the different support measures in Slovakia can be found here.

improve or prevent underperformance among students with migrant backgrounds, but also to enhance the feeling of acceptance and belonging, thus contributing towards the development of an inclusive society ([133]).

In **Austria**, 'Summer school' is a two-week program for the individualised and targeted support of students. It enables the consolidation of the teaching language, so that students can better follow the lessons in German (reading), maths and science (the latter for primary school pupils) in the following school year. Summer school is primarily for 'extraordinary' students from primary and lower secondary schools, i.e. students with a deficiency in the German language, and for other students needing to catch-up in German. In any case, the recommendation of the school management or the responsible teacher is decisive for attending the summer school. Pupils are taught by pedagogues and teacher trainees. Participation in the summer school is voluntary. After registration, the participation becomes obligatory for the entire period ([134]).

The Flemish Community of Belgium and Austria both provide small group teaching in the context of a summer school during the school holidays ([135]). The aim of the summer school is to help students address any learning delays or deficiencies by providing learning support outside the regular school period. In both education systems, the summer school takes place in the last two weeks before the beginning of the new school year. In the case of the Flemish Community of Belgium, the 10 days can become 20 if the summer school is offered in half days ([136]). A large-scale survey commissioned by the Flemish government was conducted in 2023. It found out that compared with when the programme started (2020), the summer schools are now a widespread phenomenon, with more than 12 000 students thus far having attended.

In **Slovenia**, Roma teaching assistants have been employed in primary schools since the 2021/2022 school year. They work in schools where the number of Roma children is sufficient and in accordance with certain criteria. The key tasks of the assistants include assisting students in overcoming emotional and language barriers, establishing, maintaining and facilitating contact between parents and school professionals, helping in the integration of Roma students, working with school professionals in designing and implementing measures to improve the success of Roma students, organising activities for students and their parents in the communities where they live and, finally, promoting the value of education among the members of the Roma community ([137]). This support not only addresses learning needs but also fosters a sense of belonging among Roma students and their families. (The recruitment, training and evolving policy role of Roma teaching assistants are further discussed in Chapter 6.) Drawing on a survey and quantitative research methods, Slovenian authorities analysed the effectiveness of the programme and concluded that it is necessary to (a) change the Roma student population criteria for the placement of a Roma teaching assistant, (b) improve the assistants' long-term employment prospects, (c) clearly define their tasks, (d) adjust their job classification, and (e) offer CPD before and during employment.

([133]) Curriculum for Slovenian language lessons for immigrant students.

([134]) Sommerschule 2025.

([135]) The Flemish measure is reported in Figure 5.3 as 'additional funding' rather than 'tutoring', because of the decentralised nature of the education system The Flemish education authorities make funding available for the setting up and running of a summer school, but it is not necessary that all schools participate in the programme and, furthermore, sometimes the summer school is not offered by a school.

([136]) Summer schools in Flanders, 2025.

([137]) Rules on the Norms and Standards for Performing the Programme of Basic School.

5.4. Additional funding at the discretion of schools

Denmark is one of the countries where school autonomy applies. The country's education authorities provided more money and guidelines to help students in improving their performance in reading literacy or mathematics, but it is up to school heads to tailor the support to the school's circumstances. In addition, Denmark recently adopted the 'message book', which is a tool designed to support students' development, both academic and personal, through an ongoing dialogue between the student, parents and school. The idea is that this communication channel should be meaningful yet non-bureaucratic ([138]).

As already mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, Germany's *Startchancen* programme comes with money for learning support. More specifically, 30 % of the funds are earmarked for needs-based school development and teaching improvement measures, including additional learning support in German and mathematics. This allows *Startchancen* schools to implement solutions that are tailored to the specific challenges they face ([139]). In Austria, 100 primary and secondary schools that need support staff to help underachieving students have been singled out by the Federal Institute for Quality Assurance and the University of Vienna to receive more money ([140]).

In the Netherlands, through the 'Masterplan for basic skills', the national authorities have made additional resources available. Schools can apply for grants that will help them improve low-achieving students' basic skills.

Finally, Norwegian top-level authorities made a grant available to the municipalities with the aim of increasing students' reading skills. The grant is meant to be used for the purchase of printed books and in support of school libraries ([141]).

5.5. Summary

This chapter focused on the learning support measured adopted by top-level education authorities in Europe since 2020/2021 to help underachieving students in reading literacy, mathematics and/or science. The analysis revealed that 27 out of 37 education systems took relevant measures, which in most cases apply for both primary and lower secondary education. Amongst the most common measures are a new policy framework and small group tutoring. The latter can be offered during the school day or outside of it (usually in the afternoon or during school holidays).

The research literature suggests that personalised learning can play an important role in tackling underachievement, especially if it takes place during school hours. Therefore, the finding that some education systems recently adopted small group tutoring during the school day is encouraging, but only nine did so in both primary and lower secondary schools. Likewise, only eight education systems adopted small group teaching outside the school hours in both education levels. These numbers refer only to centralised education systems. Some of the more decentralised education systems, such as the German, Dutch or Swedish systems, provide funding for small group teaching, but it is up to schools to decide how exactly to use the funding. Hence, the total number of measures related to small group teaching is slightly higher. Often the measures tackle literacy problems amongst students with migrant backgrounds, but in general the language support programmes are open to all students facing difficulties.

The chapter also cast a closer look at a selection of new policy frameworks and other measures. Overall, the qualitative analysis showed that a wide range of measures has been recently deployed to deal with underachievement. Such measures range from small group teaching and help with homework to the development of new methodological guidelines and the recruitment of more teachers. This richness suggests that authorities have a great number of instruments they can use in their fight against student underachievement.

([138]) The 'message book'.

([139]) Federal Government-Länder agreement on the implementation of the Startchancen programme for the period 2024 – 2034, 2024.

([140]) 100 Schools – 1 000 Opportunities.

([141]) 300 million for school books, Government of Norway, 2024.

Chapter 6: Supporting teachers to improve basic skills

Effective education systems depend on well-supported teachers who enable students to develop basic skills in literacy, mathematics and science – competences essential for personal fulfilment, academic progression and professional success. Teachers are not only facilitators of knowledge but also key agents of change, shaping learning environments and influencing the development of lifelong skills (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017; OECD, 2023a).

Research consistently suggests that teacher quality is among the most significant factors affecting student achievement, surpassing even socioeconomic background in its impact (Blömeke, Olsen and Suhl, 2016; European Commission, 2022b; OECD, 2023a). At the global level, the UNESCO 2024 *Global report on teachers* highlights the urgent need to address teacher shortages and transform the profession through enhanced career pathways, attractive working conditions and sustained investment in professional development (UNESCO, 2024). These priorities align closely with EU initiatives and underscore the systemic nature of teacher support in improving educational equity and student outcomes.

The Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future ([142]) reaffirm teachers' pivotal role in education and call for systemic measures to strengthen their competences. In particular, they advocate for greater participation in continuing professional development (CPD) and urge education and training institutions to offer high-impact, research-informed CPD through collaboration, peer learning, mentoring and networking. These goals are supported by evidence indicating that sustained, collaborative CPD models – including professional learning communities – contribute to enhanced teacher self-efficacy, instructional quality and student achievement (Borko, 2004; Weißenrieder *et al.*, 2015; Blömeke and Kaiser, 2017).

Complementing these efforts, the Council recommendation on pathways to school success ([143]) emphasises the role of teachers in preventing underachievement and fostering inclusive, learner-centred education. It recommends targeted support to strengthen teacher competences through high-quality professional development, early identification of learning needs and inclusive pedagogical approaches. However, despite these policy commitments, a significant number of students continue to fall below minimum proficiency levels, particularly in literacy, mathematics and science – a concern underscored by recent PISA results and the Education and Training Monitor (European Commission, 2022b; OECD, 2023b).

The Eurydice report *Teachers in Europe: careers, development and well-being* underscores that comprehensive teacher support – including CPD, mentoring, guidance and access to innovative teaching resources – is essential for improving student outcomes and reducing educational disparities (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2021). Similar findings were reported in TALIS 2018, which highlighted that teachers who regularly engage in professional learning are more likely to apply effective strategies such as formative assessment and differentiated instruction (OECD, 2021b). Moreover, empirical research shows that investment in teacher training contributes to reducing achievement gaps over time (Jackson, Rockoff and Staiger, 2014; Papay and Kraft, 2015).

([142]) Council of the European Union, 2020. Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future (2020/C 193/04), OJ C 193, 9.6.2020, pp. 11–19.

([143]) Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on pathways to school success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2022/C 469/01, (OJ C 469, 9.12.2022).

CPD programmes enable teachers to implement evidence-based approaches – including learner-centred methods, formative assessment and adaptive instruction – to address the varied needs within their classrooms. These skills are critical to creating environments in which all students can succeed (OECD, 2023a; UNESCO, 2024). A meta-analysis of academic interventions in European primary education confirms that structured literacy programmes – often delivered by trained teachers – significantly improve reading comprehension among low-performing students (Dietrichson *et al.*, 2017b).

There is a strong link between strengthening basic skills and fostering inclusive education. Inclusive education aims to ensure that all learners – irrespective of socioeconomic status, language background or learning needs – receive high-quality, tailored support (UNESCO, 2017). Research suggests that inclusive practices, such as co-teaching, differentiated instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy, can reduce underachievement and promote engagement (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011; UNESCO, 2018). Professional collaboration among teachers also contributes to improved instructional quality and student learning (Vescio, Ross and Adams, 2008). These findings reinforce the value of differentiated instruction when implemented in supportive school contexts (Ziernwald, Hillmayr and Holzberger, 2022; Letzel-Alt and Pozas, 2023).

The Commission staff working document accompanying the proposal for a Council recommendation on pathways to school success outlines key strategies to help teachers address underachievement (European Commission, 2022a). It highlights the importance of collaborative approaches involving teachers, support staff and specialists in creating inclusive learning environments. These directions are underpinned by research showing that school-based professional learning communities enhance teaching practices and student outcomes (Goddard, Goddard and Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Vescio, Ross and Adams, 2008).

In addition, the strategic policy frameworks discussed in Chapter 1 emphasise the importance of comprehensive measures to support teachers, acknowledging their central role in educational success. These include enhancing professional competences through CPD, providing structured guidance, promoting inclusive teaching practices and ensuring access to high-quality instructional materials.

Finally, this chapter also reflects the objectives of the Action Plan on Basic Skills, which underscores the pivotal role of teachers in tackling underachievement and promoting inclusive, high-quality learning. The Action Plan reinforces the need for strategic investment in professional development, inclusive teaching practices and accessible learning materials (European Commission, 2025b).

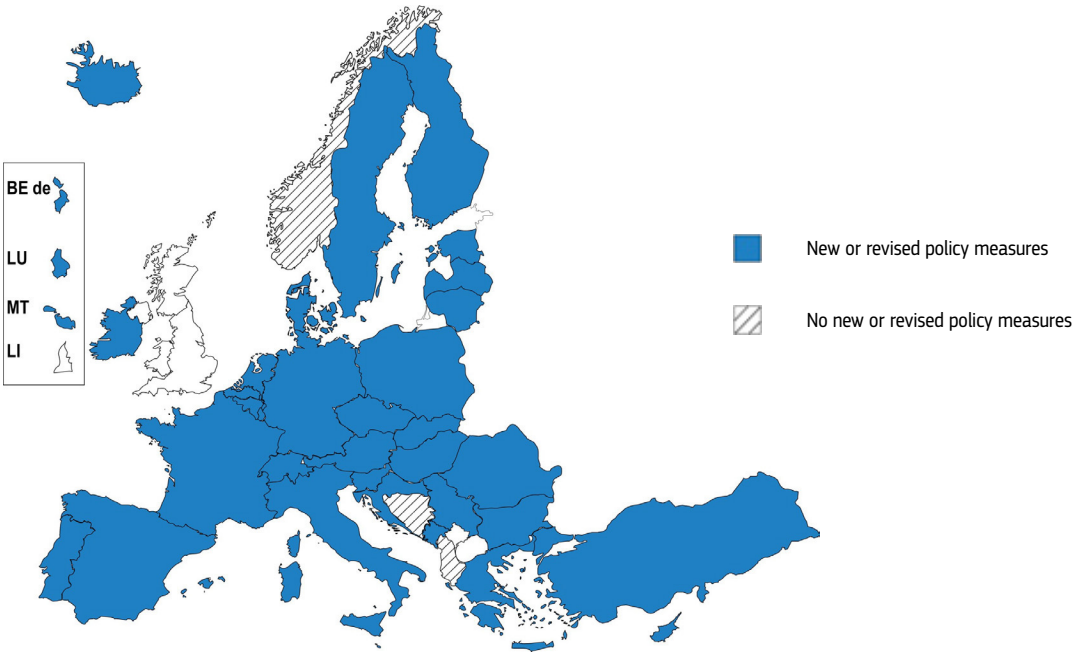
6.1. New or revised policy measures since 2020/2021

This section provides an overview of the policy measures designed to support teachers in enhancing basic skills acquisition and delivering inclusive education. As shown in Figure 6.1, the vast majority of European education systems have newly introduced or revised policy measures since the 2020/2021 school year to strengthen teachers' capacity in response to underachievement in basic skills – literacy, mathematics and science. This reflects a growing recognition of the need for targeted interventions to improve teaching effectiveness.

Figure 6.2 categorises these changes into six main themes: (1) provision of CPD related to basic skills, (2) provision of CPD related to inclusive education, (3) teaching materials and resources supporting basic skills acquisition, (4) teaching materials and resources supporting inclusive education, (5) new top-level funding with local/school autonomy, and (6) other support initiatives such as mentorship or peer-learning.

CPD remains a key priority for enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills and, in turn, improving student outcomes in basic skills and inclusive education. The use of structured guidance and aligned teaching resources supports consistency in teaching approaches. These policy initiatives also incorporate inclusive education principles, fostering learning environments that respond to diverse learner needs.

Figure 6.1: New or revised policy measures supporting teachers to improve basic skills acquisition and deliver inclusive education, 2020/2021-2024/2025, ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific notes

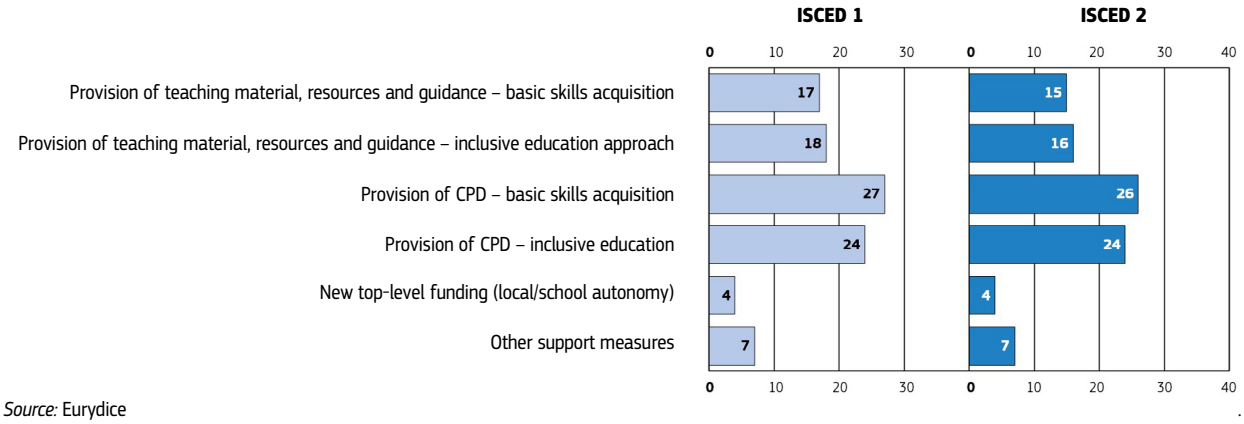
Cyprus and **Montenegro**: reported policy measures mostly concern ISCED 1.
Ireland: reported policy measures concern ISCED 2.

Among the systems analysed, 27 provide structured CPD to enhance teachers' capacity to deliver basic skills teaching. Seventeen systems complement this with teaching materials, resources or guidance. Inclusive education also features prominently, with 25 systems offering CPD focused on inclusive teaching approaches and 18 providing guidance or materials to support inclusive classroom practices. In addition, seven systems have launched new initiatives such as mentoring schemes and peer-learning opportunities. Most new or revised policy measures apply across both primary and lower secondary education, with only minor differences between the two levels. These differences will be discussed as they relate to the detailed measures. A comprehensive approach – combining all four major measures – is observed in the Flemish Community of Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Finland and Switzerland. These education systems have implemented coherent approaches supporting both basic skills acquisition and inclusive pedagogy.

In Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, new top-level funding frameworks have been introduced. These include Denmark's Quality programme for primary schools ([144]), Germany's *Startchancen* programme ([145]), the Netherlands' Masterplan for basic skills ([146]) and Sweden's 2024 Government grants for strengthened knowledge development ([147]). They allocate financial support and set overarching goals at the central level, while implementation decisions are taken at the school or local authority levels.

([144]) Denmark's Quality programme for primary schools.
([145]) Germany's *Startchancen* programme.
([146]) The Netherlands' Masterplan for basic skills.
([147]) Government grants for strengthened knowledge development 2024, Swedish National Agency for Education.

Figure 6.2: Number of education systems with new or revised policy measures supporting teachers to improve basic skills acquisition and deliver inclusive education, 2020/2021-2024/2025, ISCED 1-2, by sub-category



Source: Eurydice

Although all three basic skills are addressed in current policy measures, literacy and mathematics tend to receive slightly greater emphasis. Science is also included in a significant number of initiatives, though its prominence is comparatively lower. The following Section 6.2 examines the various approaches adopted by European education systems in implementing and combining these policy measures to enhance basic skills teaching and inclusive classroom practices.

6.2. Provision of professional development opportunities

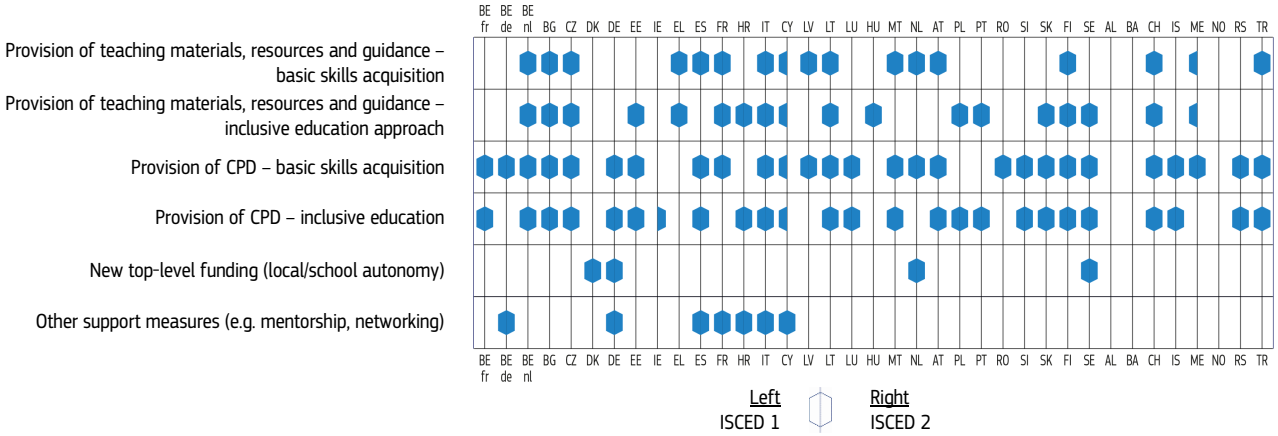
CPD programmes focused on teaching basic skills and inclusive education represent some of the most widespread policy measures across European education systems, as illustrated in Figure 6.2. While countries vary in their specific approaches to teacher training, common patterns emerge in how CPD is structured and aligned with national education priorities.

These patterns reflect the policy frameworks outlined in Chapter 1, where CPD is positioned as a key mechanism to improve teaching quality and address underachievement early. Emphasising evidence-based methods, CPD supports the instructional strategies discussed in Chapter 2, such as formative assessment and differentiated instruction, which help meet diverse learning needs and improve outcomes. CPD is also closely linked to the curriculum and assessment reforms described in Chapters 3 and 4. Training often accompanies new or revised curricula to ensure alignment between content and pedagogy. Moreover, growing attention is given to formative assessment within CPD, enabling teachers to identify learning gaps and adapt their teaching. These competences are central to promoting both basic skills and inclusive education.

Against this background, European education systems can be broadly grouped into three categories: those implementing integrated CPD models that combine basic skills development with inclusive pedagogies; those adopting targeted strategies focusing on either basic skills or inclusive education; and those pursuing equity-driven initiatives aimed at underperforming schools and specific learner groups. These approaches reflect a wider policy shift towards adaptive, differentiated and evidence-informed teaching practices that respond to both learning challenges and equity gaps. They also underscore the interdependence of inclusive education and basic skills acquisition, both of which require teachers to be equipped with responsive and evidence-informed teaching methods.

The first group – **integrated CPD approaches** – includes 21 education systems that have introduced initiatives to build teachers' capacity to strengthen basic skills while simultaneously applying inclusive pedagogical practices.

Figure 6.3: Policy measures supporting teachers to improve basic skills acquisition and deliver inclusive education, 2020/2021-2024/2025, ISCED 1-2, by education system and sub-category



Source: Eurydice.

Bulgaria's 'Success for you' project ([148]), co-funded by the European Social Fund Plus, offers structured CPD courses focusing on reading, mathematics and inclusive strategies for teachers working with ethnic minorities and students with special educational needs (SEN). A similar approach is evident in Czechia, where the 'Let's get everyone involved' initiative, managed by the National Pedagogical Institute of Czechia ([149]), provide CPD programmes integrating basic skills teaching with inclusive education practices. In Lithuania, the CPD framework prioritises mathematics didactics, literacy instruction and universal design for learning (UDL), ensuring that teachers receive comprehensive training that addresses both academic proficiency and inclusive pedagogy. In Switzerland, the *Mindsteps* programme' ([150]) incorporates formative assessments and personalised learning resources into CPD, allowing teachers to monitor student progress and tailor instruction accordingly.

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, the Priority in-service training programme (INSET) ([151]) was strategically refocused between 2020 and 2024 to strengthen teaching in reading comprehension, Dutch-language integration and mathematics in over 200 schools. The initiative builds on earlier cycles, including a 2018–2020 phase focused on support staff in inclusive education. It is implemented through two-year projects by a range of providers, including pedagogical guidance services, higher education institutions and private organisations. Evaluation results suggest positive outcomes and strong teacher engagement. Monitoring is carried out via annual reports and feedback to a follow-up group, with resources shared on the *KlasCement* platform ([152]).

In the **French Community of Belgium**, the 'Pact for excellence in teaching' ([153]) has reinforced the CPD framework since the 2020/2021 school year, strengthening teacher capacity in basic skills and inclusive education. Important changes include new training pathways, expanded peer-learning networks and mandatory CPD in reading, mathematics and differentiated instruction. As part of this initiative, the 'Towards an inclusive school' programme ([154]) provides training on intellectual developmental disorders and reasonable accommodations, helping teachers implement individualised learning plans.

([148]) Project 'Success for you', Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria.
([149]) 'Let's get everyone involved' initiative, National Pedagogical Institute of Czechia.
([150]) *Mindsteps* programme, Switzerland.
([151]) Priority In-Service Training (INSET), Flemish Community of Belgium.
([152]) *KlasCement* platform, Flemish Community of Belgium.
([153]) Pact for excellence in teaching, French Community of Belgium.
([154]) 'Towards an inclusive school' programme, French Community of Belgium.

In **Finland**, the Finnish National Agency for Education collaborates with local authorities to design evidence-based CPD programmes. The LUMA Centre Finland network ([155]) plays an important role in providing free teacher training in mathematics, reading instruction, special education methodologies and diverse assessment strategies. Finland also prioritises inclusive education and multicultural pedagogy, ensuring all students receive equitable learning opportunities. The University of Tampere's *InTrans* project ([156]) supports inclusive transition practices to ensure smoother educational pathways for students with diverse learning needs. Additionally, the programme 'Expert in multicultural pedagogy and guidance' ([157]) equips educators with skills in multicultural counselling, cultural sensitivity and inclusive teaching to better support diverse student needs.

In **Italy**, a comprehensive CPD framework has been developed through the *Scuola futura* platform ([158]) supported by the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). This initiative offers approximately 45 000 training courses to over 650 000 teachers and school staff, covering basic skills improvement and STEM-related and multilingual education. Training is delivered through regional school hubs, offering tailored programmes aligned with local needs. Italy also supports inclusive education through an Orientation reform ([159]) that introduced CPD training for teachers to guide students in choosing appropriate learning paths.

France, Malta and Slovakia have introduced national CPD strategies that provide structured training for teachers, focusing on literacy, mathematics and inclusive teaching methodologies. In France, the *Plan français* ([160]), alongside the earlier *Plan mathématiques* ([161]), provides in-service training for primary teachers, offering 30 hours of training per subject over a six-year cycle. At the district level, *référents français* (teacher trainers) receive 120 hours of training across three years. Evaluations of both plans indicate high levels of teacher satisfaction and report professional benefits, including improved instructional practices and enhanced student learning outcomes ([162]). In addition, self-evaluation tools developed by the School Evaluation Council support the continuous improvement of training delivery ([163]).

Similarly, Malta's 2024–2030 National education strategy ([164]) prioritises CPD collaborations with universities, enhancing teacher training in both basic skills and inclusion. In Slovakia, the National project for professional development of teachers ([165]) emphasises reading literacy, metacognitive strategies and support for Slovak as a second language. Serbia and Türkiye have launched large-scale CPD initiatives aimed at functional literacy, assessment techniques and career progression. Serbia's accredited CPD covers maths literacy, thematic teaching and SEN support ([166]), while Türkiye's 2022 In-Service Training Regulation ([167]) introduced school-based CPD and a Teacher Information Network ([168]).

A smaller group of countries have reported a second approach **focusing either on basic skills improvement or inclusive education**. Six education systems (the German-speaking Community of Belgium, France, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania and Montenegro) target strengthening the basic skills. These systems prioritise literacy, mathematics and science, equipping teachers with subject-specific expertise. In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, CPD is designed to support core literacy and numeracy skills, with specialised consulting services for primary schools aligning teacher training with competency-based curriculum standards. Latvia has developed CPD programmes that train teachers in competency-based learning, formative assessment and

([155]) LUMA Centre, Finland.
([156]) *InTrans* project, University of Tampere, Finland.
([157]) Finland's 'Expert in multicultural pedagogy and guidance' CPD programme.
([158]) Italy's *Scuola futura* platform.
([159]) Italy's Orientation reform.
([160]) *Plan de formation en français – premier degré*, Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, France.
([161]) *Relever le niveau en mathématiques de la maternelle à la terminale*, Ministère de l'Education Nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, France.
([162]) Synthèse sur l'enquête des plans mathématiques et français (2023).
([163]) *Outils d'auto-évaluation des constellations* mis en place par le Conseil de l'évaluation de l'école (CEE), France.
([164]) Malta's 2024-2030 National education strategy.
([165]) National project for professional development of teachers, Slovakia.
([166]) Rulebook on Continuing Professional Development and advancement into titles for teachers, preschool Teachers and professional associates (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 109/2021).
([167]) In-service Training Regulation, Türkiye, Ministry of National Education.
([168]) Teacher Information Network, Türkiye.

adaptive instructional methods. In the Netherlands, CPD is delivered through centres of expertise, offering training in subject-specific methodologies, formative assessment and digital learning tools. For example, the Expertise centre for mathematics and arithmetic ([169]) provides specialised training in mathematics instruction. In Romania, the programme 'Reading to learn – literacy strategies in the teaching-learning process' ([170]) focuses on reading comprehension, formative assessment and instructional effectiveness, ensuring that teachers receive targeted professional development in literacy instruction.

Conversely, Ireland, Croatia, Poland and Portugal have reported measures focused on inclusive education. In Croatia, the Education and Teacher Training Agency (AZOO) ([171]) offers CPD that strengthens literacy and numeracy teaching, particularly in low-performing schools. Ireland, Poland (see country example) and Portugal prioritise CPD in special needs education, differentiation techniques and inclusive classroom practices.

In **Poland**, CPD includes training in co-teaching, UDL and reasonable accommodations to support students with SEN. The 'Accessible School for All' (ASA) project ([172]) strengthens the competences of specialist teachers (pedagogues, psychologists, speech therapists). Implemented by the Educational Research Institute in cooperation with UNICEF, universities and NGOs, this initiative focuses on fostering inclusive schools, strengthening mental health education and integrating refugee and migrant students. The Polish Ministry of National Education offers free postgraduate studies in inclusive pedagogy, thereby enhancing teacher training for diverse learning needs.

In Ireland, Oide, the national support service for professional learning, provides CPD courses aimed at strengthening inclusive practices at the post-primary level. These include structured webinars and workshops on whole-school guidance, support for English as an additional language (EAL) learners and inclusive planning for diverse learning needs. The CPD targets teachers, school leaders and guidance counsellors, and is designed to foster collaborative, learner-centred environments that address diverse student needs ([173]). Portugal offers CPD courses in Braille literacy, assistive technologies and differentiated instruction, enhancing accessibility and inclusion for students with diverse learning needs ([174]).

The data reported by European education systems contain numerous examples referring to the third approach – **equity-driven CPD models** targeting teachers in underperforming schools or those working with specific learner groups such as migrant or SEN students. They aim to ensure that teachers working in challenging environments receive specialised training in evidence-based interventions and student support mechanisms. The following examples illustrate diverse approaches to equity-driven teacher development.

Spain and Germany link CPD with broader school improvement policies, ensuring that professional development is embedded within systemic efforts to address educational disadvantage. In Spain, the Programme for guidance, progress and educational enrichment (PROA+) ([175]) targets CPD for teachers in participating schools, equipping them with tools for differentiated instruction and intervention strategies. A comparable model is found in Germany, where the *Startchancen* programme focuses on schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, delivering CPD in pedagogical leadership, literacy and mathematics instruction. Similarly, CPD initiatives in Montenegro and Türkiye prioritise low-performing schools, reinforcing teacher competences in literacy, numeracy and assessment methodologies. These policies reflect a trend towards equity-based teacher development, where CPD is used as a tool to mitigate educational disparities by strengthening the capacity of teachers in underperforming schools.

Other education systems, including in Estonia, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden, have tailored CPD to support specific learner groups, such as migrant students, ethnic minorities and students with SEN. They have expanded CPD for inclusive education,

([169]) The Netherlands' Expertise Centre for Mathematics and Arithmetic.
([170]) National Register of Accredited Continuing Professional Development Programs | Ministry of Education and Research, Romania.
([171]) Catalogue of State and Inter-County Expert Conferences of Croatian Education and Teacher Training Agency for 2024 – AZOO.
([172]) Poland's 'Accessible school for all project'.
([173]) Inclusive Education practices – Oide, Ireland.
([174]) Example: Training course 'Inclusive education practices', Portugal.
([175]) Spain's Programme for orientation, progress, and educational enrichment (PROA+).

equipping teachers with pedagogical tools to support diverse classrooms through structured or modular training programmes. Moreover, Eurydice findings indicate that across Europe, the ability to teach students with SEN or disabilities is among the most commonly promoted inclusive education competences through CPD (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023, p. 78).

Estonia offers CPD programmes on classroom collaboration and inclusive teaching for SEN students, ranging from short-term courses to 300-hour programmes. The University of Luxembourg offers a Master's in inclusive education, training teachers in pedagogical strategies for diverse classrooms ([176]). Finland's 'Expert in multicultural pedagogy' programme offers training in cultural sensitivity, multicultural counselling and inclusive teaching strategies. Similarly, Slovenia's KATIS CPD programmes ([177]) help teachers integrate foreign-born students into mainstream education, while in Sweden, the 2024 modular CPD programme focuses on student participation and systematic SEN support ([178]).

Finally, digitalisation is enhancing access and flexibility in teacher professional development. The Flemish Community of Belgium's *Leerpunt* platform ([179]) and Italy's *Scuola futura* (mentioned earlier) offer on-demand, self-paced courses in basic skills, STEM and inclusive education. Austria's 'New Curricula' Massive open online course (MOOC) ([180]) and Switzerland's *Mindsteps* ([181]) provide online modules on formative assessment, literacy and mathematics. Similarly, Sweden's *Lärportalen* ([182]), Hungary's digital tools for CPD ([183]) and Cyprus's national e-learning platform ([184]) support CPD in literacy, mathematics, assessment and inclusion. It is worth noting that a common feature across these initiatives is the emphasis on modular, interactive content, enabling teachers to personalise their learning while reducing logistical barriers to participation.

A notable trend is the alignment of CPD with national education strategies, suggesting that teacher development is viewed as a long-term lever for reducing achievement gaps and strengthening inclusive teaching. While some education systems have adopted comprehensive, centrally coordinated models, others rely on more flexible or decentralised approaches. The connection between inclusive education and basic skills development is evident, as many programmes incorporate differentiated instruction, formative assessment and adaptive methodologies to support diverse learners and improve student outcomes.

6.3. Teaching materials, resources and other support measures

In addition to CPD programmes, many European education systems have introduced complementary support measures to strengthen teachers' capacity to deliver effective basic skills teaching and inclusive education. These include structured pedagogical guidance, access to high-quality teaching materials, professional networks, mentoring schemes and peer-learning opportunities.

Teaching resources play an important role in bridging training and classroom practice. They typically include lesson plans, assessment tools and diagnostic frameworks aligned with curricula. Such materials reinforce the teaching approaches covered in CPD and ensure consistency with updated content and teaching standards, as discussed in Chapter 3 on curriculum. They also support pedagogical practices outlined in Chapter 2, such as differentiated instruction and collaborative teaching.

The extent to which these resources are integrated with CPD varies across countries, reflecting differences in policy priorities, implementation models and system-level challenges. As shown in Figures 6.2 and 6.3, nearly half of education systems provide dedicated

([176]) Programme *Master en sciences de l'éducation – Éducation inclusive et accessibilité pédagogique*, University of Luxembourg.
([177]) Slovenia's Catalogue of further education and training programmes for education professionals (KATIS).
([178]) Swedish National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools.
([179]) *Leerpunt* platform, Flemish Community of Belgium.
([180]) Austrian MOOC training 'NEW Curricula – Teaching with new curricula, competence grids and exemplary learning tasks'.
([181]) *Mindsteps* programme, Switzerland.
([182]) *Lärportalen* platform, Sweden.
([183]) Hungarian National Public Education Portal.
([184]) Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus.

teaching materials addressing both basic skills and inclusive practices. A group of 11 systems – the Flemish Community of Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, France, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Finland, Switzerland and Montenegro – stand out for having developed comprehensive resources that align with CPD content. These materials serve as essential complements to training, offering practical tools that help translate theoretical knowledge into effective classroom practice.

For example, the Flemish Community of Belgium, France (see country example), Lithuania and Switzerland provide nationally developed teaching guides comprising lesson plans, assessment instruments and diagnostic tools. The Flemish Community of Belgium integrates digital CPD modules with structured teaching resources through the *Leerpunt* platform ([185]) to support teaching in literacy, mathematics and inclusive education. In Czechia, the National Pedagogical Institute supports teachers working with Ukrainian students by providing specialised resources such as 'Methodological texts for working with Ukrainian pupils' ([186]). Lithuania has issued curriculum-aligned methodological guidance for literacy and numeracy, along with dedicated resources on UDL and support for students with SEN.

In **France**, the *Plan français* ([187]) (introduced in the 2020/2021 school year) and the earlier *Plan mathématiques* ([188]) (launched in 2018) provide structured training for teachers supported by nationally developed teaching materials. These include guides such as 'Teaching reading and writing in first grade' and 'French grammar from first to sixth grade' ([189]). In 2023, a new Science and technology teaching guide ([190]) was also introduced. A comprehensive resource bank for basic skills in French and mathematics has been established, offering a wide range of resources. These include remedial activities for struggling students, enrichment tasks for advanced learners, targeted learning sequences addressing specific competences and diagnostic assessments to identify student needs. New video resources have also been developed to support teachers in implementing the updated curricula and pedagogical approaches. Notable examples include the *Regards sur* series ([191]) and 'Tuesdays for science and technology' series ([192]), which provide practical insights for teaching mathematics, French and science in line with curriculum reforms. To further support inclusive education, the *Cap École* inclusive platform ([193]) offers interactive guides, video tutorials and training modules designed to help teachers support students with learning difficulties.

Several education systems, including Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Finland, Switzerland and Türkiye, have embedded digital learning platforms to increase accessibility and support flexible professional development. These systems provide teachers with modular, interactive resources aligned with national training efforts, facilitating continuous learning and instructional improvement. Greece's interactive schoolbooks platform ([194]) includes digital versions of textbooks with simulations, videos and gamified learning content, reinforcing teacher training in literacy, mathematics and differentiated instruction. Italy's *Scuola futura* platform (mentioned in the previous section) and Cyprus's e-learning platform ([195]) offer online instructional resources, enabling teachers to access on-demand training modules and best practice examples. Finland has developed specialised learning materials in collaboration with LUMA Centre Finland, providing free digital resources supporting mathematics, reading instruction and STEM education. Switzerland's *Mathbuch* series ([196]) offers structured curriculum-aligned learning materials for teachers supporting basic skills acquisition, while Türkiye's EBA platform ([197]) provides electronic resources for teachers alongside printed textbooks. Alongside these system-

([185]) *Leerpunt* platform, Flemish Community of Belgium.
([186]) Methodological texts for working with Ukrainian pupils.
([187]) Plan de formation en français – premier degré, Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, France.
([188]) *Plan mathématiques*, France.
([189]) Les guides fondamentaux pour l'enseignement, France.
([190]) Science and technology teaching guide.
([191]) Regards-sur-les-programmes-francais-cycle-2.
([192]) Example: Les Mardis des sciences et la technologie – plouf – retour d'expérience.
([193]) Confiance, apprentissages, partage – Cap école inclusive – Réseau Canopé.
([194]) Greece's 'Interactive School Books' platform.
([195]) Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus.
([196]) Switzerland's *Mathbuch* series.
([197]) Türkiye's EBA platform.

wide platforms, another group of systems – Spain, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands and Austria – has developed resources that complement CPD, particularly with a subject focus in literacy, mathematics and science. Latvia's *Skolo.lv* ([198]) and *MAPE* ([199]) platforms offer open-access lesson plans and textbooks. The Netherlands supports teachers through centres of expertise that distribute instructional tools and best practices.

Seven education systems – Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden – focus on teaching materials for inclusive education. These include resources for multilingual instruction, co-teaching, UDL and support for SEN students. Estonia provides CPD-linked resources on differentiated learning and supporting students with disabilities. Poland's 'Accessible school for all' initiative ([200]) offers methodological guides on multilingual education and SEN support. Similarly, Sweden has developed modular CPD-linked teaching materials covering topics such as student participation, inclusion and systematic support measures for SEN learners ([201]).

The analysis above suggests that most countries complement CPD courses with structured teaching resources, ensuring teachers receive both training and practical instructional materials. The growing trend towards digital and interactive resources reflects a broader shift in professional learning, ensuring that teachers have access to flexible, evidence-based instructional tools to enhance classroom effectiveness.

Beyond training and materials, four education systems – Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden – have introduced top-level funding, while seven systems – the German-speaking Community of Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy and Cyprus – have implemented additional support measures. These include mentorship programmes, teacher networks and school-based advisory services. In the German-speaking Community of Belgium (see country example), professional learning communities and mentorship initiatives support teacher development in basic skills instruction.

In the **German-speaking Community of Belgium**, a specialised consulting service (*Fachberatung*) ([202]) was introduced to complement existing programmes in German, French, mathematics and science, helping better align teaching in basic skills with curriculum standards. The *Fachberatung* provides expert consultation and training for teachers, led by experienced educators and higher education specialists. It offers school-based support, targeted professional development and guidance on improving basic skills, particularly in areas such as French as a foreign language for students with learning difficulties.

A similarly targeted approach can be seen in the Netherlands. The Masterplan for basic skills provides funding for educational coordinators who offer tailored, school-level support. These experts assist school leaders and teaching teams in diagnosing needs, designing improvement plans and implementing evidence-informed strategies to enhance literacy, writing and mathematics outcomes.

France has taken a more collaborative route by establishing *Laboratoires de mathématiques* ([203]), collaborative spaces where primary and secondary teachers work together to strengthen mathematics instruction. Italy has developed a dual approach that supports both teacher guidance and peer learning. The Orientation reform ([204]) has trained over 60 000 mentor teachers to guide students in their educational and career choices. At the same time, the *Equipe Formative Territoriali* (Territorial Training Teams) network ([205]), with 21 regional coordinators and around 100 teacher trainers, provides ongoing support and training in pedagogical practices, digital skills and inclusive education.

In Spain, the Territorial Cooperation Programme for the reinforcement of mathematical competence ([206])

([198]) Latvia's *Skolo.lv* platform.

([199]) Latvia's *MAPE* platform.

([200]) Poland's 'Accessible school for all' project.

([201]) Special education for learning for preschool class, compulsory school, Sami school and special youth homes – National Agency for Education, Sweden.

([202]) *Fachberatung*, German-speaking Community of Belgium.

([203]) French Mathematics Laboratories – Math in France.

([204]) Italy's Orientation reform – FUTURA.

([205]) Italy's *Equipe Formative Territoriali* (EFT) network.

([206]) Resolution of 5 September 2024, of the Secretary of State for Education, publishing the Agreement of the Education Sectoral Conference of 30 July 2024, approving the proposal for territorial distribution and the criteria for the distribution of credits managed by Autonomous Communities for the Territorial Cooperation Programme for the reinforcement of mathematical competence, in the 2024 budget year.

fosters collaboration among mathematics teachers, supported by advisory teams who assist in the design and implementation of reinforcement plans. In parallel, the Territorial Cooperation Programme for inclusive education ([207]) promotes stronger educational guidance, early intervention and cross-sectoral cooperation involving education, health and social services. Additional resources – such as speech therapists, interpreters and mediators – are deployed in mainstream schools to support inclusion.

In Croatia, the National plan for the development of the education system ([208]) places particular emphasis on mentorship for early-career teachers, while in Cyprus, the Functional literacy programme ([209]) incorporates mentorship and peer networking within structured training in reading and mathematics.

By combining structured mentoring with collaborative learning and advisory support, these education systems help teachers address students' diverse learning needs more effectively. Digital platforms are also playing an increasing role in professional learning, widening access to resources and enabling flexible, continuous development.

Addressing underachievement in basic skills often requires targeted interventions, including specialised teacher training and expanded classroom support. Section 6.4 further explores national policies for recruiting specialist teachers and deploying teaching assistants – key roles in providing tailored support for learners with additional needs.

6.4. Policy measures for recruitment of specialised teachers and teaching assistants

The recruitment and deployment of teachers with a specialisation in addressing learning difficulties (specialised teachers) and teaching assistants represent another important policy area supporting basic skills acquisition and inclusive education. The Council recommendation on pathways to school success ([210]) highlights the vital contribution of highly trained educators and support staff in ensuring that all students, including those with learning difficulties, receive appropriate support. Recent evidence supports this approach.

The Eurydice report *Increasing achievement and motivation in mathematics and science learning in schools* shows that the involvement of specialist remedial teachers at the primary level and the provision of learning support during the school day are associated with lower rates of low achievement in both mathematics and science (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022, Figures 7.1 and 7.2, pp. 130–131). Similarly, the Eurydice report *Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe* finds that teaching assistants and other classroom-based support staff play an important role in helping students from diverse backgrounds succeed in mainstream education (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023a).

This section focuses on two categories of teaching support staff directly linked to student learning outcomes: specialised teachers and teaching assistants who work under the supervision of class teachers to facilitate inclusive practices. These roles are distinct from the broader category of educational support staff – such as psychologists, cultural mediators or counsellors – whose functions extend beyond classroom-based instructional support (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023a).

As noted in Chapter 1, strategic efforts in prevention, intervention and compensation rely on the presence of trained personnel capable of responding to diverse learning needs. Teachers with expertise in learning difficulties, as well as support staff such as teaching assistants, are essential in delivering personalised learning and in helping to reduce educational disparities.

Specialised teachers receive targeted training – either during initial teacher education (ITE) or through CPD –

([207]) Resolution of 5 September 2024, of the Secretary of State for Education, publishing the Agreement of the Education Sectoral Conference of 30 July 2024, approving the proposal for territorial distribution and the criteria for the distribution of the credits managed by Autonomous Communities for the Inclusive Education Territorial Cooperation Programme, European Social Fund+, in the 2024 financial year.

([208]) Croatian national plan for the development of the education system until 2027.

([209]) Cyprus's Functional literacy programme.

([210]) Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on pathways to school success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2022/C 469/01, (OJ C 469, 9.12.2022).

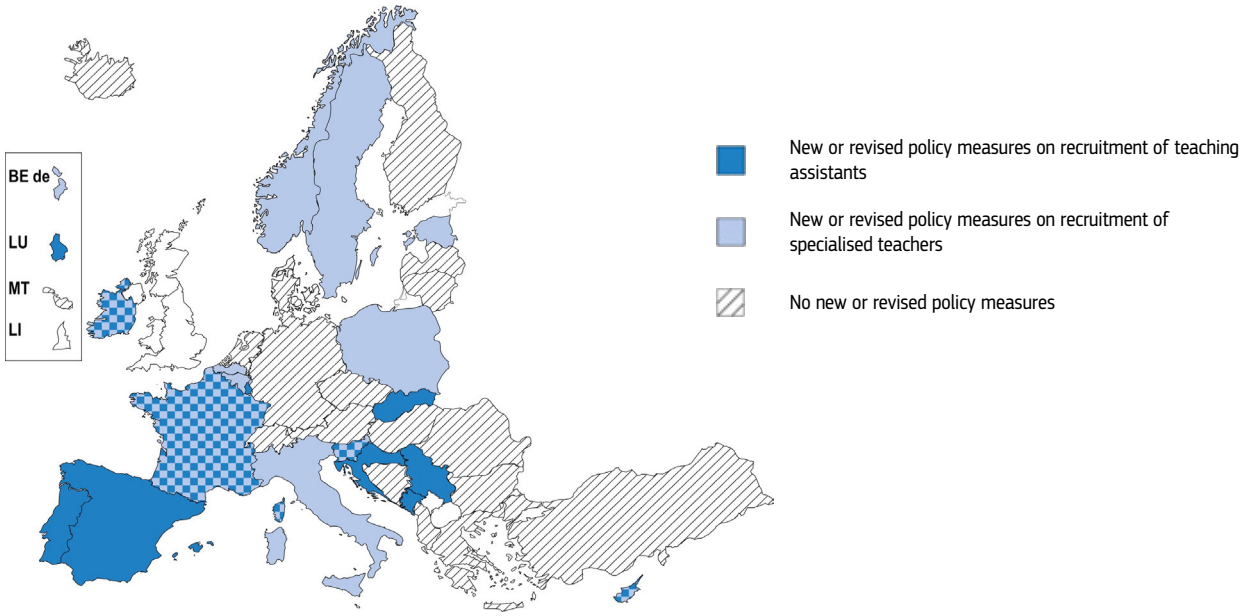
to identify and support learners facing difficulties. They apply approaches such as differentiated instruction, formative assessment and tailored interventions to meet individual needs. Teaching assistants complement these efforts by offering hands-on classroom support, facilitating inclusive practices and engaging students through small group or one-to-one activities. As highlighted in Chapter 2, recent policies increasingly promote differentiated instruction, co-teaching models and flexible student grouping as strategies to support underachieving students.

While educational support staff are widely present across Europe, classroom-based support roles such as teaching assistants are the subject of more targeted policies in some countries. Teaching assistants play a pedagogically focused role in mainstream classrooms, complementing teachers through co-teaching, small group work or differentiated instruction (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023, pp. 83–84).

Figure 6.4 illustrates that since the school year 2020/2021, 12 European education systems have introduced policies to increase the number of teachers trained in supporting students with learning difficulties, alongside initiatives to encourage their recruitment. These measures aim to ensure that students struggling with basic skills receive evidence-based interventions and improved access to quality education. Likewise, 11 education systems have implemented policies to encourage the appointment of teaching assistants to strengthen classroom support.

As previously noted, this report focuses on new or revised policies adopted since 2020/2021. Some systems with earlier provisions in place may not be represented in Figure 6.4. Their absence does not imply a lack of provision but rather reflects the report's focus on recent policy developments. This distinction is essential for interpreting the data: systems that have maintained their support mechanisms may not feature in the policy change analysis, even though they continue to rely on specialised teachers and teaching assistants to support learners with difficulties. The situation before the analysed period is illustrated by the Eurydice report *Increasing achievement and motivation in mathematics and science learning in schools* (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a). Chapter 6 of that report shows that the involvement of specialised teachers or remedial teachers was formally regulated in about half of the systems in the 2020/2021 school year, and teaching assistants were involved in roughly a third, particularly at the primary level (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022, Figure 6.5, pp. 121–122).

Figure 6.4: New or revised policies encouraging recruitment of specialised teachers and teaching assistants, 2020/2021-2024/2025, ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

While specific policies differ across countries, three broad trends can be identified: education systems adopting a comprehensive approach involving both specialised teachers and teaching assistants; those prioritising the recruitment of specialised teachers; and those focusing on increasing the availability of teaching assistants in classrooms.

Four education systems – Ireland, France, Cyprus and Slovenia – have introduced reforms targeting both the recruitment of specialised teachers and teaching assistants (see country examples). This combined approach reflects a commitment to strengthening inclusive education and addressing underachievement in basic skills through a combination of specialised teaching expertise and structured classroom support. Moreover, top-level ITE competence frameworks in many systems promote inclusive education by emphasising values such as equality, non-discrimination and diversity, or by addressing specific requirements related to teaching students with special needs (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023, pp. 80).

In **Ireland**, the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) workforce has been expanded, with the number of posts rising to 17 000 (up from 10 575 in 2011). This complements Ireland's ITE policy statement ([211]), which requires all student teachers to complete practical experience in inclusive education settings. This policy is designed to better prepare new teachers to work with students with diverse learning needs, aligning with international best practices in special education. It also emphasises strengthening ITE through practical experience and collaboration within the education sector.

In **France**, training in inclusive practices is now a mandatory component of ITE and is further supported through the *Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle aux pratiques de l'éducation inclusive* (CAPPEI) framework ([212]). In 2024, the framework was expanded to include professional experience validation pathways, enabling teachers to have relevant on-the-job experience recognised toward certification. This reform aims to encourage more teachers to specialise in inclusive education. Since 2023, France has also increased the recruitment of *Accompagnants d'Élèves en Situation de Handicap* (AESH) ([213]), creating over 6 500 new posts to support individual and small group instruction. This development complements policies discussed in Chapter 2, where small group instruction in mathematics and French has been introduced at the lower secondary level to provide more personalised learning support.

([211]) Irish Initial teacher education policy statement, 2022.

([212]) Devenir enseignant spécialisé | éduscol | Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche | Dgesco.

([213]) Accompagnants d'Élèves en situation de handicap (AESH), France; Cadre de gestion des personnels exerçant des missions d'accompagnement d'élèves en situation de handicap (AESH).

The deployment of AESH staff is also monitored at the national level, including data on recruitment, students' coverage and the implementation of inclusive support schemes.

In **Cyprus**, policy measures focus on inclusive education and differentiated instruction through specialised teacher training and the use of teaching assistants. In 2022, Cyprus introduced a Differentiated Instruction Guide ([214]), distributed to all public schools, alongside teacher training seminars that combined theory with demonstration lessons. A representative from each school attended and was responsible for implementing these practices. Additionally, the School and social inclusion actions (DRASE+) programme ([215]) helps teaching assistants and specialised teachers to facilitate differentiated instruction and co-teaching approaches, particularly in classrooms with migrant students or those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In **Slovenia**, support for students with learning difficulties, migrant and refugee students and those from ethnic minorities has expanded through increased recruitment of specialised teachers and teaching assistants in basic schools. Schools may hire additional counsellors in social pedagogy, special education, psychology, rehabilitation or inclusive pedagogy based on student needs (Rules on Norms and Standards for Basic Schools, Article (10) ([216]). Schools enrolling nine or more migrant students can appoint a Slovenian-language teacher for language acquisition and integration (Article 48). To further promote inclusion, Roma assistants provide targeted classroom support in schools with significant Roma student populations. An analysis of Roma assistants' work ([217]) highlighted the need for long-term job stability, clear responsibilities and continuing professional development to enhance their impact. These findings have informed recent adjustments to national inclusion policies, aiming to strengthen the role of Roma assistants in schools.

By investing in structured professional development, creating formal career pathways and ensuring legal recognition of support roles, European education systems aim to strengthen the capacity of specialised teachers and teaching assistants to provide high-quality, inclusive education for all students.

A second group of countries – including all of the Belgian communities, Estonia, Italy, Poland, Sweden and Norway – has prioritised specialised teacher training. In the French Community of Belgium, the *Accompagnement Personnalisé* initiative ([218]) allocates additional teaching staff to support co-teaching models. This mirrors the shift towards flexible student grouping discussed in Chapter 2, where additional staff are placed in classrooms to regulate learning, provide targeted instruction and enhance co-teaching approaches. Complementing this focus on targeted support, the German-speaking Community of Belgium introduced in 2024 a new dedicated teaching position for general education subjects in lower secondary support classes serving students without a primary school certificate ([219]). This reform consolidates previously separate roles, clarifies qualification requirements and simplifies pathways to permanent employment, aiming to enhance support for learners with basic skills gaps.

In the Flemish Community of Belgium, newly established learning support centres (see Section 6.2) bring together multidisciplinary teams specialising in inclusive pedagogy, offering direct coaching to teachers and strengthening support for students with SEN. Estonia has increased university enrolment for special education professions, introduced beginner's allowances for new specialists and extended teacher-training scholarships to attract candidates to roles such as special education teachers, speech therapists, psychologists and social educators ([220]). Italy has introduced a structured academic pathway for initial teacher training that includes coursework in pedagogy, psycho-pedagogy and digital learning, to better equip future teachers in supporting students with SEN.

In Poland, a new policy framework ([221]) focuses on increasing the number of specialised teachers in schools. These professionals play an important role in supporting basic skills development (reading, mathematics and science), particularly for students with additional educational needs. The new legislation links the required number of specialised teachers to school enrolment and sets minimum staffing thresholds. As a result, the number of specialised staff more than doubled between school years 2021/2022

([214]) Cyprus's differentiated instruction guide, 2022.
([215]) Cyprus's school and social inclusion actions (DRASE+) programme.
([216]) Rules on norms and standards for basic schools, Slovenia.
([217]) Analysis of the work of Roma assistants in kindergartens and basic schools, Slovenia.
([218]) *Périodes obligatoires d'accompagnement personnalisé*, French Community of Belgium.
([219]) Decree on Measures in education and the elderly sector 2024, German-speaking Community of Belgium.
([220]) Procedure for applying, paying and reclaiming the beginner's allowance for teachers and support specialists, Estonia.
([221]) Poland's Law of May 12, 2022, on Amendments to the Law on school education and some other acts.

and 2024/2025. Sweden launched a state-funded initiative ([222]) in the year 2023/2024 to expand the number of specialised teachers, allocating grants for both general staff reinforcement in special education and the establishment of specialised teaching groups. In Norway, the Competence boost for special education and inclusive practices programme ([223]) was introduced to expand CPD opportunities for teachers specialising in learning difficulties. This initiative offers a combination of collective professional development sessions, online training resources and advanced study programmes, ensuring that teachers can continuously update their skills in inclusive education. Additionally, local municipalities can apply for grants to support further CPD for teachers in inclusive pedagogical methods.

A third group of countries – including Spain, Croatia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia, Montenegro and Serbia – has prioritised the recruitment and professionalisation of teaching assistants. As highlighted in Chapter 2, co-teaching and flexible student groupings have gained prominence in instructional organisation, and teaching assistants play an integral role in facilitating personalised learning. Spain has reinforced the co-teaching models in several autonomous communities, such as Extremadura ([224]), Valencia ([225]) and Murcia ([226]), enabling teaching assistants to work alongside teachers in flexible learning groups. Croatia has formalised teaching assistant roles under the Personal Assistance Act (see country example).

In **Croatia**, the Personal assistance act and the Ordinance on teaching assistants and professional communication intermediaries ([227]) regulate the training and professionalisation of teaching assistants. This legislation ensures that assistants provide both academic and social support for students with severe disabilities and learning difficulties. Schools are required to employ trained assistants, with structured funding in place for their salaries and professional development. The revised legal framework guarantees that teaching assistants are available across primary and secondary education, thereby ensuring long-term support in classrooms.

Portugal prioritised the recruitment of specialised staff to enhance the integration of migrant students, and of tutors to provide support to low achieving students ([228]). Luxembourg hired 50 additional teaching assistants in autumn 2024 and a further 50 in 2025 to enhance its inclusive education strategy, ensuring that students with additional learning needs receive structured support ([229]). Slovakia's 2023 amendment to the School Act ([230]) expanded the role of teacher assistants from serving only students identified by counselling centres to serving as general classroom support for any students who need additional help. This approach increases flexibility and inclusion, allowing teaching assistants to help all students who require extra assistance. Montenegro has adopted legal provisions establishing the role of full-time teaching assistants to support students with special education needs. Their responsibilities are formally defined in national standards and individual education plans, outlining their contribution to inclusive classroom practices ([231]). In 2023, Serbia established the National Association of Pedagogical Assistants ([232]), marking a significant step in the professional training and hiring of teaching assistants – particularly to support Roma students – by establishing a national association and

([222]) State grants for staff reinforcement of special education teachers in 2024 – Swedish National Agency for Education.

([223]) The Competence Boost for Special Needs Education and Inclusive Practice, Norway.

([224]) Extremadura's Instruction 18/2024 from the General Directorate of Vocational Training, Innovation and Educational Inclusion.

([225]) Valencia's Primary education decree 106/2022.

([226]) Murcia's programme for inclusive education.

([227]) Croatian Personal assistance act, OG71/23; Ordinance on teaching assistants and professional communication intermediaries (OG 85/2024).

([228]) Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 140/2024, 17 October (Annex 1.3 and 2.1), operationalisation by Despatch no 656/2025, 15 January, and Legislative Order No 10-B/2018, 6 July.

([229]) Luxembourg, Law of 23 July 2024 defining the responsibilities of educational and psycho-social staff in the services and administrations of the Ministry of National Education.

([230]) Act No 245/2008 on education and training (§ 145a, 2(m)), ensuring the work of a teaching assistant in the classroom, Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, Slovakia.

([231]) Montenegro's National standard for teaching assistants.

([232]) Serbian National Association of Pedagogical Assistants.

recruiting 47 new assistants for the next three school years.

The analysis suggests that a number of European education systems have recently taken steps to enhance support for students with learning difficulties, particularly through the recruitment and training of specialised teachers and teaching assistants. These measures are often positioned within broader strategies to improve equity and reduce underachievement in basic skills.

These recent policy changes can be viewed in light of earlier findings from the Eurydice report *Increasing achievement and motivation in mathematics and science learning in schools*, which identified certain system-level factors associated with better outcomes. In particular, the presence of remedial teachers and the organisation of learning support during the school day were associated with a reduction in the proportion of low-achieving students in both mathematics and science (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a). While several education systems have since introduced new or revised policies, others have continued to rely on earlier arrangements.

Overall, recent policy developments indicate that support for students with learning difficulties has been a focus of reform in several education systems, particularly through measures aimed at increasing the availability of support staff. However, the scope and nature of these measures vary. Their effectiveness will ultimately depend on how they are operationalised in schools, including the availability and training of staff.

6.5. Summary

Since the 2020/2021 school year, the majority of European education systems have introduced new or revised CPD programmes aimed at strengthening both the teaching of basic skills and inclusive education practices. These initiatives are frequently supported by structured pedagogical guidance and curriculum-aligned teaching materials, promoting consistency in teaching approaches.

Approaches vary across countries: some have adopted centralised models, while others prioritise more flexible, targeted CPD programmes, including measures directed at specific learner groups. Many systems integrate CPD with structured teaching resources to support coherent, evidence-informed pedagogical practices.

The interconnection between inclusive education and basic skills development is evident, as both rely on adaptive teaching methods, inclusive classroom environments and targeted student support. Inclusive education is increasingly embedded within teacher development frameworks through specialised training and school-based support measures, while mentoring and peer-learning opportunities foster professional collaboration. Digital platforms play an important role in CPD delivery, offering accessibility and flexibility.

Recent trends also point to efforts to recruit and train specialised teachers and teaching assistants. Many systems incorporate inclusive education within ITE and CPD to prepare teachers for diverse classroom contexts. Others have developed institutional mechanisms and funding schemes to increase the availability of specialised teachers. The role of teaching assistants has been strengthened in several systems, either through recruitment initiatives or formal recognition of their responsibilities within legislative and policy frameworks. Four education systems have adopted a comprehensive approach, combining both the recruitment of specialised teachers and the deployment of teaching assistants to provide structured, multi-level classroom support.

Finally, there is an emphasis on flexible, locally tailored interventions, enabling education systems to adapt support measures to specific learner needs. These trends reflect a shared commitment to strengthening support structures and improving educational access and outcomes for students requiring additional learning support. In several education systems, national evaluations have been introduced, combining survey data with school-level observations to provide insights into the implementation of support measures and their impact on inclusive practices and the teaching of basic skills.

Chapter 7: Parents' involvement in the learning process

This chapter examines policies aimed at strengthening parents' involvement in addressing underachievement in basic skills. The analysis focuses on top-level measures introduced or revised since the 2020/2021 school year and still in place in 2024/2025. In this report, the topic is explored by focusing primarily on:

- policies supporting training for parents related to the improvement of basic skills;
- the provision of pedagogical resources for home learning;
- home book schemes and other family-based literacy initiatives;
- broader measures facilitating parental involvement in their children's learning, with a focus on reducing socioeconomic disparities.

Research consistently shows that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, students tend to achieve better learning outcomes, especially in reading, mathematics and science (Epstein, 2011; Goodall and Montgomery, 2013). The 2021 NESET report further highlights that parental involvement – both at home and through cooperation with schools – positively influences academic achievement and student well-being. It notes that home-based activities, such as fostering a learning-conducive environment and discussing school progress, are among the strongest predictors of academic success, particularly when grounded in trusting, respectful relationships between parents and educators (Alieva, 2021).

Building such engagement has been linked to higher levels of student motivation and more positive attitudes toward school. However, participation varies significantly across socioeconomic groups, contributing to educational inequalities (OECD, 2012a). The Eurydice report *Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe* notes that disadvantaged learners – including those from low socioeconomic, migrant and ethnic minority backgrounds – are identified as target groups in national policies. In this context, parental support is viewed as an important means of promoting equity in learning outcomes (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023a).

In response to these disparities, many education systems have adopted policies to enhance the ability of parents to support learning at home. These measures include structured training sessions, access to guidance materials and the distribution of curriculum-aligned resources. Evaluations have indicated that such initiatives can be effective in supporting students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Home book schemes further support literacy development, particularly for disadvantaged children, fostering vocabulary acquisition and a lifelong appreciation for reading (OECD, 2012b). Community-driven initiatives, such as family literacy programmes and homework support schemes, provide additional assistance, particularly for at-risk students (Harris and Goodall, 2008).

Both the Council recommendation on pathways to school success ([233]) and the OECD 2030 Learning Compass emphasise the importance of engaging families to create inclusive and supportive learning environments (OECD, 2025). The European Commission Staff working document on pathways to school success advocates a whole-school approach, promoting collaboration between schools, families and communities to overcome socioeconomic barriers (European Commission, 2022a). It highlights the importance of flexible engagement models, including

([233]) Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on pathways to school success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, 2022/C 469/01, (OJ C 469, 9.12.2022).

in-person workshops, digital resources and community-led interventions, while calling for sustained policy efforts beyond one-off initiatives. The Action Plan on Basic Skills (European Commission, 2025b) complements these efforts by outlining concrete measures to reinforce parental support mechanisms, ensuring that families from all backgrounds have access to the necessary resources to help their children succeed.

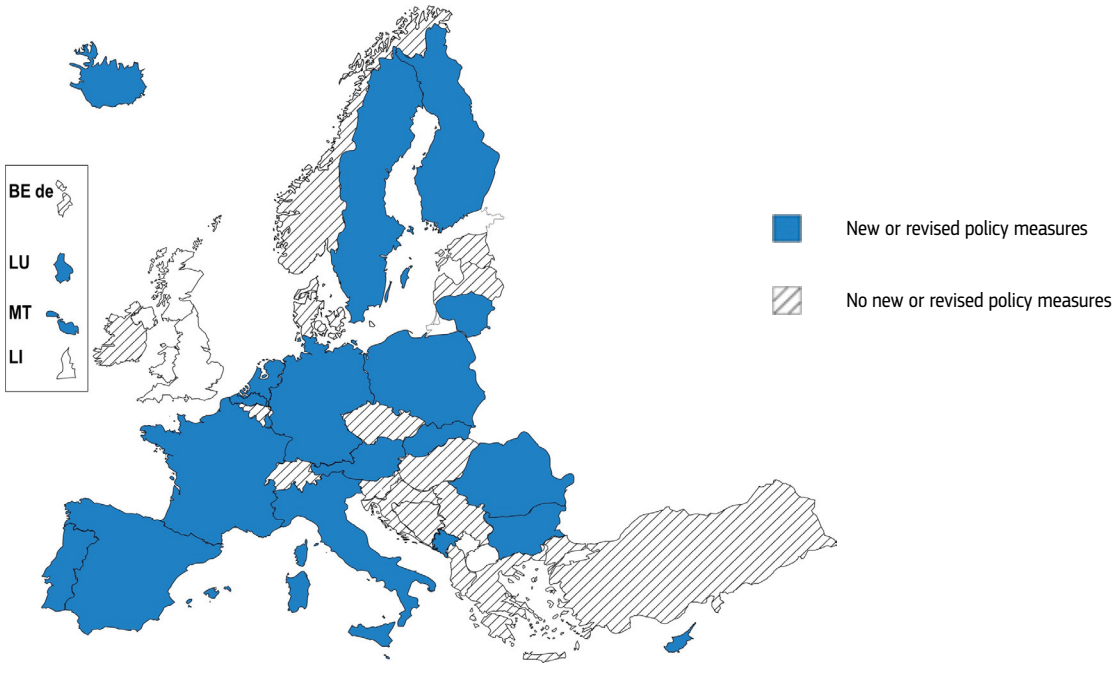
This chapter explores recent developments in policies supporting parents, focusing on their role in tackling underachievement in basic skills. Section 7.2 examines training initiatives for parents, Section 7.3 presents measures related to pedagogical resources and Section 7.4 discusses support policies such as home book schemes, family literacy programmes and additional measures.

7.1. New or revised policy measures since 2020/2021

This section provides an overview of newly introduced or revised policy measures that aim to strengthen parents' engagement in supporting basic skills learning. These initiatives reflect recognition of parents as key contributors to students' learning outcomes. Newly introduced or revised measures include structured training programmes for parents, the provision of pedagogical resources, home book schemes, literacy initiatives and other targeted interventions aimed at enhancing the home learning environment.

As shown in Figure 7.1, just over half of European education systems have introduced or revised policies to involve parents in efforts to improve basic skills acquisition. The category 'new top-level funding' refers to cases where overarching funding and objectives are set by top-level education authorities, while implementation details are decided at the local or school levels.

Figure 7.1: New or revised policy measures supporting parents in improving basic skills acquisition, 2020/2021-2024/2025, ISCED 1-2



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific notes

Cyprus, Finland and **Montenegro**: reported policy measures mostly concern ISCED 1.

A closer examination of these measures reveals a clustering of policy initiatives around three main areas: parental training, the provision of pedagogical resources and home-based support (e.g. book schemes, family literacy initiatives), as illustrated in Figure 7.2. These approaches represent varying levels of engagement, from direct involvement through training to more indirect forms of support via learning materials. Each of these areas is explored in the following sections.

Nine education systems have introduced workshops or training sessions for parents. These measures aim to equip parents with practical strategies to support their children's learning. Their effectiveness is likely to depend on levels of parental participation, as well as the extent to which training is adapted to diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

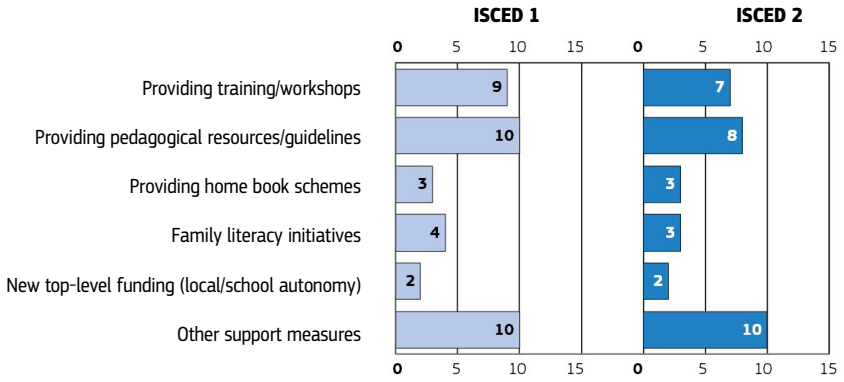
The provision of structured guidance and pedagogical resources is slightly more widespread, reported in 10 education systems since 2020/2021. These materials are intended to facilitate parents' involvement in their children's education. However, their actual uptake and impact may vary depending on contextual factors such as time availability, levels of parental engagement and familiarity with school expectations.

Home book schemes have been newly introduced or revised in Italy, Malta and the Netherlands. However, it should be noted that similar schemes may be in place in other education systems without recent policy changes and are therefore not reflected in the data. Likewise, family literacy initiatives have been reported in Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland. These aim to extend learning beyond the classroom, although their effectiveness may depend on family literacy levels and the reading culture at home.

In addition to these three main areas, further measures have been reported in 11 education systems, covering both primary and lower secondary education. Ten systems apply such measures at ISCED 1 and ten at ISCED 2, with some systems represented in both levels. Moreover, Germany and France have introduced new top-level funding frameworks that grant greater flexibility to schools and local authorities in designing tailored interventions. These include Germany's *Startchancen* programme ([234]) and France's 'Our school, let's create it together' initiative ([235]).

Most new or revised policy measures concern both primary and lower secondary education, with very few differences between the two levels. In terms of subject focus, most policy measures relate to literacy and mathematics. This emphasis likely reflects broader concerns about basic skills in literacy and numeracy, which are widely considered essential for overall academic achievement.

Figure 7.2: Number of education systems with new or revised parent support measures in improving basic skills acquisition, 2020/2021-2024/2025, ISCED 1-2, by sub-category



Source: Eurydice.

([234]) Germany's *Startchancen* programme.

([235]) Notre école, faisons-la ensemble | éduscol | Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, France.

These measures are frequently embedded within wider policy frameworks for tackling underachievement and are often developed in conjunction with curriculum reforms (see Chapter 3), changes in instructional time (see Chapter 2) and policies promoting teacher collaboration with families (see Chapter 6).

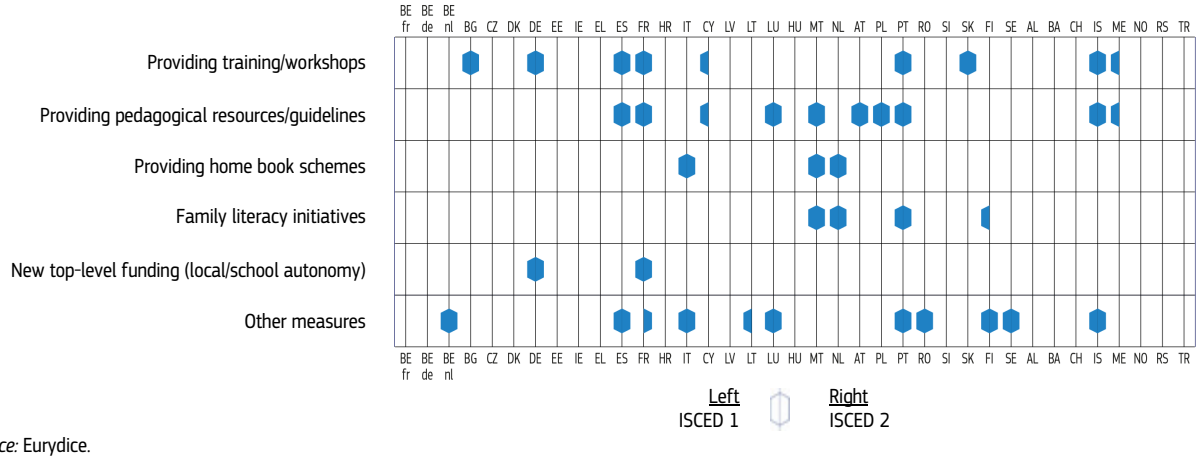
7.2. Provision of trainings and workshops

Providing workshops and training for parents is an approach introduced in nine European education systems. As shown in Figure 7.3, this measure has been reported by Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, France, Cyprus, Portugal, Slovakia, Iceland and Montenegro. These initiatives aim to equip parents with the skills needed to support their children's basic skills learning. Training programmes typically pursue two main objectives: first, to enhance parents' understanding of effective learning strategies; and second, to strengthen collaboration between families and schools. While these goals are broadly shared, the structure and content of training programmes vary across countries.

A common feature across the policy initiatives is their focus on socioeconomically disadvantaged families and migrant communities, recognising that these groups often face additional barriers to engagement. The Eurydice report *Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe* also underscores the importance of involving families in school life as a way to support students from marginalised backgrounds, including refugee and newly arrived migrant learners (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023a).

Education systems in Germany, France and Portugal have introduced targeted training for families with lower levels of formal education, providing structured support to help them engage with their children's learning. In Germany, the *Startchancen* programme (see previous section) allocates funding to schools to support cooperation with parents, with particular attention to migrant families. Support measures include interpreting services, cultural mediation and training for parents to help their children succeed at school.

Figure 7.3: New or revised parent support measures in improving basic skills acquisition, 2020/2021-2024/2025, ISCED 1-2, by education system and sub-category



Source: Eurydice.

Similarly, in France, the *Cités éducatives* initiative ([236]) fosters collaboration between schools, families and local authorities in disadvantaged areas. A key component is the 'Opening the school to parents for children's success' programme ([237]), which provides support for newly arrived, non-French-speaking parents through language learning and orientation to the school curriculum. A 2024 national qualitative evaluation of the *Cités éducatives* programme by the National Institute for Youth and Popular Education (INJEP) identified key enabling factors and challenges, noting that measures targeting families often focus on skill-building rather than drawing on families' existing strengths. Some local teams have tested more

([236]) Cités éducatives | Agence nationale de la cohésion des territoires.

([237]) Ouvrir l'école aux parents pour la réussite des enfants | éduscol.

participatory, hands-on approaches ([238]). Such evaluation provides insights into implementation processes and help identify conditions for success and engagement with families. Continuing this trend across education systems, Portugal has introduced a new measure under the 'Learning more now' plan ([239]), which includes training for migrant parents. This initiative offers access to language courses and educational support to facilitate parental involvement and strengthen the connection between families and schools.

While some systems implement nationwide training programmes embedded in broader policy frameworks, others adopt more decentralised or thematic approaches. Germany and France have established structured national initiatives that ensure consistency in provision and outreach. Other systems, such as Spain, Slovakia and Cyprus, have introduced regional or targeted models, allowing adaptation to local needs. Spain (see country example) has implemented region-specific approaches providing strategies for parents to support their children's school performance.

In **Spain**, the Programme for personal and family support and guidance units for educationally vulnerable students ([240]) aims to support the educational trajectories of vulnerable learners, with the dual objective of preventing school failure and promoting academic success. A key component of the programme is to equip families with the skills and resources needed to enhance their understanding of, and involvement in, their children's education. Although it is a national initiative, implementation is primarily carried out by the autonomous communities, which adapt and develop region-specific measures in line with national guidelines. Each region is responsible for designing and executing targeted actions to support families and facilitate their engagement in the educational process. Although national in scope, evaluation is managed by the autonomous communities. In Andalucia, for example, schools must submit interim and final evaluation reports detailing selection criteria, implemented actions and observed outcomes. These are monitored by regional education authorities, reflecting a commitment to ongoing evaluation, though approaches differ across regions ([241]).

In Slovakia, the National Institute for Education and Youth has launched webinars and podcasts to help parents understand educational policies and learning support. For example, the podcast series *ABCs of school well-being* ([242]) offers practical advice on supporting homework, socio-emotional development and the home learning environment.

Several education systems have developed training programmes that focus on family-based learning approaches. In Iceland, the 'Building foundations for children's lives – invest in play' programme ([243]) provides workshops aimed at strengthening parental self-confidence, communication skills and the ability to support learning from an early age. Similarly, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute runs a 'Network of Schools for the Support of the Love of Reading in Preschool and Primary Education', involving teacher and parent activities on children's literature and literacy strategies ([244]). In Montenegro, the 'Parenting for lifelong health' programme (see country example) has been introduced to strengthen parental engagement in children's education.

In **Montenegro**, the 'Parenting for lifelong health' initiative ([245]), developed with the World Health Organization and UNICEF, combines in-person and online workshops led by education and child development experts. The programme offers structured guidance on literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional development, with a particular focus on low-income and rural families. It is implemented through local schools and community centres and includes sessions on homework routines, positive parent–child communication and behaviour management. A digital platform complements the training with videos, downloadable materials and live Q & A sessions with educators. Evaluations conducted before and after implementation show a 70 % reduction in harsh parenting, alongside improvements in setting boundaries (14 %) and supporting positive behaviour (11 %). The programme also contributed to a 31 % drop in reported child behavioural issues and a 45 % reduction in symptoms of parental depression (UNICEF Montenegro, 2023).

([238]) Évaluation nationale des cités éducatives réalisée par l'INJEP (2024).

([239]) Portugal Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 140/2024 approving the New learning recovery plan 'Learn More Now'.

([240]) Decision of 10 September 2021 of the State Secretariat for Education, publishing the Agreement of the Sectoral Conference of Education of 21 July 2021 approving the proposal for a territorial distribution and allocation criteria for the appropriations managed by Autonomous Communities assigned to the Programme of Units of personal and family support and guidance for students educatively vulnerable, in educational or psycho-pedagogical services located in grouped educational areas/sectors and rural centres.

([241]) Andalucía's Evaluation plan for the Programme for personal and family support and guidance units for educationally vulnerable students.

([242]) Podcasts 'The ABC of School Well-Being – National Institute of Education and Youth, Slovakia.

([243]) Iceland's Building foundations for children's lives – invest in play programme.

([244]) Cyprus's Pedagogical Institute.

([245]) Montenegro's Parenting for lifelong health programme.

In Bulgaria, training programmes have been developed to inform parents of their educational rights and responsibilities. These workshops, often led by educational mediators, aim to help parents support regular school attendance and homework completion. The initiative also includes ongoing monitoring, with a target of reaching nearly 67 000 parents to promote inclusion in a multicultural educational environment.

While the overarching objective of these initiatives is consistent – enhancing parents' capacity to support learning – their implementation varies across education systems. One trend is the focus on socioeconomically disadvantaged families and migrant communities. This reflects a recognition of the influence of socioeconomic background on student achievement and has led to targeted policies supporting parents with limited formal education or those unfamiliar with national education systems.

Some countries implement nationwide frameworks to ensure coherence and broad coverage, while others adopt decentralised or region-specific approaches that allow for adaptation to local needs. Regardless of the model, the aim remains to equip parents with the knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to their children's educational development. Education systems continue to refine these approaches, seeking to strike a balance between structured provision and flexibility to meet the diverse needs of families.

However, training alone may not be sufficient to ensure sustained parental involvement. To complement these efforts, many education systems have introduced pedagogical resources that parents can use independently or alongside training. By making such materials accessible and easy to use, these measures aim to extend support beyond workshops and provide ongoing guidance in fostering learning at home.

The following Section 7.3 examines the provision of pedagogical materials, guidance and resources made available to parents.

7.3. Provision of pedagogical resources and guidelines

Alongside training workshops, many education systems have prioritised the provision of structured pedagogical resources to support parents in actively contributing to their children's learning. These resources vary in format and delivery, including printed guides, home learning kits and interactive digital platforms. The primary objective is to increase parents' confidence in supporting basic skills development, while promoting greater continuity between school-based instruction and home learning environments. Often aligned with curriculum and assessment reforms, these materials underpin broader efforts to strengthen collaboration between schools and families.

Figure 7.3 illustrates the education systems that have adopted this policy approach. Six systems – Spain, France, Cyprus, Portugal, Iceland and Montenegro – have implemented both parental training and the provision of pedagogical resources. This combined approach reinforces the learning strategies introduced during workshops while providing parents with continued access to guidance materials.

In Spain, the *Escuela de familias* programme ([246]) (see section 7.2) combines training sessions with structured resources tailored to different educational levels. Similarly, Cyprus provides structured materials through its nationwide 'School guide for parents' ([247]) initiative, which outlines curriculum expectations and offers strategies for supporting learning. Some resources specifically target migrant and refugee families, using culturally adapted materials and bilingual communication tools.

Portugal's '21|23 School+ Plan' ([248]) integrates digital literacy workshops with online resources to foster parental engagement. Subsequently, the 'Learn More Now – Plan' reinforces support for language acquisition to migrant students' parents ([249]). Initiatives such as the 'Digital Academy for parents' ([250]) and the 'Autonomous

([246]) Spain's *Escuela de familias* programme.

([247]) Cyprus's School guide: a useful tool for parents and students.

([248]) Portugal's Council of Ministers Resolution No 90/2021, of 7 July (domain 1.4 Family+), approving the '21|23 School+ Plan', an integrated plan for learning recovery and its continued edition '23|24 School+ Plan' regulated by the Council of Ministers Resolution No 80-B/2023, of 18 July.

([249]) Portugal's Plan 'Learn more now: recover and improve learning' (*Aprender Mais Agora*) from school year 2024/2025 on.

([250]) Portugal's Digital Academy for parents.

online study platform' ([251]) provide tools to help parents support students' homework and learning routines. These measures reflect a continued policy focus on engaging families through accessible, digitally mediated learning environments.

In Iceland, the 'Parental consensus for compulsory education' guide ([252]) supports training initiatives by providing structured advice on parents' roles in education, collaboration with teachers and strategies for creating a supportive home-learning environment. Montenegro's 'Parenting for lifelong health' programme ([253]) combines digital and face-to-face training with structured resources aimed at helping parents reinforce literacy and numeracy development at home.

By combining training with pedagogical resources, these education systems recognise that effective parental engagement depends not only on awareness and training, but also on sustained support through accessible materials. The goal is to equip parents with clear, curriculum-aligned tools that enable them to assist their children's learning at home.

In addition to national programmes, Spain, France and Luxembourg implement parental engagement initiatives at the regional, local or school levels to promote parental involvement in education. In Spain, the Programme for orientation, progress and educational enrichment (PROA+) ([254]) includes structured guidance to strengthen family engagement in the learning process. In Luxembourg, parent forums function as a key mechanism for parental involvement, offering reliable information, peer exchange and professional dialogue. The forums provide a network promoting interaction and meetings between parents and professionals, a parent newsletter and guidance to support parents' involvement in education ([255]).

Austria and Poland (see country examples) have developed resources focused on competency-based learning and multilingual accessibility.

In **Austria**, the 'Individual competence measurement PLUS' (iKMPLUS) initiative ([256]) is an assessment and guidance tool designed to help both students and parents to better understand educational outcomes and support learning progress. For parents, iKMPLUS offers booklets available in 14 languages that explain assessment procedures and offer sample feedback reports for key subjects such as reading (German), mathematics and English. These materials aim to facilitate accessibility for families from diverse linguistic backgrounds. By providing clear, structured information, iKMPLUS enables parents to support learning at home, collaborate with teachers and make informed decisions about their child's education. The programme is accompanied by evaluation tools and feedback mechanisms that help inform school-level and family-level learning decisions.

In **Poland**, the 'Handbook for the parents of pupils' ([257]) outlines recommended practices for parental involvement in school activities, strategies for cognitive development and techniques for supporting learning at home. It acts as a comprehensive resource, offering guidance on how to participate actively in a child's education. The initiative also includes school-based workshops and information sessions, where educators advise parents on early cognitive development, recognising learning difficulties and managing homework routines. The handbook is supported by multilingual content and digital platforms, enabling parents to interact with educators, access personalised advice and view instructional videos on home learning support.

Overall, pedagogical resources appear to play a valuable role in supporting parents' involvement in their children's learning. By providing consistent and practical guidance in both printed and digital formats, these tools can help strengthen the connection between home and school. When grouped by their primary focus – general pedagogical support, regional or school-level initiatives, multilingual and competency-based materials, or digitally supported engagement – it becomes clear that education systems are making use of diverse strategies to promote parental engagement in basic skills education.

([251]) Portugal's 'Autonomous online study platform'.
([252]) Iceland's parental consensus for compulsory education.
([253]) Montenegro's 'Parenting for lifelong health programme'.
([254]) Spanish programme for orientation, progress, and educational enrichment (PROA+).
([255]) Luxembourg's parent forums.
([256]) iKM PLUS at the primary school – materials for pupils and guardians and iKMPLUS at the secondary level – materials for pupils and guardians.
([257]) Poland's Handbook for the parents of pupils.

7.4. Literacy initiatives, home book schemes and other support measures

Building on the previous two sections addressing the provision of training and pedagogical resources, literacy initiatives and home book schemes function as complementary policy measures aimed at strengthening parental involvement in children's education. While training equips parents with knowledge and pedagogical resources offer structured support, these measures seek to embed reading habits into everyday family life. These measures reflect the recognition that sustainable improvements in basic skills require a holistic, multi-level approach involving both schools and families.

Home book schemes not only promote early literacy but also help establish a reading culture within families, ensuring that children acquire strong basic skills that support long-term academic success. Three education systems – Italy, Malta and the Netherlands (see country examples) – have introduced home book schemes and free textbook initiatives, specifically targeting disadvantaged families.

In **Italy**, the government has implemented a nationwide free textbook scheme to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to essential reading materials. This policy is complemented by financial assistance for families in need. In October 2024, the Ministry of Education and Merit (MIM) ([258]) increased its budget by EUR 4 million to expand textbook provision. The ministry allocated funds to support low-income families in purchasing the necessary textbooks, as part of broader efforts to reduce educational disparities.

In the **Netherlands**, *BookStart* ([259]) and 'Library at school' ([260]) initiatives promote literacy through free library memberships and reading resources for young learners and their families. *BookStart* focuses on early childhood literacy, offering free book packages to new parents and promoting early reading routines. Public libraries collaborate with health centres to distribute materials and provide guidance to parents on developing reading habits at home. 'Library at School' extends these efforts into primary education, where schools integrate library resources into the curriculum. The programme includes structured reading sessions, parental workshops and digital access to reading materials, ensuring continuity in literacy development throughout childhood.

Similarly, Malta's 2024–2030 National education strategy ([261]) incorporates home book schemes into its literacy policy, aiming to instil early reading habits by distributing age-appropriate books to households. This is supported by structured follow-up activities designed to encourage family participation in literacy-building exercises.

In addition to home book schemes, broader literacy initiatives in Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland aim to support both students' literacy and writing development and parents' capacity to reinforce these skills at home. In Malta, the 'Family writing activity' initiative ([262]) provides interactive workshops where parents and children participate in creative writing tasks together. This approach not only enhances children's literacy but also strengthens the parent–child relationship within an educational context. In Portugal, the *Qualifica-PEE* ([263]) programme adopts an intergenerational approach by targeting parents with low levels of formal education. By supporting adult learning, the initiative aims to break cycles of educational disadvantage and enhance parents' ability to support their children's learning. Finland's 'Read to a child' initiative (see country example) takes a similar approach by distributing book packages and offering parental guidance workshops.

([258]) Italy – New provisions of the MIM with the PNRR DL, from ITS to incentives for administrative staff, from technical-practical teachers to textbooks for less well-off families.

([259]) Netherlands' BookStart initiative.

([260]) Netherlands' Library at school programme.

([261]) Malta's 2023-2030 national education strategy.

([262]) Malta's Family writing activity initiative.

([263]) Portugal's Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 90/2021: Approves Plan 21 | 23 School +, Specific Action 1.4.2 – Return to study.

In **Finland**, the 'Read to a child' programme ([264]) aims to foster intergenerational reading habits. Books are selected to suit different age groups, with bilingual editions available for migrant families. The programme also includes workshops for parents that highlight the cognitive and emotional benefits of shared reading. Schools and libraries collaborate to organise storytelling sessions, lending schemes and online literacy resources, encouraging families to sustain reading habits beyond the initial intervention. Another Finnish initiative, 'Reading grannies and grandpas' ([265]) brings volunteer senior citizens into schools to provide individual reading support for students. In 2024, a new section was added for families, offering accessible guidance on the importance of reading and practical tips for supporting children's literacy at home. This initiative fosters both school-based and home-based literacy engagement, particularly benefiting children needing additional reading practice.

These initiatives suggest the importance of incorporating parents into literacy development strategies, ensuring that children receive consistent support both at home and in school. The analysis reveals two trends. First, education systems are combining material support with parental guidance, offering not only access to books and literacy resources but also structured activities, workshops or follow-up support to help families use them effectively. This approach reflects an understanding that resources alone may not be sufficient without practical support in applying them. Second, several initiatives are designed to reach families beyond the school setting, often involving public libraries, health centres or community organisations in the delivery of literacy programmes. This broader outreach helps to engage parents who may have limited contact with schools and fosters a more inclusive learning environment.

As shown in Figure 7.3, 11 education systems have introduced additional measures to promote parental involvement. Digital platforms are becoming an important tool in this regard. Italy's *Unica* platform ([266]) serves as a central hub for school–family communication, including access to enrolment tools, learning updates and support services. Parents are invited to complete a satisfaction questionnaire after enrolment, providing feedback on the quality and usefulness of available services. Similarly, Luxembourg's *e-Bichelchen* ([267]) enables real-time parent–school interaction, while encouraging schools to communicate regularly with families, adapt materials to learners' needs and jointly plan learning activities.

France's *Devoirs faits* (Homework is done) programme ([268]) offers structured homework support in secondary schools, with parental participation encouraged. In Lithuania, the Law on Education ([269]) allows schools to determine how to engage parents in supporting low-achieving students. Measures include everyday learning activities and targeted guidance for students with special needs, with a focus on school–parent collaboration to improve student outcomes. In Luxembourg (see country example), home-based initiatives are integrated into the broader literacy strategy.

In **Luxembourg**, parent forums ([270]) are coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth as part of its Child and Family Services. These forums support all parents – from the early stages of parenthood through the entire course of their child's development – by offering free, accessible activities that promote parenting, literacy, language development and inclusion. With a focus on early support and active parental involvement, the forums foster inclusive dialogue, co-reflection and family-centred guidance. Activities supporting literacy and learning include workshops, thematic lectures, introductory sessions, encounters for parents (with or without children), individual counselling and awareness campaigns, developed collaboratively with parents. The aim is to build confidence, mutual respect and a welcoming, non-judgemental environment for every family.

In Iceland, the Children's prosperity act ([271]) establishes a legal framework that ensures parents are actively involved in identifying and addressing their child's support needs through coordinated services, with designated school-based staff responsible for facilitating collaboration between families and professionals. Similarly, Portugal has implemented

([264]) Finland's 'Read to a child' programme.
([265]) Finland's 'Reading grannies and grandpas' initiative.
([266]) Italy's *Unica* platform.
([267]) Luxembourg's *EBichelchen* platform.
([268]) France Dispositif *Devoirs faits* – Vademecum expliquant le rôle des parents.
([269]) Lithuania's Law on Education.
([270]) Luxembourg's parent forums.
([271]) Iceland's Act No 86/2021 on the Integration of services in the interest of children's prosperity.

targeted measures to support inclusive school–family cooperation, particularly for multilingual and migrant families. These include free Portuguese language courses for foreign parents through the 'Portuguese hosting language' programme, which helps families better support their children's learning and integration into the school community. Mediator teams also play an important role by strengthening communication between schools and families in socio-culturally diverse contexts ([272]).

In some education systems, parental engagement is supported through legally established frameworks. In the Flemish Community of Belgium (see country example), parental representation in education policy has been institutionalised through three parent umbrella associations. A similar structural approach exists in Sweden, where the National Agency for Education has issued General Guidelines on extra adaptations and special support ([273]), recommending that schools involve parents in the design and implementation of support measures to ensure they are fully informed and actively engaged.

In the **Flemish Community of Belgium**, parental involvement is supported through three legally recognised parent umbrella associations ([274]). These organisations are tasked with informing, supporting and raising awareness among parents, parent associations and parent councils. They also represent parents' interests in the Flemish Education Council and contribute to policy development at the request of the Flemish Government. Three-year management agreements define the strategic and operational objectives of these associations, covering both core activities and thematic projects. Examples include participation in the implementation of the Flemish tests and the Reading action plan (see Chapter 1). Each year, the associations agree on their planned activities and submit an annual work plan for government approval. In addition to formal policy participation, parent organisations in the Flemish Community disseminate resources and training materials on topics such as literacy development and inclusive education practices. Through this structured partnership, parental involvement in education policy is reinforced, contributing to more supportive learning environments for all students.

7.5. Summary

European education systems have developed a range of complementary approaches to support parents in contributing to their children's learning. While some systems have prioritised structured training programmes and the provision of pedagogical materials, others have focused on direct literacy support through book distribution schemes and home-based reading initiatives.

A recurring theme across these approaches is the emphasis on inclusivity. Many initiatives specifically target disadvantaged families, aiming to ensure that parental engagement strategies do not disproportionately benefit those already well-positioned to support their children. Key efforts include the provision of accessible learning materials, structured support for parents and strengthened collaboration between families and schools. In addition, some education systems have introduced handbooks and guidance documents to enable parents to take an active role in their children's educational journeys, particularly for students requiring additional support or adaptations.

Another notable development is the use of digital platforms to support home–school collaboration. These platforms facilitate communication between schools and families and may offer access to educational resources, guidance and real-time updates. The use of multilingual resources further highlights the increasing need to cater to diverse and migrant families, ensuring more equitable access to support.

Several education systems have also focused on fostering home-based literacy practices, recognising that parental engagement extends beyond school-related activities and includes the creation of a supportive home learning environment. However, the number of dedicated literacy initiatives and home book schemes remains limited. In many cases, literacy promotion is embedded within broader educational strategies rather than implemented as standalone policies. In decentralised systems, responsibility for

([272]) Resolution of the Council of Ministers No 140/2024, 17 October (Annexes 2.1 and 2.5) approving the 'Learn more now' Plan.

([273]) Comments on general advice for working with extra adaptations, special support and action programmes – The Swedish National Agency for Education.

([274]) Decree on the subsidisation of parent umbrella associations.

such initiatives may lie with regional or local authorities. Some systems have chosen to prioritise library networks and digital tools over physical book distribution.

A number of education systems have introduced evaluation mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of parental support measures. These include formal feedback systems, structured reporting by parent associations or regular monitoring through national strategies. Nonetheless, in most systems, evaluation of family engagement is not yet consistently implemented or embedded within broader education policy reviews.

Together, these developments suggest a sustained policy interest in strengthening the role of families in improving basic skills and addressing underachievement in reading, mathematics and science.

Glossary

Assessment tools: the means suited to a specific assessment method for implementing an assessment. For example, written exams are typically used in summative assessments while oral presentations or class participation are used in formative assessments.

Basic skills: basic skills are to be understood according to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.

Competence: in the Council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, 'competences are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, where:

- knowledge is composed of the facts and figures, concepts, ideas and theories which are already established and support the understanding of a certain area or subject;
- skills are defined as the ability and capacity to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results;
- attitudes describe the disposition and mind-sets to act or react to ideas, persons or situations' ([275]).

Continuing professional development (CPD): in-service training that allows teachers to broaden, develop and update their knowledge, skills and attitudes. It may be formal or non-formal and include both subject-based and pedagogical training. Different formats are offered, such as courses, seminars, workshops, degree programmes, peer or self-observation and/or reflection, support from teacher networks and observation visits. In certain cases, CPD activities may lead to supplementary qualifications.

Curriculum: an official steering document issued by top-level authorities containing programmes of study or any of the following: learning content, learning objectives, attainment targets, guidelines on pupil assessment or syllabuses. Specific legal decrees in some education systems may also be taken into account. More than one type of steering document may be in force at any one time in an education system and these may impose on schools' different levels of obligation to comply. They may, for example, contain advice, recommendations or regulations. Whatever the level of obligation, they all establish the basic framework in which schools develop their own teaching to meet their pupils' needs.

Diagnostic assessment: the process of identifying students' areas of learning difficulties/weaknesses in a subject or skill and their causes (Esomonu and Eleje, 2020). Results of diagnostic assessment 'provide information about students' mastery of relevant prior knowledge and skills within the domain as well as preconceptions or misconceptions about the material' (Ketterlin-Geller and Yovanoff, 2009). Teachers can use this information to respond to students' needs.

Horizontal flexibility: flexibility of instruction time which occurs when top-level education authorities set a total number of teaching hours for a combination of compulsory subjects within the same grade. The local authorities or the schools themselves can then decide how much time to allocate to each subject.

([275]) Council recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, 2018/C 189/01.

Inclusion (inclusive education): an approach that values diversity and aims to afford equal rights and opportunities to everyone. In the area of education, inclusive policies aim 'to allow all learners to achieve their full potential by providing good quality education to all in mainstream settings with special attention to learners at risk of exclusion and underachievement by actively seeking out to support them and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners, including through individualised approaches, targeted support and cooperation with families and local communities' (European Commission, 2020).

Initial teacher education (ITE): pre-service training that aims to provide prospective teachers with core professional competences and to develop the attitudes needed for their future role and responsibilities. ITE programmes cover general academic subjects and professional training (pedagogy, teaching methods and duties). The latter may also include the possibility of a first teaching experience through in-school placements. ITE is usually provided by a university or teaching/educating facility.

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): the reference international classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by levels and fields. It was developed to facilitate the comparison of education statistics and indicators across countries based on uniform and internationally agreed definitions. The coverage of ISCED extends to all organised and sustained learning opportunities for children, young people and adults, including those with special educational needs, irrespective of the institutions or organisations providing them or the form in which they are delivered.

The current classification – ISCED 2011 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012) – has nine levels, which start at ISCED 0 (early childhood education) and extend to ISCED 8 (doctoral or an equivalent level).

This report covers two ISCED levels, i.e. ISCED 1–2. The key characteristics of the levels in question are as follows.

ISCED 1: primary education

Primary education provides learning and educational activities typically designed to enable students to develop fundamental skills in reading, writing and mathematics (i.e. literacy and numeracy). It establishes a solid foundation for learning and a sound understanding of core areas of knowledge and fosters personal development, thus preparing students for lower secondary education. It provides basic learning with little, if any, specialisation.

The customary or legal age of entry is usually not below 5 years old or above 7 years old. This level typically lasts 6 years, although its duration can range from 4 to 7 years. Primary education typically lasts until ages 10 to 12.

ISCED 2: lower secondary education

Programmes at ISCED 2 level, or in lower secondary education, typically build on the fundamental teaching and learning processes that begin at ISCED 1. Usually, the educational aim is to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and personal development, preparing students for further educational opportunities. Programmes at this level are usually organised around a more subject-oriented curriculum, introducing theoretical concepts across a broad range of subjects.

Some education systems may offer vocational education programmes at ISCED 2 to provide individuals with skills relevant to employment.

ISCED 2 begins after 4 to 7 years of ISCED 1 education. Students enter ISCED 2 typically between the ages of 10 and 13 (age 12 being the most common). Lower secondary education typically lasts until ages 14 to 16.

Learners who are disadvantaged and/or at risk of discrimination: students whose family, social or economic circumstances, personal characteristics or cultural background hinder their access and equal opportunities in school education. Students at risk of underachievement, drop-out, early leaving from education and training. Students who may experience discrimination based on individual characteristics, such as their gender, national/ethnic/religious background, disability, etc.

Learning support: aims to respond to the learning needs of students, in order to achieve expected learning outcomes. It places the students at the centre of the learning process and aims to provide solutions (tailor-made or otherwise) responding to their particular needs.

Local authorities: authorities responsible for territorial units below the regional level. Local authorities may comprise elected representatives or may be administrative divisions of central authorities.

Low-achieving or underachieving students: students performing below the expected level of attainment in one or more school subjects. Low achievement may be expressed in absolute terms (e.g. a low grade) or in relative terms (e.g. students who underperform compared to the majority of the class or, in other words, their results are significantly lower than the class average). In the context of the OECD PISA Survey, underachievers are those 15-year-old students who fail to reach the OECD PISA proficiency Level 2, which is considered to be the minimum level necessary to participate successfully in society, in any area of the basic skills. In the context of the IEA TIMSS Survey, low-achieving students in grade 4 are the ones who do not achieve the Intermediate International Benchmark (475 points).

One-to-one tutoring: a form of individualised learning support where one student is being taught or given learning support by one teacher (or teaching assistant).

Measurable targets: quantitative/numerical objectives. They are commonly expressed as a percentage or a number to be reached.

Monitoring: refers here to a process of collecting and analysing information in order to check system performance in relation to goals and standards, and to enable any necessary changes to be made. The range of data used may include, for instance, the results of school self-evaluation or school inspections, external examinations or other national assessments, specially prepared performance indicators or outcomes of international evaluations (including PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA, etc.).

National tests: tests carried out under the responsibility of the top-level education authority during ISCED levels 1–3. The procedures for the administration and marking of these tests, the setting of content and the interpretation and use of results are decided at the top level. All students take the tests under similar conditions and tests are marked in a consistent way. National tests are separate from and often additional to certified examinations taken at the end of an ISCED level or other summative tests. Tests designed at the school level on the basis of a centrally designed framework of reference are not considered national standardised tests. International surveys such as PISA are also not considered national tests, even if the results may be used for national purposes.

Policy or policy measure: refers to regulations, recommendations, guidelines, tools and actions (including monitoring and evaluation), as well as funding that are intended to achieve (or contribute towards achieving) certain public policy goals.

Special educational needs (SEN): a range of needs, including physical and mental disabilities, and cognitive and educational impairments. A child is commonly recognised as having special educational needs if they are not able to benefit from the school education generally available to children of the same age without additional support or adaptations in the content of studies (Braun, 2020).

Steering documents: different kinds of official documents containing regulations, guidelines and/or recommendations for education institutions.

Strategy (or other major policy plan): an official policy document developed by top-level authorities in an effort to achieve an overall goal. A strategy can comprise a vision, identify objectives and goals (qualitative and quantitative), describe processes, authorities and people in charge, identify funding sources, make recommendations, etc. Depending on the particular education system, a strategy may refer to a specific document bearing the term 'strategy', but it may also refer to a document (or documents) that describe a major policy plan equivalent to a strategy without, however, bearing the title 'strategy'.

Teachers having a specialisation in addressing learning difficulties (specialised teachers): teachers who have received special training – either during initial teacher education or as part of their continuing professional development (CPD) – on the identification of and support for students facing learning difficulties. These teachers might, though not necessarily, give instruction only to low-achieving students (i.e. serve as 'remedial teachers').

Teaching assistant: an individual who assists a teacher with instructional responsibilities. Teaching assistants may assist in the classroom but also serve as the sole instructor for a class or group of students. Also referred to as 'teachers' aide' or 'education assistant'.

Top-level (or top-level authorities): the highest level of authority with responsibility for education in a given country, usually located at the national (state) level. However, for Belgium, Germany, Spain and Switzerland, the *Communautés*, *Länder*, *Comunidades Autónomas* and the language regions/cantons respectively are either wholly responsible or share responsibility with the state level for all or most areas relating to education. Therefore, these administrations are considered as the top-level authority for the areas where they hold the responsibility, while for those areas for which they share the responsibility with the national (state) level, both are considered to be top-level authorities.

Vertical flexibility: a form of flexibility of instruction which occurs when central education authorities indicate the total number of hours to be allocated to a specific subject to be taught across more than one grade, without specifying how these hours should be distributed.

References

Alieva, A. (2021) *Parental involvement in formal education*. NESET ad hoc question No. 1/2021. Available at: https://nesetweb.eu/en/resources/library/parental-involvement-in-formal-education/ (Accessed: 11 June 2025).

Andersen, S.C., Humlum, M.K. and Nandrup, A.B. (2016) 'Increasing instruction time in school does increase learning', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, 113(27), pp. 7481–7484. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1516686113.

Bal, A.P. (2016) 'The effect of the differentiated teaching approach in the algebraic learning field on students' academic achievements', *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, (63), pp. 185–204. Available at: https://doi.org/10.14689/EJER.2016.63.11.

Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998) 'Assessment and Classroom Learning', *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), pp. 7–74. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/0969595980050102.

Blank, R.K. (2013) 'Science instructional time is declining in elementary schools: What are the implications for student achievement and closing the gap?', *Science Education*, 97, pp. 830–847.

Blaskó, Zs., da Costa, P. and Schnepf, S.V. (2021) *Learning Loss and Educational Inequalities in Europe: Mapping the Potential Consequences of the COVID-19 Crisis*. IZA Discussion Paper No. 14298. IZA – Institute of Labor Economics. Available at: https://docs.iza.org/dp14298.pdf

Blömeke, S. and Kaiser, G. (2017) 'Understanding the Development of Teachers' Professional Competencies as Personally, Situationally and Socially Determined', in Clandinin, D. and Husu, J., *The SAGE Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*. SAGE Publications. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402042.

Blömeke, S., Olsen, R.V. and Suhl, U. (2016) 'Relation of Student Achievement to the Quality of Their Teachers and Instructional Quality', in T. Nilsen and J.-E. Gustafsson (eds) *Teacher Quality, Instructional Quality and Student Outcomes: Relationships Across Countries, Cohorts and Time*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 21–50. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-41252-8_2.

Borko, H. (2004) 'Professional Development and Teacher Learning: Mapping the Terrain', *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), pp. 3–15. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033008003.

Bouguen, A., Grenet, J. and Gurgand, M. (2017) *Does class size influence student achievement?* IPP Policy brief n°28. Paris: Institut des Politiques Publiques (IPP).

Braun, A.M.B. (2020) *Referral and Identification of Special Educational Needs*. Paper commissioned for the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, Inclusion and education ED/GEMR/MRT/2020/P1/3. Paris: UNESCO.

Bressoux, P., Lima, L. and Monseur, C. (2019) 'Reducing the number of pupils in French first-grade classes: Is there evidence of contemporaneous and carryover effects?', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 96, pp. 136–145. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2018.10.006.

Carlana, M. and La Ferrara, E. (2021) 'Apart but Connected: Online Tutoring and Student Outcomes during the COVID-19 Pandemic', (21). Available at: https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3777556.

Crato, N. and Patrinos, H.A. (2025) 'PIRLS 2021 and PISA 2022 Statistics Show How Serious the Pandemic Losses Are', in N. Crato and H.A.

Patrinos (eds) *Improving National Education Systems After COVID-19: Moving Forward After PIRLS 2021 and PISA 2022*. Cham: Springer (Evaluating Education: Normative Systems and Institutional Practices), pp. 1–15.

Darling-Hammond, L. *et al.* (2017) 'Does teacher preparation matter? Evidence about teacher certification, Teach for America, and teacher effectiveness', *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13(42). Available at: https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v13n42.2005.

Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A. (2003) *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review*. Research Report No 433. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills. Available at: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/6305/1/rr433.pdf (Accessed: 1 April 2025).

Dietrichson, J. *et al.* (2017a) 'Academic Interventions for Elementary and Middle School Students With Low Socioeconomic Status: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', *Review of Educational Research*, 87(2), pp. 243–282. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316687036.

Dietrichson, J. *et al.* (2017b) 'Academic Interventions for Elementary and Middle School Students With Low Socioeconomic Status: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', *Review of Educational Research*, 87(2), pp. 243–282. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316687036.

EACEA/Eurydice (2009) *National Testing of Pupils in Europe: Objectives, Organisation and Use of Results*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Eklöf, H. and Nyroos, M. (2013) 'Pupil perceptions of national tests in science: perceived importance, invested effort, and test anxiety', *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 28(2), pp. 497–510.

Epstein, J.L. (2011) *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494673.

Esomonu, N.P.-M. and Eleje, L.I. (2020) 'Effect of Diagnostic Testing on Students' Achievement in Secondary School Quantitative Economics', *World Journal of Education*, 10(3), pp. 178–187. Available at: https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v10n3p178.

European Commission (2020) 'ET2020 Working Group on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination through Education 2016-2018: Elements of a Policy Framework'. Available at: https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/news/news-files/Elements%20of%20a%20Policy%20Framework%20Final.docx (Accessed: 25 March 2025).

European Commission (2022a) 'Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on pathways to school success'. SWD/2022/176 final. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022SC0176 (Accessed: 28 March 2025).

European Commission (2022b) *Education and Training Monitor 2022*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission (2024) *The future of European competitiveness: Report by Mario Draghi*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/draghi-report_en (Accessed: 18 March 2025).

European Commission (2025a) 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on A STEM Education Strategic Plan: skills for competitiveness and innovation'. COM(2025) 89 final.

European Commission (2025b) 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and

the Committee of the Regions on the Action Plan on Basic Skills'. COM(2025) 88 final.

European Commission (2025c) 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Union of Skills'. COM(2025) 90 final.

European Commission (2025d) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of Regions: The Union of Skills*. COM(2025) 90 final. Brussels: European Commission, p. 21. Available at: https://op.europa.eu/publication-detail/-/publication/5c5c5399-fa8a-11ef-b7db-01aa75ed71a1.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2017) *Citizenship Education at School in Europe – 2017*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2019) *Digital Education at School in Europe*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: Structures, policies and student performance*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2021) *Teachers in Europe: careers, development and well-being*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2022a) *Increasing achievement and motivation in mathematics and science learning in schools*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2022b) *Informatics education at school in Europe*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2022c) *Supporting refugee learners from Ukraine in schools in Europe*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2023a) *Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2023b) *Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe – 2023: Equity in school and higher education*. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2024) *Equity in school and higher education*, *Eurydice data and visuals*. Available at: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/data-and-visuals/equity (Accessed: 28 January 2025).

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022a) *Education and training monitor 2022 – Comparative report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/117416.

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture *et al.* (2022) *Key competences for all – Policy design and implementation in European school education – Final report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/1951.

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022b) *Progress towards the achievement of the European Education Area – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/059480.

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2024a) *Education and Training monitor 2024 – Comparative report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/815875.

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2024b) *Roadmap for ensuring school success for all – A practical 'living' guide for the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success – Thematic report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Eveleigh, F. (2010) 'The Role of Assessment in Effective Pedagogy in Primary Mathematics', *Matematika 4*, pp. 10–17.

Filges, T., Sonne-Schmidt, C.S. and Nielsen, B.C.V. (2018) 'Small class sizes for improving student achievement in primary and secondary schools: a systematic review', *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 14, pp. 1–107. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2018.10.

Fischer, N., Theis, D. and Zücher, I. (2014) 'Narrowing the Gap? The Role of All-Day Schools in Reducing Educational Inequality in Germany', *International Journal for Research on Extended Education*, 2(1), pp. 79–96.

Florian, L. and Black-Hawkins, K. (2011) 'Exploring inclusive pedagogy', *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(5), pp. 813–828. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.501096.

Fredriksson, P., Öckert, B. and Oosterbeek, H. (2011) 'Long-Term Effects of Class Size', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 128. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjs048.

Gajderowicz, T. *et al.* (2024) *The Learning Crisis: Three Years After COVID-19*. IZA Discussion Paper No. 17550. IZA – Institute of Labor Economics. Available at: https://docs.iza.org/dp17550.pdf (Accessed: 30 January 2025).

Goddard, Y.L., Goddard, R.D. and Tschannen-Moran, M. (2007) 'A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation of Teacher Collaboration for School Improvement and Student Achievement in Public Elementary Schools', *Teachers College Record*, 109(4), pp. 877–896. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810710900401.

Goodall, J. and Montgomery, C. (2013) 'Parental involvement to parental engagement: a continuum', *Educational Review*, 66(4), pp. 399–410. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.781576.

Gortazar, L., Hupkau, C. and Roldán-Monés, A. (2024) 'Online tutoring works: Experimental evidence from a program with vulnerable children', *Journal of Public Economics*, 232, p. 105082. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2024.105082.

Gouëdard, P. *et al.* (2020) 'Curriculum reform: A literature review to support effective implementation', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 239. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/efe8a48c-en.

Groenewald, E. *et al.* (2024) 'Examining the Effectiveness of Differentiated Instruction in Enhancing Student Learning Outcomes: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis', 1, pp. 255–261.

Gust, S., Hanushek, E.A. and Wößmann, L. (2024) 'Global universal basic skills: Current deficits and implications for world development', *Journal of Development Economics*, 166(January 2024). Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2023.103205.

Hanushek, E.A. and Wößmann, L. (2019) *The economic benefits of improving educational achievement in the European Union: An update and extension*. EENEE Analytical Report 39. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/211582.

Harris, A. and Goodall, J. (2008) 'Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning', *Educational Research*, 50(3), pp. 277–289. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880802309424.

Henderson, A.T. and Mapp, K.L. (2002) *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Annual Synthesis 2002*. Austin,

Texas: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools SEDL. Available at: https://sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf (Accessed: 1 April 2025).

Jackson, C.K., Johnson, R.C. and Persico, C. (2016) 'The Effects of School Spending on Educational and Economic Outcomes: Evidence from School Finance Reforms', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131(1), pp. 157–218. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv036.

Jackson, C.K., Rockoff, J.E. and Staiger, D.O. (2014) 'Teacher Effects and Teacher-Related Policies', *Annual Review of Economics*, 6(August 2014), pp. 801–825. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080213-040845.

Jakubowski, M., Gajderowicz, T. and Patrinos, H. (2024) *COVID-19, School Closures, and Student Learning Outcomes: New Global Evidence from PISA*. GLO Discussion Paper, No. 1372. Global Labor Organization (GLO). Available at: https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/281116 (Accessed: 23 January 2025).

James, M. (2010) 'An Overview of Educational Assessment', in P. Peterson, E. Baker, and B. McGaw (eds) *International Encyclopedia of Education (Third Edition)*. Oxford: Elsevier, pp. 161–171. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.01713-9.

Jensen, V.M. (2013) 'Working longer makes students stronger? The effects of ninth grade classroom hours on ninth grade student performance.', *Educational Research*, 55(2), pp. 180–194. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2013.801244.

Ketterlin-Geller, L.R. and Yovanoff, P. (2009) 'Diagnostic Assessments in Mathematics to Support Instructional Decision Making', *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 14(16).

Lakhno, M. (2023) 'What Is a Policy Framework? An Attempt at Conceptualization', *Sociální studia / Social Studies*, 20. Available at: https://doi.org/10.5817/SOC2023-35675.

Lavy, V. (2015) 'Do differences in schools' instruction time explain international achievement gaps? Evidence from developed and developing countries', *The Economic Journal*, 125(588), pp. F397–F424. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/ecoj.12233.

Letta, E. (2024) *Much more than a Market. Speed, security, solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU citizens*. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf (Accessed: 18 March 2025).

Letzel-Alt, V. and Pozas, M. (2023) *Differentiated Instruction Around the World: Exploring Differentiated Instructional Practice in General School Education*. Münster/New York: Waxmann Verlag. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.31244/9783830997023.

Leuven, E. and Oosterbeek, H. (2018) *Class size and student outcomes in Europe*. EENEE Analytical Report No. 33. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: 10.12766/28340.

Maldonado, J.E. and De Witte, K. (2022) 'The effect of school closures on standardised student test outcomes', *British Educational Research Journal*, 48(1), pp. 49–94. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3754.

Muho, A. and Taraj, G. (2022) 'Impact of Formative Assessment Practices on Student Motivation for Learning the English Language', *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(1), pp. 25–41.

Nardi, P. (2023) *Improving National Education Systems after COVID-19: The Role of Equity-Focused Governance and Systemic Reform*. OECD Education Working Papers No. 287. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/0832cb6e-en.

Nickow, A., Oreopoulos, P. and Quan, V. (2020) 'The impressive effects of tutoring on preK-12 learning: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the experimental evidence.', (27476).

Available at: http://www.nber.org/papers/w27476.

OECD (2012a) *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en.

OECD (2012b) *Let's Read Them a Story! The Parent Factor in Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264176232-en.

OECD (2019) *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en.

OECD (2020) *Curriculum Overload: A Way Forward*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/3081ceca-en.

OECD (2021a) *Adapting Curriculum to Bridge Equity Gaps: Towards an Inclusive Curriculum*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/6b49e118-en.

OECD (2021b) *Teachers Getting the Best out of Their Students: From Primary to Upper Secondary Education*. TALIS. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/5bc5cd4e-en.

OECD (2023a) *Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/e13bef63-en.

OECD (2023b) *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en.

OECD (2024) *An Evolution of Mathematics Curriculum: Where It Was, Where It Stands and Where It Is Going*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/0ffd89d0-en.

OECD (2025) *The OECD Learning Compass 2030*. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/data/tools/oecd-learning-compass-2030.html (Accessed: 1 April 2025).

Ozan, C. and Kıncal, R.Y. (2018) 'The Effects of Formative Assessment on Academic Achievement, Attitudes toward the Lesson, and Self-Regulation Skills', *International Journal of Assessment and Evaluation*, 28(1), pp. 17–31.

Papay, J.P. and Kraft, M.A. (2015) 'Productivity returns to experience in the teacher labor market: Methodological challenges and new evidence on long-term career improvement', *Journal of Public Economics*, 130, pp. 105–119. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2015.02.008.

Priestley, M. *et al.* (eds) (2021) *Curriculum Making in Europe: Policy and Practice Within and Across Diverse Contexts*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Schnepf, S.V. *et al.* (eds) (2024) *The pandemic, socioeconomic disadvantage and learning outcomes: Cross-national impact analyses of education policy reforms*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Schuepbach, M. (2015) 'Effects of extracurricular activities and their quality on primary school-age students' achievement in mathematics in Switzerland', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 26(2), pp. 279–295. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2014.929153.

Schütz, G., Ursprung, H.W. and Wößmann, L. (2008) 'Education Policy and Equality of Opportunity', *KYKLOS*, 61(2), pp. 279–308.

Seidlitz, A. and Zierow, L. (2022) *The Impact of All-Day Schools on Student Achievement – Evidence from Extending School Days in German Primary Schools*. CESifo Working Paper No. 8618. Munich: Munich Society for the Promotion of Economic Research - CESifo GmbH.

Shimizu, Y. and Vithal, R. (eds) (2023) *Mathematics Curriculum Reforms Around the World: The 24th ICMI Study*. Cham: Springer. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13548-4.

Thum-Thysen, A., Cravetto, R. and Varchola, J. (2021) *Investing in People's Competences – A Cornerstone for Growth and Wellbeing in the*

EU. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union (European Economy Discussion Papers, Discussion Paper 139).

Traphagen, K. (2011) *Strengthening science education: The power of more time to deepen inquiry and engagement*. Washington, DC: National Center on Time and Learning.

UNESCO (2017) *A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: https://doi.org/10.54675/MHHZ2237.

UNESCO (2018) *Global Education Monitoring Report 2018: Gender Review – Meeting Our Commitments to Gender Equality in Education*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261593.

UNESCO (2024) *Global Report on Teachers: Addressing Teacher Shortages and Transforming the Profession*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388832.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012) *International Standard Classification of Education: ISCED 2011*. Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

UNICEF Montenegro (2023) *Upućivanje porodica na program „Brižne porodice" [Referring Families to the 'Caring Families' Programme]*. Crna Gora: UNICEF. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/izvjestaji/upu%C4%87ivanje-porodica-na-program-%E2%80%9Ebri%C5%BEne-porodice (Accessed: 1 April 2025).

Valiandes, S. (2015) 'Evaluating the impact of differentiated instruction on literacy and reading in mixed ability classrooms: Quality and equity dimensions of education effectiveness', *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 45, pp. 17–26. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2015.02.005.

Vescio, V., Ross, D. and Adams, A. (2008) 'A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), pp. 80–91. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.01.004.

Weißenrieder, J. *et al.* (2015) 'Scaling CPD through professional learning communities: development of teachers' self-efficacy in relation to collaboration', *ZDM*, 47(1), pp. 27–38. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-015-0673-8.

Wößmann, L. (2015) 'The economic case for education', *Education Economics*, 24(1), pp. 3–32. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2015.1059801.

Yeşil Dağlı, Ü. (2019) 'Effect of increased instructional time on student achievement', *Educational Review*, 71(4), pp. 501–517. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1441808.

Ziernwald, L., Hillmayr, D. and Holzberger, D. (2022) 'Promoting High-Achieving Students Through Differentiated Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms—A Systematic Review', *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 33(4), pp. 540–573. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X221112931.

Annex: Strategic policy frameworks

This annex provides information feeding Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1. Please refer to the analysis provided in Sections 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 for further information.

Education system	Type of top-level policy frameworks	
	Broader top-level policy framework	**Dedicated top-level policy framework**
BE fr	Decree establishing the student's support file (DAccE)	
BE de	No policy framework reported	
BE nl		Reading action plan of the Flemish Community of Belgium Language action plan / The School year of Dutch of the Flemish Community of Belgium
BG	2021–2030 Strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning 2021-2030 National strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for equality, inclusion and participation of Roma (2021-2030)	
CZ	Strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic up to 2030+ Long-term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic 2023-2027	
DK	Agreement on the future evaluation and assessment system in primary schools	Quality programme for primary schools
DE	*Startchancen* programme STEM action plan 2.0	
EE	2021-2035 Education strategy	
IE	Ireland's Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy 2024-2033 Delivering equality of opportunity in schools (DEIS) programme (redefined)	
EL	2024-2025 Teaching instructions for the subjects of primary education for school year	
ES	Programme for orientation, progress, and educational enrichment (PROA+)	Territorial Cooperation Programme for strengthening mathematical competence for the 2024 budgetary exercise and Territorial Cooperation Programme for strengthening reading competence for the 2024 budgetary exercise
FR		*Plan français* Action plan 'Shock of knowledge to raise school standards'
HR	National plan for the development of the education system until 2027	
IT	2021-2027 'South agenda' national programme 2021-2027 'North agenda' national programme	
CY		Functional literacy remedial teaching programme
LV	Educational development guidelines for 2021-2027 'Future skills for the future to the public'	
LT	2021-2030 Education development programme State progress strategy 'Lithuania's vision for the future 'Lithuania 2050''	
LU	No policy framework reported	
HU	2021-2030 Public education strategy	
MT	Visioning the future by transforming education: 2024-2030 National education strategy	
NL		Masterplan for basic skills
AT		Reading programme

Education system	Type of top-level policy frameworks	
	Broader top-level policy framework	**Dedicated top-level policy framework**
PL	Poland's Integrated skills strategy 2030	
PT	Portugal's 'Learn more now: recover and improve learning' Plan	Learning monitoring tests for 4th and 6th grades
RO	National programme 'School after school'	
SI	No policy framework reported	
SK	Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Youth for the Years 2021-2028 National Action Plan of the European Child Guarantee until 2030	
FI	Government programme – a strong and committed Finland – the Government's vision	2030 National literacy strategy
SE	STEM Strategy for Sweden – From Preschool to Postgraduate Study 2025–2035	Language and mathematics strengthening efforts
AL	2021–2026 National education strategy	
BA	Student achievement standards for language, mathematics, natural sciences and information technology Strategy for the development of preschool, primary and secondary education in the Republic of Srpska for the Period 2022-2030	
CH	No policy framework reported	
IS	Iceland's Education policy 2030 – first action plan	2024–2026 Action plan for the Icelandic language
ME	Education reform strategy 2025-2035	
NO	Norway's White Paper 34, 2023-2024 'A more practical school – Better learning, motivation and well-being in grades 5–10'	
RS	Strategy for the development of education in Serbia by 2030	
TR	Türkiye's Strategic plan of the Ministry of National Education 2024–2028	

Acknowledgements

EUROPEAN EDUCATION AND CULTURE EXECUTIVE AGENCY

Platforms, Studies and Analysis

Boulevard Simon Bolivar 34 (Unit A6)
1049 Brussels
BELGIUM

https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu

Managing editor

Peter Birch

Authors

Teodora Parveva (coordinator), Anna Horvath, Snezhina Petrova, Emmanuel Sigalas

with the contribution of Matthias Franz

Graphics

Patrice Brel

Production coordinator

Gisèle De Lel and Maialen Perez Fernandez de Retana

Eurydice national units

ALBANIA

Eurydice Unit
Ministry of Education and Sports
Rruga e Durrësit, No 23
1001 Tirana
Contribution of the unit: Contribution of the Unit
Expert: Egest Gjokuta

AUSTRIA

Eurydice-Informationsstelle
Bundesministerium für Bildung
Abt. Bildungsstatistik und –Monitoring
Minoritenplatz 5
1010 Wien
Contribution of the unit:
Expert: Alexandra Kristinar-Wojnesitz

BELGIUM

Unité Eurydice de la Communauté française
Administration Générale de l'Enseignement
Ministère de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles
Avenue du Port 16 (Bureau 3P25)
1080 Brussels
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Experts: Joint responsibility

Eurydice Vlaanderen
Departement Onderwijs en Vorming / Afdeling Strategische Beleidsondersteuning
Hendrik Consciencegebouw 7C10
Koning Albert II-laan 15
1210 Brussels
Contribution of the unit: Department of Education and Training, Flanders
Experts: Katrien Vercruyssen, Goedele Avau, Elke Peeters, Sanne Noël

Eurydice Ostbelgien
Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft
Fachbereich Ausbildung und Unterrichtsorganisation
Gospertstraße 1
4700 Eupen
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Experts: Lydia Barts, Sébastien Labiaux, Neil Bogaerts, Stephanie Palm

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Ministry of Civil Affairs
Education Sector
Trg BiH 3
71000 Sarajevo
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility of the competent institutions
Experts: representatives of all competent institutions

BULGARIA

Eurydice Unit
Human Resource Development Centre
Education Research and Planning Unit
15 Graf Ignatiev Street
1000 Sofia
Contribution of the unit: Eurydice unit
Experts: Angel Valkov, Marchela Mitova

CROATIA

Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes
Frankopanska 26
10000 Zagreb
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Expert: Joint responsibility

CYPRUS

Eurydice Unit
Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
Kimonos and Thoukydidou
1434 Nicosia
Contribution of the unit: Christiana Haperi
Expert: Ioannis Ioannou (Department of Secondary General Education)

CZECHIA

Eurydice Unit
Czech National Agency for International Education and Research
Dům zahraniční spolupráce
Na Poříčí 1035/4
110 00 Prague 1
Contribution of the unit: Jana Halamová, Andrea Lajdová;
Expert: Daniela Němcová (MEYS)

DENMARK

Eurydice Unit
Ministry of Higher Education and Science
Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science
Haraldsgade 53
2100 Copenhagen Ø
Contribution of the unit: Pauline Enggaard Jakobsen (Head of Unit Danish Agency of Higher Education and Science)
Expert: Danish Agency of Education and Quality

ESTONIA

Eurydice Unit
Ministry of Education and Research
Munga 18
50088 Tartu
Contribution of the unit: Inga Kukk (coordinator, Ministry of Education and Research)
Expert: Sandra Fomotškin (Ministry of Education and Research)

FINLAND

Eurydice Unit
Finnish National Agency for Education
P.O. Box 380
00531 Helsinki
Contribution of the unit: Siru Korkala, Hanna Laakso, Petra Packalen

FRANCE

Eurydice Unit
Directorate of Evaluation, Forecasting and Performance Monitoring
Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research
61–65 rue Dutot
75732 Paris Cedex 15
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Expert: Robin Bosdeveix

GERMANY

Eurydice-Informationsstelle des Bundes
Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt e. V. (DLR)
Heinrich-Konen Str. 1
53227 Bonn
Contribution of the Unit: Joint responsibility

Eurydice-Informationsstelle der Länder im Sekretariat der Kultusministerkonferenz
Taubenstraße 10
10117 Berlin

GREECE

Hellenic Eurydice Unit
Directorate for European and International Affairs
Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports
Andrea Papandreou 37 (Office 2172)
151 80 Maroussi (Attiki)
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Expert: Polyxeni BILLA, Institute of Educational Policy

HUNGARY

Hungarian Eurydice Unit
Educational Authority
19–21 Maros Street
1122 Budapest
Contribution of the unit: Eurydice Unit Hungary
Expert: Szemenyei Mariann

ICELAND

Eurydice Unit
Ministry of Education and Children
Borgartún 33
105 Reykjavík
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Experts: Steinunn Halldórsdóttir, Hulda Herjolfsdóttir Skogland

IRELAND

Eurydice Unit
Department of Education and Youth
International Section
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 RC96
Contribution of the unit: Sinéad Ní Thuathail
Experts: Amanda Geary (Post Primary Senior Inspector), Jason Kelly (Assistant Chief Inspector)

ITALY

Unità italiana di Eurydice
Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa
Agenzia Erasmus+
Via Cesare Lombroso 6/15
50134 Florence
Contribution of the unit: joint responsibility
Experts: Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito.Per la DG per gli Affari Internazionali e l'Internazionalizzazione del Sistema Nazionale di Istruzione (DGAFI): Direttore Sabrina Capasso, Dott.ssa Rosaria Maria Petrella; per l'Ufficio del Consigliere Diplomatico (UCD): Dott.ssa Mariantonietta Salvucci; per la DG per gli ordinamenti scolastici, la formazione del personale scolastico e la valutazione del sistema nazionale di istruzione (DGOSV): Dott.ssa Maria Rosa Silvestro, Dott.ssa Daniela Marrocchi, Dott.ssa Maristella Fortunato, Dott.ssa Marina Imperato, Dott.ssa Diana Saccardo; per l'Unità di missione del PNRR: Dott. Andrea Bollini; Dott.ssa Silvia Bolognini; Dott.ssa Giuseppina Russo; Dott.ssa Immacolata Grimaldi; per la DG per lo studente, l'inclusione, l'orientamento e il contrasto alla dispersione scolastica: dirigente dott.ssa Paola Deiana; dirigente dott.ssa Azzurra Mottolese.

LATVIA

Eurydice Unit
State Education Development Agency
Vaļņu Street 1
1050 Riga
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility

LIECHTENSTEIN

Informationsstelle Eurydice
Schulamt des Fürstentums Liechtenstein
Austrasse 79
Postfach 684
9490 Vaduz

LITHUANIA

Eurydice Unit
National Agency for Education
K. Kalinausko Street 7
03107 Vilnius
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Experts: group of experts from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, and the National Agency for Education

LUXEMBOURG

Unité nationale d'Eurydice
ANEFORE ASBL
48-50, rue Charles Martel
2134 Luxembourg
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Expert: Annick Spautz (MENJE)

MALTA

Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation
Great Siege Road
Floriana
VLT 2000
Contribution of the unit:
Expert: Louis Scerri

MONTENEGRO

Eurydice Unit
Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation
Vaka Djurovica bb
81000 Podgorica
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Experts: Nevena Čabrilo (Bureau for Educational Services), Anita Marić (Bureau for Educational Services), Divna Paljević (Examination Centre)

NETHERLANDS

Eurydice Nederland
Directie Internationaal Beleid
Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap
Rijnstraat 50
2500 BJ The Hague
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility

NORTH MACEDONIA

National Agency for European Educational Programmes and Mobility
Boulevard Kuzman Josifovski Pitu, No 17
1000 Skopje

NORWAY

Eurydice Unit
Directorate for Higher Education and Skills
PO Box 1093
5809 Bergen
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility

POLAND

Polish Eurydice Unit
Foundation for the Development of the Education System
Aleje Jerozolimskie 142A
02-305 Warsaw
Contribution of the unit: Magdalena Górowska-Fells;
Expert: Elżbieta Neroj, Ministry of National Education

PORTUGAL

Portuguese Eurydice Unit
Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics
Avenida 24 de Julho 134
1399-054 Lisbon
Contribution of the unit: Margarida Leandro and Vera Caeiro, in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Education (DGE), Directorate-General for Schools (DGEstE) and Institute of Educational Assessment (IAVE);
Expert: Pedro Freitas

ROMANIA

Eurydice Unit
National Agency for Community Programmes in the Field of Education and Vocational Training
Central Library
Politehnica University of Bucharest
Splaiul Independenței No 313, sector 6
060042 Bucharest
Contribution of the unit: Veronica Gabriela Chirea;
Expert: Roxana Mihail (PhD, Head of unit, The National Center for Curriculum and Assessment)

SERBIA

Eurydice Unit Serbia
Tempus Foundation
Žabljačka 12
11000 Belgrade
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Experts: Tamara Kostić, Selena Lazić

SLOVAKIA

Eurydice Unit
Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation
Krížkova 9
811 04 Bratislava
Contribution of the unit: Martina Valušková, Juraj Schweigert
Expert: Rastislav Rosinský

SLOVENIA

Ministry of Education
Education Development and Quality Office
Masarykova cesta 16
1000 Ljubljana
Contribution of the unit: Tanja Taštanoska
Expert: Karmen Svetlik (Educational Research Institute)

SPAIN

Unidad Eurydice España – REDIE
Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa
Ministerio de Educación, Formación Profesional y Deportes
Paseo del Prado, 28
28014 Madrid
Contribution of the unit: Eva Alcayde García, Gerardo Casado Hernández, Marina Duarte Gómez, Rafael Miguel Maroto Gamero and Jaime Vaquero Jiménez; experts: Contribution of the autonomous communities: José Calvo Dombón and Encarnación Castillo Antoñanzas (Aragón); David Artime García (Principado de Asturias); Claudia Lázaro del Pozo (Cantabria); Luis Domingo González Núñez (Castilla y León); Rita Ossó Torné (Catalunya); Ana Cobos Martínez, María José García Díaz, Myriam García Sánchez, María Gatón Lasheras, Miguel Ángel Gil González, Adela Rosa Lemus (Extremadura); Manuel Enrique Prado Cueva (Galicia); Fernando Bonnín Roca (Illes Balears); Gerardo Azor Martínez (Comunidad de Madrid); and Beatriz Martínez Fernández (La Rioja)

SWEDEN

Eurydice Unit
Swedish Council for Higher Education
Box 4030
171 04 Solna
Contribution of the unit: Jenny Lindström, Madelen Charysczak

SWITZERLAND

Eurydice Unit
Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK)
Speichergasse 6
3001 Bern
Contribution of the unit: Alexander Gerlings

TÜRKIYE

Türkiye Eurydice Ulusal Birimi
Strateji Geliştirme Başkanlığı
Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı
Merkez Bina (4.Kat)
B-Blok Bakanlıklar
06648 Ankara
Contribution of the unit: Joint responsibility
Experts: Dr Yusuf Canbolat, Emine Özdemir, Esra Kırkıl, Dr Muzaffer Can Dilek, Dr Merve Büdün, Nadir Yıldırım

Getting in touch with the EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you online (european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en).

On the phone or in writing

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service:
by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls);

at the following standard number: +32 22999696;

via the following form: european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/write-us_en.

Finding information about the EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the s EU is available on the Europa website (european-union.europa.eu).

EU publications

You can view or order EU publications at op.europa.eu/en/publications. Multiple copies of free publications can be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local documentation centre (european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en).

EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1951 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex (eur-lex.europa.eu).

EU open data

The portal data.europa.eu provides access to open datasets from the EU institutions, bodies and agencies. These can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes. The portal also provides access to a wealth of datasets from European countries.

Addressing underachievement in literacy, mathematics and science.
Policy changes in European school education since 2020

Every student in Europe should have the chance to master the basic skills that open doors to learning, new opportunities, and a confident future. Literacy, mathematics, science, digital skills and citizenship are more than school subjects – they are the foundations of lifelong learning, employability, civic participation and personal growth. However, recent international assessments reveal an increasing number of students in Europe who complete compulsory education without reaching the expected levels of basic skills. This is a serious concern for equity, educational quality, and Europe's capacity to meet future challenges.

In response to this, the European Commission has placed basic skills at the heart of its broader education and skills agenda. This Eurydice report analyses how 37 education systems across Europe are tackling underachievement in literacy, mathematics and science at primary and lower secondary levels. It focuses on policies adopted or implemented since the 2020/2021 school year.

Across seven chapters, the report shows how countries are shaping an ecosystem of policy measures: adopting strategic frameworks, revising curricula, reorganising instruction, improving assessment, reinforcing learning support, strengthening support for teachers and inclusive practices, and engaging parents more closely in their children's learning. At the centre of this ecosystem are teachers, supported through professional development, inclusive pedagogical resources and the recruitment of specialised staff.

Taken together, these policy measures demonstrate a shared ambition across Europe: to ensure that no learner is left behind, and that every young person can build the strong foundations they need to thrive in school and in life.

The Eurydice Network's task is to understand and explain how Europe's different education systems are organised and how they work. The network provides descriptions of national education systems, comparative studies devoted to specific topics, indicators and statistics. All Eurydice publications are available free of charge on the Eurydice website or in print upon request. Through its work, Eurydice aims to promote understanding, cooperation, trust and mobility at European and international levels. The network consists of national units located in European countries and is coordinated by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

For more information about Eurydice, see:
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/

Publications Office of the European Union

Print
ISBN 978-92-9488-939-3
doi:10.2797/992314
EC-01-25-073-EN-C

PDF
ISBN 978-92-9488-938-6
doi:10.2797/1883015
EC-01-25-073-EN-N