

EMPOWERING TEACHERS' PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AN INDUCTION PROGRAMME BASED IN PEER-MENTORING

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Abstract

Europe is now facing the challenge of attracting new qualified teachers and maintaining those already in the career system and facing a very high level of demotivation. The extent of these realities leads to policy challenges and needs that cross the creation of systemic opportunities to transform the teaching profession, making it more attractive for new teachers, creating new opportunities of career to experienced ones and endowing school directors with approaches for the smooth and positive integration and interaction between teachers in the school setting. Although both the initial education and continuous professional development need to be of the highest quality, the possibility to access professional support throughout their careers is essential for teachers and the educational systems. According to the conclusions of the Council of the European Union, 2020/C [1], it is critical to ensure the effectiveness, innovation and high quality of the educational system, update the competences of teachers and trainers, prepare them to change, and be proactive and innovative. This includes training, induction and quality mentoring, as well as promoting and supporting continuous professional development throughout the teaching careers.

Considering these European challenges, the LOOP project (no. 626148-EPP-1-2020-2-PT-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY) is changing the way new teachers and experienced teachers cooperate based on a mentoring relationship to ease the process of integration of new teachers in the school setting, preparing them to the teaching profession and career and to establish mutual-learning opportunities essential to work in a team. To achieve these goals, two programmes were structured following a co-creation methodology involving teachers and school directors: a **mentors' capacity training course** and a **teachers' induction programme** based on mentoring. These programmes have been implemented and tested in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Greece and Slovenia since September/2022 and from the implementation, partners aim to test 7 hypotheses: 1. Formal training of mentors' programmes to train experienced teachers and school leaders facilitates the deployment of effective and formal teacher's induction programmes; 2. The opportunity for experienced teachers and school leaders to diversify their career options and act as mentors of their peers contributes to their motivation and maintenance of the system; 3. Peer-developed teachers induction programmes based on mentoring activities support the professional development of teachers initiating their careers and their maintenance on the system; 4. Formal induction programmes applied at the school level contribute to the social and cultural inclusion and development of new teachers; 5. Structured mentoring programs adapted to the context increase its participants' interest and success; 6. The training of mentors facilitates the implementation of teachers' induction programs; 7. Lack of resources and guidance are the reasons for not implementing induction programs in schools.

The implementation is being done with the support of policymakers from all countries (3 are part of the consortium) and is involving around 500 new teachers and 300 experienced teachers. Along with the implementation, the consortium is preparing **policy recommendations** for the integration of the programmes into the local, regional and or national policies and practices.

Keywords: teachers' continuous professional development, teachers-mentoring, teachers-induction, teaching profession, teachers' career progression

1 INTRODUCTION

Europe is now facing the challenge of attracting new qualified teachers and maintaining those already in the career system and facing a very high level of demotivation. The extent of these realities leads to policy challenges and needs that cross the creation of systemic opportunities to transform the teaching profession, making it more attractive for new teachers, creating new opportunities of career to experienced ones and endowing school directors with approaches for the smooth and positive integration and interaction between teachers in the school testing. Although both the initial education and continuous professional development need to be of the highest quality, the possibility to access professional support throughout their careers is essential for teachers and the educational systems. According to the conclusions of the Council of the European Union, 2020/C, it is critical to ensure the effectiveness, innovation and high quality of the educational system, to update the competences of teachers and trainers and prepare them to change, to be proactive and innovative. This includes training, induction and quality mentoring, as well as promoting and supporting continuous professional development throughout the teaching careers. This need is reinforced by a recent OECD survey related to the access of teachers to continuing professional development (CPD) activities, which reported that only 63% have compulsory CPD requirements for all teachers in at least one level of education, and then only 52% countries have compulsory CPD requirements for teachers in all levels of education (from pre-primary to upper secondary) [2]. Furthermore, the demand of answering to the challenge of teachers ageing and the consequent need to recruit new teachers, who can continuously search for innovation and face challenges and be part of the new generation of cornerstones of the European Education Area, evidence that attention should be paid to new teachers. It is imperative to provide additional guidance and mentoring, to facilitate their career start and help them cope with the specific needs they are facing [1]. This demand of endowing the Member States with concerted policies and strategies to successfully overcome these European challenges, motivated the consortium to structure the LOOP project, specifically designed to answer the needs of:

- investing in initiatives contributing to the career advancement of experienced teachers, assuring the gaining of experience by undertaking additional roles and responsibilities;
- raising the attractiveness of teaching careers to new teachers, by allowing them to progress in their careers and benefit from the know-how of more experienced teachers
- schools assure know-how retention, sustainable pedagogical intervention and management

In this context, the LOOP project is pursuing the development of policies that can properly give access to excellent training programs, in all stages of the teaching profession, namely (see Fig.1):

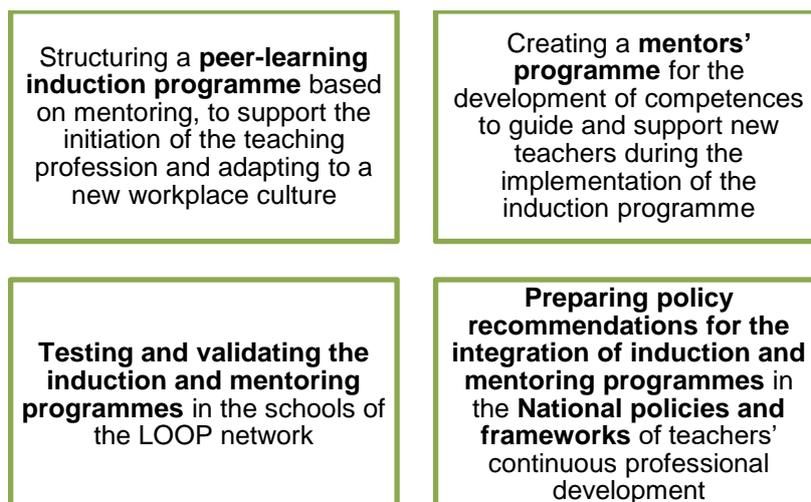


Figure 1 – Main outcomes of the LOOP project.

2 METHODOLOGY

The **LOOP - Empowering teachers' personal, professional and social continuous development through innovative peer induction programmes** is a policy experimentation project gathering 12 organisations, including ministries of education, universities and research institutions from six European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Greece and Slovenia). The project started to be built in the beginning of 2020, forward-looking the shift towards a comprehensive policy of the teaching profession and professional development that spans all stages of teaching careers.

The project relies on a collaborative methodology involving a diversity of educational professionals and experts (teachers, school directors, trainers of teachers, researchers and policymakers) in the discussion, co-design and testing of an approach to guide and support the smooth induction of new teachers in the teaching profession through peer-mentoring. Multiple opportunities for cooperation, exchange of expertise and peer learning are being created by the consortium at the local, regional/national and European levels.

2.1 The concepts behind the project

The LOOP project aims to contribute to the (re)definition of policies and practices concerning teachers' professional development and career management, endowing Member-States with the capacity and strategies to overcome the societal challenges that have been faced in education in the past 10 years, including ageing of teachers, lack of qualified teachers, demotivation and dropout of teachers, among others. The foundations and the design of the project were defined to assure the alignment of the project's main resources with the needs and expectations of teaching professionals and the regional/national norms and frameworks on educational human resources management and development. As such, the main concepts that guided the consortium in this journey and that embody the programmes and LOOP approach.

2.1.1 Co-design of solutions

A series of activities involving teachers are being promoted allowing them to take part in the process of development and validation of the programmes and policy recommendations. Teachers provided inputs for the structure and content of the programmes; they were invited to test the programmes in real context providing continuous feedback; they also took part in meetings to discuss policies and conditions for the successful and continuous implementation of the programmes. The programmes were defined, tested and validated **together with teachers**, who also supported the definition guidelines and references for the systemic shift at the policy and operational levels [4].

2.1.2 Policy experimentation

The project integrates a phase of **implementation** of the **mentors' capacity training course** and **teachers' induction programme based on mentoring** in a **real context** and with the support of ministries, schools, school directors and teachers of the six countries. The main objective of the testing phase is to **collect evidence on the quality and adequacy of the programmes** for continuous professional development and career management and create the foundations for the (re)definition of policies of the teaching profession and professional development that spans all stages of teaching careers.

2.1.3 Teachers' induction programme based on mentoring

The **LOOP teachers' induction programme** was designed as "a **professional development** programme that **incorporates mentoring** and is designed to **offer support, guidance, and orientation** for beginning teachers during the **transition into their first teaching experience**" [5].

2.1.4 Peer-mentoring

In the context of the LOOP project, peer mentoring can be defined as "a professional relationship in which an experienced person (the experienced teacher) assists another (the beginning teacher) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person's professional and personal growth" [6].

This article briefly introduces the methodology and process of development of the LOOP main results, during the first 19 months of the project, which covers the period from February/2021 to September/2022 in the six countries of the partnership: Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Slovenia and Croatia.

2.2 The teaching dimensions of the LOOP approach

Five dimensions of the teaching identity and profession are being considered along the different phases of the project: research, design, development and testing. These dimensions were defined at the beginning of the project and cover the multiple tasks and responsibilities of a teacher and are: scientific, pedagogical-didactic, bureaucratic-administrative, sociocultural and emotional.

2.2.1 *Scientific area*

This is related to the **scientific knowledge and competences linked with the subject** for which teachers are responsible. This scientific knowledge and competences are acquired in the initial training at the universities and globally, new teachers involved in the LOOP project, identified this area as the one in which they are highly prepared.

2.2.2 *Pedagogical-didactic area*

This is connected to the teaching methods applied in the classroom, the use of creative and innovative tools and resources and the strategies elected to manage communication and interaction with students. The theory behind pedagogical-didactic is commonly approached in the initial training at the universities and operationalized in the school context.

2.2.3 *Bureaucratic-administrative area*

It is intrinsically connected with the school setting and context and reports to the school's organization, internal regulations and the administrative procedures to be followed. This was one of the areas identified by new teachers, as to be improved.

2.2.4 *Sociocultural area*

It concerns the cultural and community context in which the school is located; is also related to pedagogical projects and plans defined and existent in the school and the interaction between the teachers of the schools. This area was also identified as strategic for the new teachers.

2.2.5 *Emotional area*

This area has two dimensions: an intrapersonal, related to self-awareness and conscience, self-reflection and assessment and emotional intelligence; an interpersonal dimension, connected with the ability to establish and maintain relationships and interactions with other professionals, the students and their families and also the ability to manage conflicts.

In the research phase of the project, teachers had the opportunity to identify the most relevant area(s) and discuss how they could be integrated into the new teachers' induction programme. The modules and activities of the induction programme cover these five areas, allowing mentors to guide and support new teachers in the multiple teaching tasks.

3 RESULTS

The LOOP methodology encompasses four building blocks characterized by research-oriented activities that are being implemented with participatory and continuous involvement of the educational professionals in all steps of this journey, as shown in Fig.2:

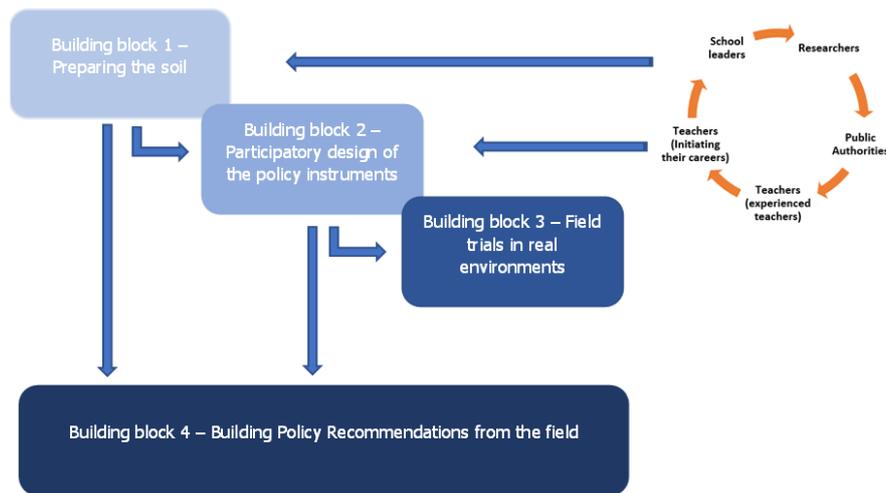


Figure 2 – LOOP methodological approach.

This article is mostly focused on building blocks 1 and 2, which were finalized and partially on building block 4, which is transversal to all periods of implementation of the project. For each one of these blocks, we will present the methodology followed to produce the results and achieve the goals defined by the consortium.

3.1 Building Block 1 – Preparing the soil

In this initial phase, the consortium proceeded with an in-depth analysis of the current state-of-the-art on tools and programmes that enable teacher’s professional development, with a focus on mentoring and induction programmes addressing peer learning. This building block was completed in 6 steps and 12 months, as presented in Fig. 3:

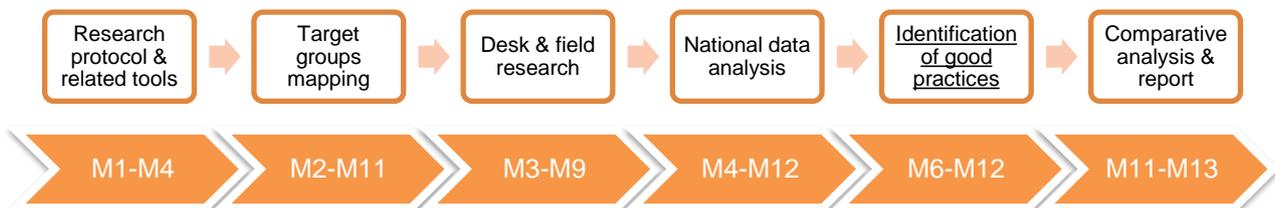


Figure 3 – The 6 steps of the building block 1.

The first building block started with the definition of the methodology and supports to be used by the consortium to collect, gather and analyse relevant data, at the national and European levels, to support the development of the LOOP approach and programmes. Along with this, each organization started to map organisations and institutes that could be strategic to support the communication with and the involvement of the project’s main target groups, in its activities. The collection of data, combined desk research with fieldwork from which resulted: the identification and analysis of 110 documents among legislations, recommendations, studies and articles to deep partners’ knowledge related to teachers’ induction programmes; the collection of 776 questionnaires from beginning teachers, experienced teachers, and school directors to better understand their experience, perception and opinions towards the policy and (formal and non-formal) practices to support the transition of beginning teachers to the school context and teaching profession; the promotion of 56 interviews also with beginning teachers, experienced teachers, and school directors to support the identification of good practices and identify the characteristics partners should consider to design the programmes; preparation and development of 6 focus groups in partner countries, involving 64 teachers to present and discuss the main results collected at the national level and identify topics to be integrated in the LOOP programmes. Four main documents resulted from this building block, as can be seen in Fig. 4:

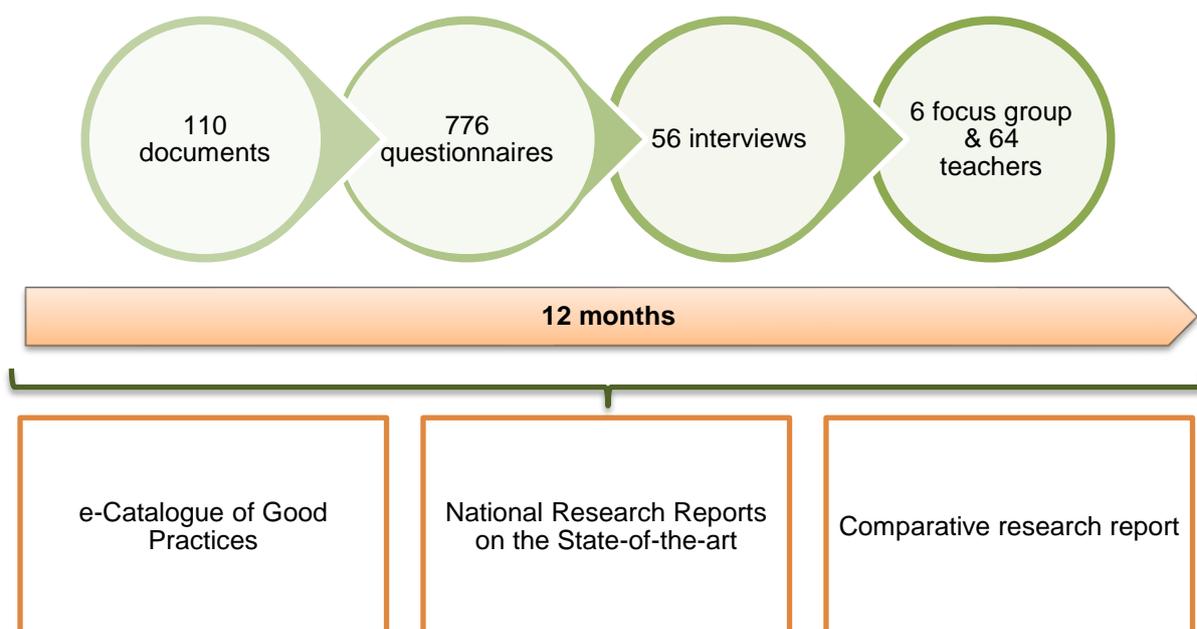


Figure 4 – The main outcomes of the building block 1 – Preparing the soil.

3.1.1 e-Catalogue of Good Practices

This e-catalogue is one of the outcomes that can be used to guide and support schools and principals to get inspired and prepare the school setting for the integration and promotion of the new teachers' induction program or initiatives. This catalogue is available online (here), in English and presents 22 practices that are being implemented in different European countries.

3.1.2 National research reports on the state-of-the-art

Six national research reports with a similar structure were produced as a result of the research phase. In these reports is possible to understand the national political framework related to the initial and continuous professional development of teachers, to disclose the challenges and trends the national educational systems are facing these days and to identify the needs, motivations and expectations of educational professionals of the countries. The reports are available in English and for each one of the countries: Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Slovenia and Croatia.

3.1.3 Comparative Research Report

This global report, *Framework for the design of innovative peer-induction programmes* presents a critical comparative analysis of the findings of the national reports and identifies the common aspects, learning gaps and recommendations for the policy instruments design in building block 2.

3.2 Building block 2 – Participatory design of the policy instruments

The national data collected during building block 1 allowed us to build the foundations for the design and development of the LOOP **mentors' capacity training course** and **teachers' induction programme based on mentoring**, to which this 2nd block reports to. For 11 months, from December/2021 and September/2022m the consortium defined a consolidated version of these two programmes, following a 6-step process, presented in Fig.5:

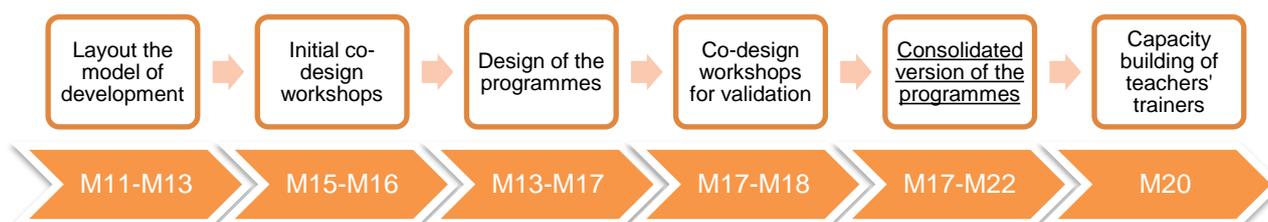


Figure 5 – The 6 steps of the building block 2.

By defining the model for the development of the programmes, the consortium had the opportunity to integrate the input from literature and educational professionals and experts, in the process of development and the programmes themselves. This model worked as a guide, from which partners drafted a structure of the programmes, presented and discussed with 143 educational professionals in 13 initial co-design workshops promoted in the six countries. Following these sections, partners proceeded with the construction of the programmes, which were validated by 145 teachers in 12 co-design sessions. A consolidated version, ready for testing, was released by the consortium, following the comments and suggestions made by professionals in these last sessions. Jointly with the two programmes, the consortium prepared a training course to prepare teachers' trainers from the six countries to implement the mentors' capacity training course at the national level. The training took place in Slovenia in September/2022 and involved 27 teachers' trainers. A summary of the outcomes of this building block is presented in Fig. 6.:

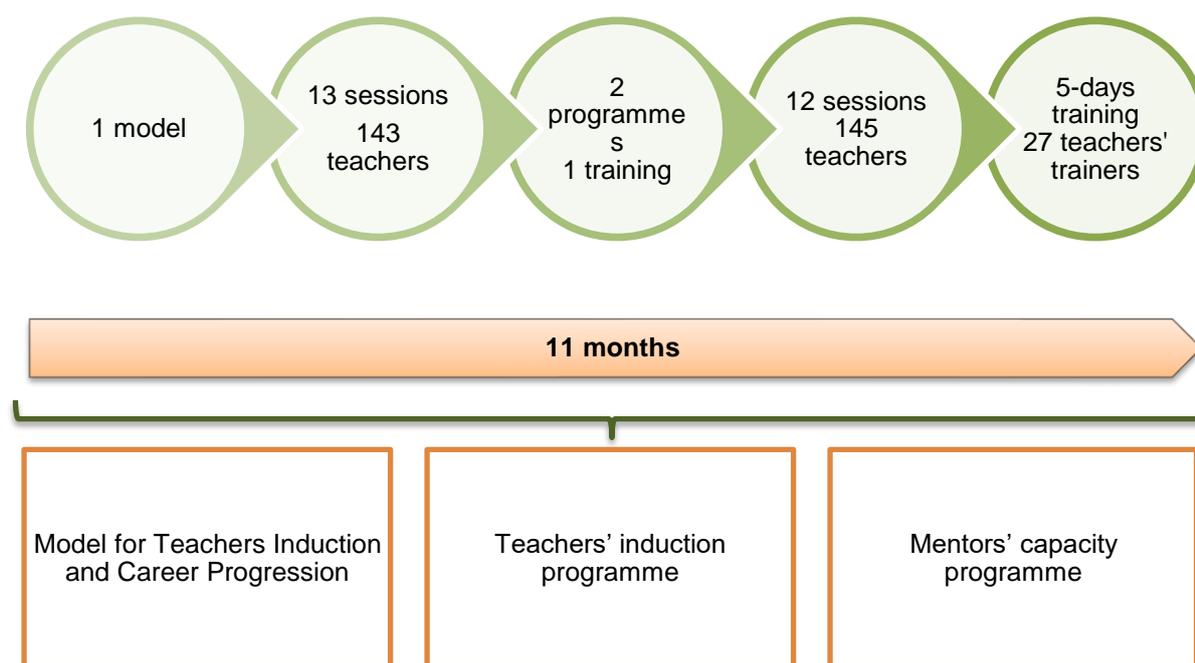


Figure 6 – The main outcomes of the building block 2 - Participatory design of the policy instruments.

From the capacity building of teachers' trainers, the consortium started defining the strategy for the testing of the programme in a real context (building block 3).

3.2.1 Model for teachers' induction and career progression

The model underlines the concepts, structure, objectives and features that the two policy instruments comply with and as a result of the research performed. A brief characterization of the two programmes is done and the basic principles of its development are shared. By exploring this document, the reader will have a deeper understanding of the lessons learned by the research and how they were considered in the development of the programs. The model is available in English [here](#).

3.2.2 Teachers' induction programme

A formal teachers' induction programme was designed, based on mentoring activities and included tools and resources to support new teachers initiating their careers. The programme comprises 14 modules organised in four main areas: The framework, Me in the role of the teacher, Me and my students and The world outside the classroom. The programmes cover de five dimensions presented in the methodology, covering multiple activities of the teaching profession. The programme is available in English ([here](#)) and in the national languages of the consortium (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Slovenian and Croatian). A brochure presenting the programme is also available [here](#).

3.2.3 Mentors' capacity programme

A formal training mentors' programme was also structured for experienced teachers allowing them to embrace a new career option. It is a 35-hour training course, organized into 3 modules: 1-Mentoring in teachers' induction programmes; 2-Mentors' professional identity and 3- LOOP teachers' induction programme. The training course included a set of activities and resources to prepare experienced teachers to be mentors of new teachers in the context of the LOOP induction programme. The programme is available in English (here) and in the national languages of the consortium (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Slovenian and Croatian). A brochure presenting the programme is also available here.

3.3 Building block 3 – Field trials in real environments

This block is related to the implementation of the programmes in the countries of the consortium, and it will start with the implementation of the **mentors' capacity training course** with support from ministries/regional authorities, universities and other organisations providing services for the continuous professional development of teachers. Following this initial training, the **LOOP teachers' induction programme** will be tested in the schools of the partnership, with the support from ministries and regional authorities, school directors and teachers, following a strategy of monitoring to collect evidence on the quality, adequacy and impact of the programme in the induction of new teachers. The process and main results from this building block will be presented in an article to be published in the first semester of 2024.

3.4 Building block 4 – Building Policy Recommendations from the field

As a policy experimental project aiming at contributing to the (re)definition of policies and practices concerning teachers' professional development and career management, the LOOP project integrates this block in which the findings, conclusions and lessons learned from the fieldwork are implemented in the three building blocks presented above. Regular policy briefs mirroring the progress and the knowledge building through the experimentation in the previous block are being produced or are planned, and will be strategic to further discuss the strategy for the integration of the programmes in the national policy frameworks and practices of the countries or the partnership and explore the potential of transfer the programmes to other countries. As such, this block started in October/2021 (M9), and has been taking place ever since and until September/2022 (M20) the following steps were done (Fig. 7.):

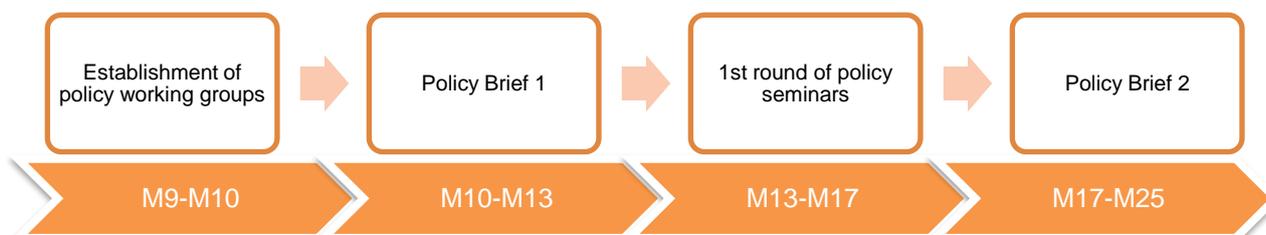


Figure 7 – The first 4 steps of the building block 4.

This block started with the definition of a working group, gathering representatives from policy authorities from the six countries of the consortium. The role of this working group is to jointly define the methodology for the collection of data to draft policy recommendations, support the identification and organisation of information for policy recommendations and validate the final versions of the policy briefs. During the first 19 months of the project, two policy briefs were prepared: one is connected with building block 1 - LOOP Policy Brief on current landscapes of education systems – and the second one with building block 2 - Model for Teachers' Induction and Career Progression. Five seminars involving 238 policymakers, school directors, teachers, teachers' trainers and researchers were promoted in five of the six countries. In this event, partners presented and discussed the 1st policy, incorporating the main inputs provided by participants in the final version of the policy brief. A second round of seminars will be promoted to present and discuss the 2nd policy brief.

In the end, the result from this block will be the final white paper with recommendations for policy action for more accurate approaches to teachers' induction programmes, based on the conclusions of the fieldwork. This document will be important to assure the sustainability of the project's results and to

support partners in the upscaling, exploitation and mainstreaming of LOOP policy measures at different levels to be explored and will be presented in an article to be published in the first semester of 2024.

The main outcomes of this building block are identified in Fig. 8.

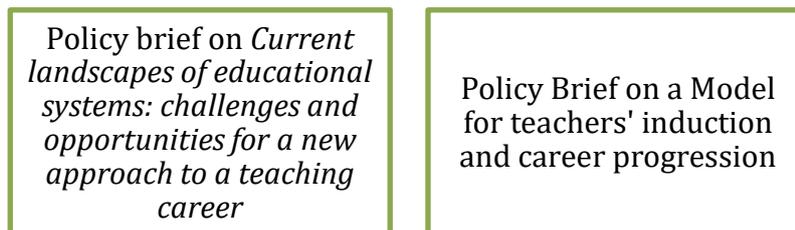


Figure 8 - The main outcomes of the building block 4.

3.4.1 *Current landscapes of educational systems: challenges and opportunities for a new approach to a teaching career*

This first policy brief is connected with the research phase and includes an analysis of the current landscapes in the consortium countries; a study of options and their potential for education systems and target groups, focusing on three dimensions – teachers’ careers, induction programmes and mentors’ training programmes; a set of recommendations that can have a positive impact, related to the previous dimensions. The policy brief is available in English (here) and in the national languages of the consortium (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Slovenian and Croatian). A brochure presenting the programme is also available here.

3.4.2 *Model for teachers' induction and career progression*

This Policy Brief presents an Induction and Progression Model for the Teacher's Career, which aims to be a reference for the constitution and improvement of induction and mentoring programmes already existing in Europe. The model presents two essential training instruments to support the induction of beginning teachers and their mentors, namely in the scientific, didactic-pedagogical, administrative/bureaucratic, socio-cultural and emotional dimensions. This model results from the experience acquired during the development of the two programmes (building block 2). The policy brief is available in English (here) and in the national languages of the consortium (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Slovenian and Croatian). A brochure presenting the programme is also available here.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The project’s design and methodology rely on a participatory approach that foresees the mobilization and engagement of stakeholders in multiple activities and events of co-design and testing of the programmes and of identification of policy measures to improve teachers’ career paths. From the results of the initial activities and events, partners started designing the LOOP programmes ensuring the:

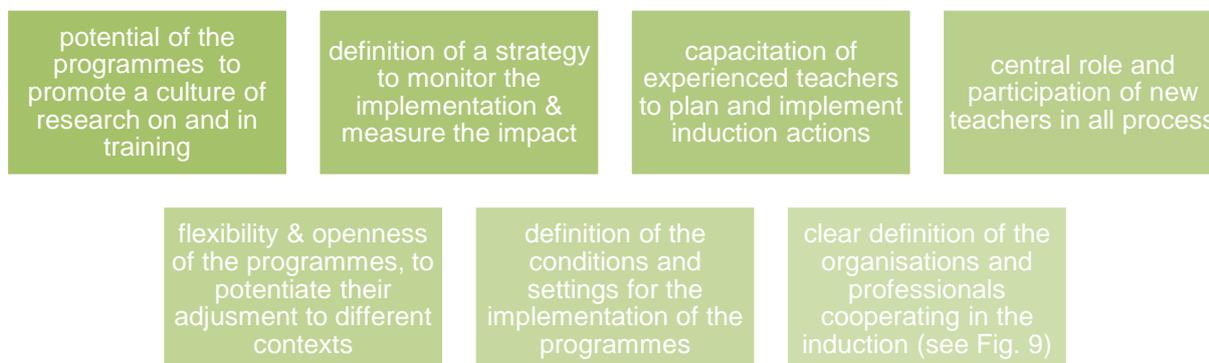


Figure 9 – Characteristics of the programmes, identified as being relevant by the target groups.

As can be seen in Fig. 9., this major involvement of target groups is critical to designing programmes matching teachers’ needs and expectations, with the flexibility to be adjusted to the national frameworks of the countries of the consortium. A set of recommendations is also being drafted to potentiate and increase the opportunities for integrating the programme into the regional/national policies and

frameworks. A resume of the activities and events promoted in the scope of the project and involving participants external to the consortium is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Resume of the activities and events promoted and of the number of external participants.

<i>Activities and events</i>	<i>Target groups</i>	<i>Editions</i>	<i>Nr. of participants</i>
Questionnaires for the research	New and experienced teachers and school directors	-	776
Interviews for the research	New and experienced teachers and school directors	-	56
Focus Groups for fine-tuning the national research reports	New and experienced teachers	6	64
Initial co-design workshops	New and experienced teachers, school directors and psychologists	13	143
Co-design workshop	New and experienced teachers, school directors and psychologists	12	145
Staff capacity building training course on the policy instruments	Teachers' trainers	1	27
Policy seminar on the current landscapes of education systems	New and experienced teachers, school directors, teachers' trainers, policy-makers, researchers	1	238
Teachers' world café	New and experienced teachers from partner countries	2	10
Policy Matching events	Partners and policymakers	2	11
TOTAL		37	1 470

The number of external participants in these activities and events reveals the major interest the project is generating in its main target groups. In the perception of directors and teachers, the LOOP programmes and approach allow them to define concerted policies and strategies to successfully overcome the European challenges related to school education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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