



Policy Recommendations

Developed by KMOP

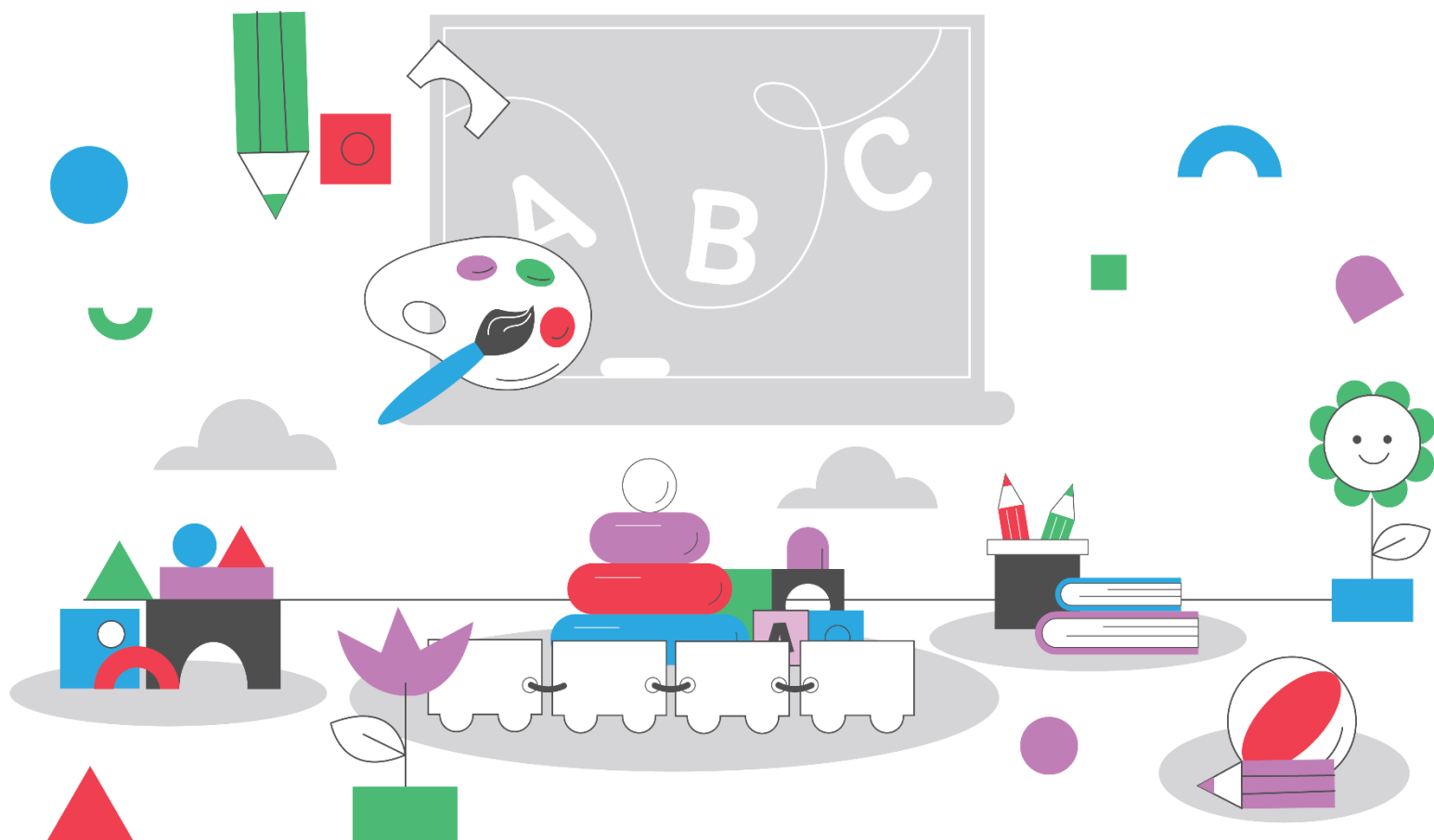


Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Micro-level recommendations.....	2
Meso-level recommendations.....	3
Macro-level recommendations.....	4

Introduction

The ASDinPreschool project aims to enhance the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in early childhood education through the development and implementation of practical tools, resources, and educational materials tailored to their needs. Additionally, it seeks to empower preschool professionals and strengthen collaboration among teachers, families, specialists, and key stakeholders.

Inclusive preschool education requires more than individual classroom interventions. It depends on the availability of appropriate professional training, accessible learning environments, adequate support services, collaboration among professionals and families, and education policies that enable preschools to respond flexibly to children's individual needs.

Against this background, Deliverable R4.4 – Policy Recommendations brings together the key policy messages emerging from the implementation of the ASDinPreschool project. The recommendations aim to inform and guide future practices and policies related to autism and inclusive education in preschool settings.

The recommendations draw on the evidence and lessons learned throughout the project, including feedback collected through workshops and pilot implementations, as well as insights related to the integration of the project's approaches and resources into everyday preschool practice. Particular attention is given to the practical experiences of preschool teachers and other professionals, including the barriers they identified and the conditions they considered necessary for more inclusive and sustainable practice.

The recommendations are intended to be relevant to policymakers and education authorities at European, national and regional levels, as well as to preschool providers, school leadership, teacher training institutions and relevant support services.

2

Micro-level recommendations

Micro-level recommendations are implemented at the individual, family, classroom or immediate community level, focusing on the direct experiences, practices and interactions of children, teachers, families and other professionals. Micro-level recommendations typically aim to support day-to-day inclusion, participation, communication and individualised support for children with autism and other diverse needs.

1. Establish a named inclusion coordinator with protected coordination time (short term)

Every preschool should assign a named staff member responsible for coordinating inclusion, supported by a clear role description and allocated working time.

The implementation of inclusive practices can depend heavily on individual teachers' initiative. Without clear coordination responsibilities, agreed adaptations may be implemented inconsistently, information may be lost when staff change and families may be unsure about whom to contact. A designated coordinator can support continuity and coordination while ensuring that inclusion remains a shared responsibility across the preschool.

Education authorities and preschool providers should establish a minimum organisational standard requiring each setting to designate an inclusion coordinator. Depending on the size and structure of

the setting, this role could be undertaken by a special education professional, a member of the school leadership team, a suitably trained teacher or a shared coordinator serving more than one small preschool setting. The coordinator's responsibilities could include following up agreed support measures, maintaining communication with families and relevant specialists, organising brief staff consultations, supporting consistent implementation of agreed strategies and helping staff identify and address barriers to participation. Providers should allocate working time proportionate to these responsibilities. A short regular coordination meeting could provide a feasible starting point, with additional consultation when required. The coordinator should support consistency, while school leadership remains accountable for ensuring that responsibilities, decisions and resources are clearly established.

2. Establish transition protocols to ensure continuity of support (short term)

Preschools and receiving educational settings should plan a simple transition protocol for autistic children and other children requiring additional support. A brief transition process should preserve effective adjustments, involve families and prepare children for changes in staff, routines and environments.

Transitions can interrupt established support. This may occur when a child moves between preschool groups, enters a new preschool setting or transitions from preschool to primary school. Receiving staff may have limited information about a child's communication preferences, sensory needs, strengths and successful classroom strategies. Without appropriate preparation, useful adjustments may not be transferred to the new setting.

Education authorities and preschool providers should introduce a simple transition process with a named contact in both the sending and receiving setting. For planned transitions, preparation should normally begin during the preceding term. The protocol should include a short meeting with the family, a concise profile of the child's strengths and helpful adjustments, opportunities for the child to become familiar with the new setting through visits, photographs or visual materials. Children should be involved in transition planning through communication methods appropriate to them. Receiving staff should agree essential adjustments before entry and review them with the family approximately four to six weeks afterwards. Information sharing should be limited to what is necessary and follow applicable consent and confidentiality procedures. The transition protocol should be integrated into existing transition arrangements rather than creating a separate assessment process.

3

Meso-level recommendations

Meso-level recommendations are implemented at the organisational, preschool, local or regional level, focusing on how educational settings, support services and relevant organisations organise, coordinate and deliver inclusive education and support. Meso-level recommendations typically address institutional practices, staff roles and responsibilities, collaboration mechanisms, resources, referral and support processes, and the organisation of services within a specific setting or region.

1. Establish structured collaboration between preschools, families and early intervention services (short to medium term)

Education systems should establish clear mechanisms for regular collaboration between preschool teachers, families, early intervention services and other professionals supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder may receive support from several professionals and services at the same time, including educators, families, psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and early intervention professionals. However, when these professionals work independently, they may have limited opportunities to exchange information, coordinate objectives or evaluate strategies together. Strategies that are effective in an early intervention setting may not be transferred to the classroom or home, while important observations made by teachers or families may not reach other professionals supporting the child. This can result in fragmented support.

Education and social policies should therefore establish clear mechanisms for regular collaboration between preschools, families and early intervention services. These could include scheduled coordination meetings, shared support plans, agreed communication channels and procedures for exchanging relevant information, always respecting data protection and family consent. Families should be recognised as active partners in this process, as they provide essential information about the child's strengths, communication preferences, interests, routines and support needs. Policy frameworks should also encourage professionals to establish shared and realistic objectives that can be addressed consistently across different environments.

2. Strengthen family-centred support and guidance (short to medium term)

Families should receive clear, accessible and practical information when autism-related developmental concerns arise. Guidance should explain available services, assessment and support pathways, educational resources and strategies that families can use together with preschool professionals.

When concerns about a child's development or possible autism first arise, families may need to navigate different educational, health and social services while also trying to understand their child's needs. Information can be fragmented, highly technical or provided by different professionals at different stages. This can make it difficult for families to understand available support and identify appropriate next steps.

Policies should therefore ensure that families have access to clear, accessible and family-centred guidance from the earliest stages of concern, including before or during a diagnostic process. Information should explain the purpose of developmental assessment, available early intervention and educational support services, families' rights, and the practical steps that can be taken to support the child at home and in preschool. Guidance should not focus exclusively on diagnosis. Families should also receive practical information about communication, social interaction, sensory needs, emotional regulation, routines and collaboration with educators. Resources should be available in accessible formats and, where possible, in different languages to respond to the diversity of families. Preschools and early intervention professionals should also be encouraged to establish collaborative relationships with families, recognising their knowledge of the child and involving them in decisions about support.

Macro-level recommendations

Macro-level recommendations implemented at the national or EU level, focusing on legislation, public policies, national strategies, funding frameworks and system-wide standards. Macro-level recommendations typically aim to strengthen the wider policy and regulatory environment, ensure consistent approaches across regions and services, and promote sustainable, long-term support and inclusion for children with autism and other diverse needs.

1. Strengthen practical and continuous autism training for preschool teachers (medium to long term)

National and regional education authorities should ensure regular, accessible and practical professional development on autism and inclusive preschool education for all preschool teachers.

Preschool teachers play a central role in creating inclusive learning environments and supporting children's participation in everyday preschool activities. However, effective inclusion requires more than general awareness of autism. Teachers need practical knowledge and strategies that can be translated into everyday classroom practice. Guidance should address differentiation and provide flexible approaches for adapting activities and resources to children's different developmental profiles, abilities and levels of support needs.

Education authorities should integrate autism and inclusive preschool education into continuing professional development systems. Training should be recurring and accessible rather than dependent on individual teachers' initiative or the availability of occasional training opportunities. Training should combine essential knowledge with practical application and include basic knowledge regarding the autism spectrum and the diversity of its symptoms, recognition of communication, sensory and social needs, methods for supporting communication and building relationships with the child, strategies for responding to sensory overload, challenging behaviors, and crisis situations, adaptation of environments, routines and educational materials and approaches for supporting participation within the peer group. Practical case studies, classroom examples, exercises, demonstrations and opportunities for peer exchange should form an integral part of the training.

2. Introduce needs-based and flexible funding for inclusive preschool support (long term)

Education funding systems should provide flexible resources based on children's and preschool settings' identified support needs rather than relying exclusively on formal diagnosis or certification.

Access to additional resources and support can be closely connected to formal documentation, such as a diagnosis, ruling or professional opinion. However, children's support needs may become apparent before a formal diagnostic process has been completed. Preschools should be able to respond to children's support needs at an early stage. Early support may include adapting the physical or learning environment, providing additional adult or specialist support, introducing alternative communication methods, or implementing measures to reduce sensory overload. Responding to identified needs as they arise can help reduce barriers to participation and support children's inclusion in everyday preschool activities. Waiting for formal documentation can delay the implementation of practical support that could already be provided within the preschool environment.

It is proposed to introduce an integrated and flexible funding model in which each facility would receive a basic, fixed budget intended for adapting the environment to the diverse needs of children. At the same time, additional funding should be increased based on the facility's actual needs, rather than solely on the number of children holding specific certifications. A multi-level funding model could be adopted: a basic budget for every preschool, plus additional funds allocated based on a needs assessment. A key change would involve adopting the principle of "funding based on need rather than

diagnosis." This would enable the preschool to respond to a child's actual difficulties as soon as they are noticed, rather than waiting for the completion of a formal procedure.

3. Establish functional, non-diagnostic early identification and needs-based support planning in preschool settings (medium to long term)

Education and health systems should establish clear procedures for developmental observation, early identification, functional assessment and referral, while ensuring that preschool teachers do not assume a diagnostic role.

Preschool teachers are often among the first professionals outside the family to observe a child's development over an extended period and across different everyday situations, such as in interaction with peers. They may therefore notice communication, sensory, social or behavioural differences before a child receives specialist assessment. At the same time, a formal diagnosis does not fully reflect a child's individual functioning and needs. Children with the same diagnosis may have different strengths, barriers and support needs.

Education and health authorities should establish standardised pathways that guide preschool staff on developmental observation, documentation of observations, early indicators of autism, discussing concerns sensitively with families, accessing specialist advice or assessment, removing environmental barriers, adapting teaching methods and conditions. Where appropriate, preschool settings should have clearly identified contact points within early intervention, health or specialist support services. multidimensional functional assessment should consider the child's capabilities, strengths, activity limitations, environmental barriers and available resources rather than focusing exclusively on diagnostic labels. Preschool teachers should not be expected to diagnose autism. Their role should be to identify observed support needs, document relevant information and follow established referral and support pathways. Importantly, support strategies within the preschool should begin according to the child's observed needs and should not necessarily be postponed until a formal diagnosis is obtained.

6

4. Strengthen sensory accessibility in preschool settings (short to medium term)

Preschool infrastructure and accessibility policies should promote environments that reduce sensory and communication barriers for children with diverse needs.

The physical and sensory characteristics of preschool environments can create barriers to participation. Noise, lighting, visual clutter, crowded spaces and the absence of quiet areas may contribute to sensory overload and make participation more difficult for some children. A key shift: instead of adapting a preschool only when a problem arises, preschools should be designed from the outset to accommodate children's sensory diversity as the standard rather than the exception.

Education authorities should develop design and accessibility guidance for preschool settings. The guidelines should cover, among other things: acoustics, including reduction of excessive noise and reverberation, lighting, including stable, adjustable lighting and minimisation of uncomfortable or flickering light sources, quiet areas, where children can go when they become overwhelmed, sensory spaces, spatial organisation, with clear layouts and predictable movement, visual stimulation, avoiding unnecessary visual clutter and flexibility, allowing adjustments to lighting, stimulus levels and room organization. In addition, preschool providers should conduct periodic reviews of sensory, communication and organisational barriers. Small accessibility improvements should be supported

through accessible funding mechanisms, while larger infrastructure adaptations should have a clearly identified funding route.

5. Embed adaptable and inclusive strategies into everyday preschool practice (short to medium term)

Preschools should integrate inclusive strategies and adaptable resources into everyday routines, activities and transitions rather than using them only as separate or occasional interventions.

Preschool teachers may learn about useful autism-support strategies through training or professional development but still lack quick access to clear, ready-to-use materials in an appropriate language and format. Scattered resources, inconsistent terminology and materials that are difficult to adapt to different classroom situations can limit their regular use in everyday preschool practice. Ensuring that practical and adaptable resources are readily available can support preschool teachers in applying inclusive strategies consistently across routines, activities and transitions. Preschools should also regularly review children's participation and wellbeing, including whether children are able to take part in shared activities, routines and social interactions on an equal basis. Such reviews should help identify barriers to participation and prevent situations where children are repeatedly excluded, participate in reduced activities or hours, or are unable to access appropriate support.

Education authorities and preschool providers should encourage whole-setting approaches in which inclusive strategies are incorporated into routine classroom planning. Resources should provide teachers with practical guidance on how to simplify or extend activities, adjust the level of adult support, provide alternative communication or visual supports, adapt activities to different developmental levels and include children with different support needs in shared activities. Educational resources developed or publicly supported for preschool settings should include clear differentiation guidance, alternative implementation options and visual examples. Where possible, materials should be modular and available in accessible digital formats so that teachers can adapt and combine them according to classroom needs. Preschool teams should use simple observation and reflection processes to identify barriers to participation and monitor whether agreed support measures are enabling children to participate meaningfully in everyday activities. Embedding inclusive strategies into everyday practice can also reduce the risk of singling out children who require additional support and can allow strategies to benefit the whole group.

7

6. Strengthen in-class and specialist support for children with diverse needs (medium to long term)

Preschools should have access to appropriate in-class and specialist support, together with mechanisms for collaboration between preschool teachers, support professionals and families. Support should be flexible and responsive to children's observed needs and participation barriers.

Teacher knowledge and educational resources are essential for inclusion, but they may not be sufficient when children have different developmental profiles and levels of support needs. Additional adult support in the classroom, including collaborative approaches such as co-teaching, can help educators respond more effectively to diverse needs. Implementing activities can also become more challenging when children require different forms or levels of support, highlighting the importance of adequate staffing and flexible support arrangements. Inclusive practice must also recognise the

practical realities of preschool classrooms, where one teacher may be responsible for a large group of children with different developmental profiles, strengths and support needs at the same time. This requires flexible support arrangements and practical resources that can be implemented without placing the responsibility for meeting highly diverse needs on one teacher alone.

Education systems should strengthen mechanisms through which preschool teachers can access additional classroom support and professional consultation. Depending on the national context and the needs of the child, this may include support and consultation by special education professionals, psychologists, speech and language professionals, occupational therapists and early intervention professionals. At preschool level, regular team planning and consultation should support the coordination of strategies across daily activities. Where additional staff are available, their role should be integrated into classroom planning rather than being limited to isolated work with individual children. Strengthening in-class and collaborative support can reduce the pressure placed on individual teachers while supporting children's participation with their peers.

