

LOOP Policy Brief on the field trials: the impact of a Teachers' Induction Programme and a Mentors' Capacity Programme on the teaching profession

WP4 – BUILDING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE FIELD ACTIVITIES
DELIVERABLE 4.3 – POLICY BRIEF 3

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**EMPOWERING TEACHERS' PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL
AND SOCIAL CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
INNOVATIVE PEER – INDUCTION PROGRAMMES**

1. INTRODUCTION

The LOOP Project – Empowering Teachers' Personal, Professional, and Social Continuous Development through Innovative Peer-Induction Programmes aims to implement a systemic action that ensures the induction of teachers at the beginning of their professional activity, supported by mentorship, seeking political legitimacy, particularly through the definition of a legal framework suitable for the national contexts of the countries within the LOOP consortium (Portugal, Spain, Croatia, Slovenia, Greece and Italy).

The work carried out as part of the project over the past two years has led to the publication of two Policy Briefs, culminating now in the preparation of this Policy Report 3: On field trials - the impact of a teacher's induction programme and a mentors' capacity programme on the teaching profession. This report is a result of Work Package (WP) number four "Developing policy recommendations from field activities" of the LOOP project.

The first report, related to the current panorama of educational systems: challenges and opportunities for a new approach to the teaching profession, stems from research carried out in different national contexts taking into account the implementation of formal teacher induction programmes, informal induction practices, as well as mentors' capacity programmes.

The second report, entitled *New Political Instruments - A Model of Teacher Induction and Career Progression*¹, which also emerged as a result of the LOOP project, addresses induction as a multidimensional process with the goal of supporting teachers through mentoring, under the responsibility of certified mentors. The model provides a tool to support new teachers in adapting to the workplace culture, ensuring the appreciation of their profession, the improvement of their well-being and motivation, and also offering a perspective on the functions and roles of the different actors involved in this process, with a particular focus on the development of mentors' competencies for these teachers.

Policy Report 3, targeting the same audience as the two previous reports, aims to make known the induction programme and the mentors' capacity programme's impact on the teaching profession. It highlights the challenges faced during their implementation, presents the main conclusions drawn from this experience (namely regarding the changes in career opportunities, the motivation of experienced teachers and school principals, and the professional development and motivation of beginning teachers), and provides recommendations that are considered to be of great relevance for decision-making in the context of the future definition and implementation of these programmes.

For a better understanding of how the LOOP project implementation unfolded, it was considered relevant to structure the information at three levels: macro, meso and micro.

The macro level - **IMPLEMENTATION MEANING** – aims, above all, to standardize the concepts of induction and mentoring (already presented in Policy Briefs 1 and 2). In this document, it is considered crucial to proceed with this **conceptual delimitation**, as it will support the subsequent **drafting of regulations**.

¹ LOOP Induction Programme and Mentors' Capacity Programme.

The meso level - **IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXTS** - starts from the definition of concepts and the drafting of regulations and focuses on school activities, resulting in the development of an **action plan** and a **strategy for its implementation**. This level includes the creation of a working group, presenting induction to the community, defining criteria for the selection of mentors and mentees, and the appropriate mentor profile.

It also clarifies the role of school leadership and entities associated with training - as responsible management structures for defining, organizing, and providing the necessary resources for the success of induction programmes for mentees² as well as for mentors' capacity programmes. The aim is to ensure, on the one hand, that the plan can contribute to the development and improvement of the quality of services provided by schools and, on the other hand, that teachers are supported, trained and integrated into the school culture. Therefore, it is considered essential to define some guidelines to support the structuring, implementation, and monitoring of induction programmes supported by mentoring, as well as mentors' capacity programmes (as mechanisms for integration and induction into the profession), in order to provide teachers with the opportunity to access these programmes and ensure the provision of resources and activities that promote the development of mentors and mentees in the various dimensions of their professional activities.

The micro level - **PROFESSIONALS** - focuses on the professional development and integration of teachers, both those who will benefit from the mentor training process and those who will be integrated into the teaching profession. It validates the profile of skills and knowledge that is intended to be enhanced through a careful and coordinated analysis of the induction programmes (activities and strategies). This ensures that, through a multilevel approach, these programmes are aligned with the needs, potential and interests of mentees, facilitating their integration into the educational community, contributing to make the teaching profession more attractive and teachers better prepared to respond to current challenges.

Considering the three aforementioned levels of analysis that structure this document, the recommendations included in it are particularly important since they result from the experience gained through the creation and implementation of LOOP project and, therefore, are very relevant and useful in the definition of future actions.

² New teachers at the beginning of their professional activity or facing a new professional challenge.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this report are aligned with those of the LOOP project, as they aim to develop the implementation of formal teacher induction programmes and informal practices, as well as mentors' capacity programmes. These programmes are significant for both facilitating access to the teaching profession and maintaining the quality of its practice. They are also necessary to address gaps in initial teacher education and improve the relationship between theory and practice, offering new learning opportunities. In this context, this report specifically aims to:

- Contribute to a comprehensive teacher profession policy at all stages of the career.
- Strengthen and innovate national offerings for teachers' professional development.
- Promote induction and mentoring programmes as high-impact professional development activities.
- Disseminate the conclusions resulting from the implementation of programmes within the LOOP project.
- Enhance career pathways and opportunities in education by implementing and improving induction processes through mentoring activities to support beginning teachers.
- Expand career progression options for experienced teachers by providing access to a formal mentors' capacity programme.
- Integrate the principles of peer learning and evidence-based training into teachers' professional development programmes, contributing to knowledge management and fostering intergenerational learning in schools.
- Improve the quality of educational services provided by schools.
- Provide valuable recommendations for the implementation of future actions based on the experience gained from the programmes' implementation.

3. CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE LOOP PROJECT ACTION

The LOOP project is based on the conception of a teacher induction and career progression model, serving as a reference for the implementation of mentor-based induction programmes. These programmes, designed to be carried out within schools, are important training tools to support beginning teachers and their mentors, contributing to their professional development in scientific, pedagogical, administrative, bureaucratic, sociocultural, and emotional dimensions. The duration, participants and their respective responsibilities are also defined within this model.

It is important to note that the LOOP project was developed in three phases, each one with different yet complementary objectives, determined by a quasi-experimental methodology. The project aimed to test the hypotheses based on the following action axes and their respective premises:

HYP.1 - The formal training of the mentor's capacity programmes implemented to support experienced teachers facilitates the deployment of effective and formal teachers' induction programmes at the school level.

HYP.2 - The opportunity for experienced teachers to diversify their career options and function as mentors of their peers' increases teaching staff motivation and contributes to retaining them in the system.

HYP.3 - Peer-developed teachers induction programmes based on mentoring activities support the professional development of teachers initiating their careers and contribute to retaining younger teachers in the system.

HYP.4 - Formal induction programmes applied at the school level contribute to the social and cultural inclusion and development of younger teachers.

HYP.5 - Structured mentoring programmes adapted to the context increase the interest and success of their participants.

HYP.6 - The training of mentors facilitates the implementation of teachers' induction programmes.

HYP.7 - Lack of resources and guidance are the reasons for not implementing induction programmes in schools.

The phases of the project implementation are briefly described below and their description intends to contextualize the conclusions and recommendations presented, which constitute the primary objective of this report.

► 1ST PHASE: SOIL PREPARATION

The activity of the LOOP project began with an analysis of the current situation of teacher induction processes in the different countries of the consortium. Research was conducted on existing mentors' capacity programmes and/or best practices, both formal and informal, as well as teacher induction programmes supported by mentoring activities. In the same way, policy instruments that recognize these programmes, articles, and studies were analysed through research, interviews, and focus groups, revealing the need to:

- Review the teaching profession, with a clear focus on its appreciation, increasing its attractiveness at different career stages by ensuring:
 - A greater recognition of pedagogical roles/positions, including mentoring, with benefits such as career progression.
 - Effective support for teachers at the beginning of their professional careers through the implementation of a structured induction programme, supported by experienced peers who can integrate these new roles with their teaching responsibilities.

- Improve supervision practices, especially through the implementation of induction, by furthering their professional development through:
 - Providing induction practices not only to beginning teachers but also to teachers in mobility and/or temporary contracts.
 - Changing the evaluative perspective of induction programmes to make them more formative.
 - Emphasizing mentoring offered by experienced teachers from the same school or disciplinary group, trained to act as mentors and capable of adopting a collaborative and constructive approach.
 - Creating new career opportunities for experienced teachers, allowing them to take on the role of being peer mentors thus contributing to the improvement of educational systems.
 - Enhancing the role of mentors through their certification and professional recognition of this status.
 - Developing a mentors' capacity programme focused on planning and implementing actions that effectively support teachers in their professional immersion.
 - Establishing an impact evaluation system for mentors' capacity programmes in teachers' integration.

▶ **2ND PHASE: COLLABORATIVE DESIGN OF THE MAIN INSTRUMENTS**

This phase concerns the development of teacher induction and mentors' capacity programmes, which include the provision of a wide range of activities and resources. These programmes were designed to address gaps identified in the existing programmes within the countries that are part of the LOOP consortium, ensuring that they fulfil the needs mentioned by beginning teachers, teachers with over 20 years of experience and school leaders.

Therefore, a co-design process for the programmes was implemented in all countries involved in the LOOP project, resulting in two programmes: one for teacher induction and the other for mentor training.

Policy Report 2 provides a detailed description of these two programmes within the scope of the LOOP project. However, due to their importance in the context of this report, it was considered relevant to summarize the essential aspects that characterize each of them, as follows.

▪ **LOOP INDUCTION PROGRAMME FOR TEACHERS**

This programme is divided into 14 modules, covering the pedagogical, disciplinary, bureaucratic, administrative, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of the teaching profession and includes a set of activities aimed at supporting beginning teachers through mentoring. This programme is flexible and adaptable, so as to be suitable for new needs of specific contexts and mentees, and has an expected duration of six months, that can be extended, if necessary.

This programme's objectives are as follows:

- Provide an induction opportunity for beginning teachers,
- Offer a high-quality induction programme,
- Reduce the anxiety experienced by teachers,
- Empower teachers with the necessary knowledge to perform their roles effectively, engage positively with their peers and respond to the needs of the organization and its context,
- Facilitate an integrated transition from initial training to active professional life and an adequate integration into the school team,

- Increase teachers' motivation for carrying out their duties and, consequently, enhance retention rates in the profession.

▪ **MENTORS' CAPACITY PROGRAMME**

This programme consists of three sequential, interconnected, complementary, and distinct blocks distinguished by their theoretical content. It has a minimum duration of 35 hours and is primarily delivered in a face-to-face format, targeting experienced teachers and school leaders.

This programme's objectives are as follows:

- Understand the duties, responsibilities, and expectations associated with the respective role.
- Identify priorities, actions, and relevant competencies for fulfilling the mentor's role.
- Develop norms and protocols to guide mentoring actions.
- Develop skills in the various dimensions of the teaching profession, such as: scientific/pedagogical, technical/normative, interpersonal and ethical/social.
- Develop skills to support interventions in the context of professional performance.

▶ **3RD PHASE: VALIDATION THROUGH FIELD TRIALS IN REAL ENVIRONMENTS**

The instruments previously developed were used in this phase to test and validate the hypotheses for the formulation of new policy measures supporting teachers' professional development. The Teachers' Induction Programme and the Mentors' Capacity Programme reflect the concepts, structure, objectives, and premises on which the LOOP project's purpose is based. Both programmes were implemented in all consortium countries, according to the following strategy and operational criteria:

▪ **STAGES AND IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES**

- Selection and invitation phase: selection of schools, mentors, and mentees; constitution of control and experimental groups.
- Information and training phase: training for experimental group's mentors, workshops for experimental group's mentees and information sessions for mentors and mentees of the control group.
- Monitoring phase: in-person and remote monitoring sessions for both groups, with a preference for the experimental group.

▪ **SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS**

- Schools were invited by the National Partners to join the LOOP network to participate in this project.
- At the same time, invitations were sent to schools with which national partners have connections and information sessions were organized with their principals.

▪ **CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATION OF MENTEE TEACHERS** (obligatory to meet **one** of the following selection criteria):

- Have up to 8 years of service in education.
- Have up to 8 years of service in the disciplinary group.
- Have up to 8 years of service in the education cycle.
- Have not held a teaching position for at least 10 years.

▪ **CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATION OF MENTOR TEACHERS** (obligatory to meet **one** of the following selection criteria):

- Have several years of experience in teaching within the school where they are currently working.
- Be a teacher belonging to the teaching career.
- Demonstrate professional commitment.
- Be recognized by their peers as a responsible and competent professional.

▪ **CRITERIA FOR THE COMPOSITION OF CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS**

The experimental group and the control group comprised schools with similar characteristics, taking into account the following two factors: education level (early childhood, primary and secondary) and location (urban and rural areas). Regarding the criteria used to constitute the control and experimental groups, it is important to highlight that during the implementation phase, it was observed that:

- The difference between the two groups was that experienced teachers in the experimental group received training to take on the role of mentors, while experienced teachers in the control group were only informed about both programmes.
- Beginning teachers in the experimental group had access to a workshop while those in the control group participated in an information session.
- The experimental group received systematic support during the field trials while the control group had no support at all.
- The members of the control group implemented the Teacher Induction Programme without any support from the partners, relying only on the materials provided during the information sessions.
- Mentor/mentee pairs were formed by respecting the following premises, whenever possible:
 - One experienced teacher (mentor) corresponded to one or two mentees.
 - Technological resources were provided whenever the mentor and mentees were from different schools.
 - Mentors and mentees were from the same scientific area, whenever possible.

▪ **MONITORING AND SUPPORT**

The implementation of the LOOP project took place over several³ months, and included meetings with school administrators, mentor training, information sessions for mentees and the induction programme implementation. Monitoring⁴ and support were provided through a combination of remote⁵ and in-person meetings involving mentors, mentees and school principals. These meetings aimed to clarify doubts, analyse the programme, support the mentor-mentee relationship, monitor the programme implementation, define activities and ensure their alignment with the needs and expectations of mentors and mentees, as well as with the school contexts.

³ 6 months in Greece, Spain, 8 months in Portugal.

⁴ In Italy, the implementation showcased a distinct approach, diverging from the practices observed in other participating nations. This divergence primarily stemmed from Italy's unique position as the sole country in the partnership to have formally established an induction programme for novice educators, which fundamentally relies on a mentoring framework. Given this pivotal context, the Italian team strategically directed the implementation of the Mentoring Capacitation Programme (MCP) towards experienced teachers, aligning it with the existing induction course.

⁵ In Croatia, teachers (mentors and mentees) from the different group had access an online space to work in collaboration in different activities.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1. FOREWORD

The initial years of teaching are a critical period for the professionalization of teachers, which should be viewed as a gradual process of personal and professional growth, that includes initial training, induction and continuous professional development. The transition of newly qualified teachers into professional life is seen as crucial in addressing the issue of early career abandonment. Therefore, all induction actions should provide beginning teachers with continuous personal, social and professional support to face the “shock of school reality”.

The implementation of a teacher induction programme supported by mentoring requires a meticulous approach at various levels of action. Thus, the conclusions, as well as the recommendations, are organized according to this strategy into **macro, meso, and micro** levels. These three levels assume different perspectives of action and, of course, distinct recipients and responsibilities, although they are guided by the common goal of implementing or renewing teacher induction.

4.2. MAIN CONCLUSIONS

► MACRO LEVEL: MEANING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION

- The implementation of the LOOP project, through the adoption of teachers’ induction programmes and mentors’ capacity programmes, introduced a new role that was highly appreciated by mentors and should, therefore, be considered as a **new career opportunity**⁶, as mentioned in Policy Brief 2 and National Reports. Consequently, it is essential to engage in a concerted policy action to ensure the establishment of a solid regulatory framework and the definition of a set of mechanisms that enable its implementation, based on an atmosphere of cooperation among different levels of decision-making, professional teacher organizations, universities, training centres, researchers and national education councils.
- The **concepts of mentoring and induction** were discussed among the different countries in the partnership and it was noticed that there are regulatory frameworks with distinct conceptual approaches. As a result, a common definition had to be agreed upon. Here is a brief reference to the concepts adopted in the LOOP Project:
 - **Induction** is a planned and systematic process focused on the collaborative and formative dimensions that reflect the needs of each context and each teacher. It supports professional development and training in various dimensions of teaching professionalism, including the scientific, pedagogical, disciplinary, bureaucratic, administrative, emotional, social and cultural aspects. This occurs during a crucial phase of (re)integration into a school after completing initial training. The recipients, in general, have the following characteristics: i) short teaching experience, ii) change of school, iii) change of the education level or recruitment group (special education, vocational training, etc.), iv) have not been teaching for over 10 years, v) are in the probationary period, or vi) are offering temporary services⁷.
 - **Mentoring** is considered a support activity for induction in which confidentiality, collaboration, professional, social, cultural, and emotional support are ensured, based on a mutual learning process between a formally recognized mentor and the respective mentee(s). The mentoring model on which the LOOP project is based not only implies support for the mentees but also contributes to the

⁶ Hyp.2 of LOOP Project.

⁷ In Portugal, this process can be left to the responsibility of school management.

professional development of the entire educational community. Mentoring aims to promote a flexible and efficient transition for teachers at the beginning of their professional activity.

- It was necessary to define a **mentor's profile** (as already recommended in Policy Brief 2), safeguarding, in particular:
 - Teaching experience, recognizing that 10 or 20 years of activity imply accumulated knowledge in various dimensions of teaching activity.
 - Knowledge acquired from performing other relevant roles, such as participation in innovative projects and guiding internships.
 - Specific training, particularly participation in the mentors' capacity programme.
 - Past performance evaluations and motivation to perform the role.
 - The relationship with "training schools⁸" and the expression of interest in participating.
 - The level of development of some particular skills, related to social and communication competencies.
- To define the purposes of this project, it was important to establish **real and concrete objectives** to:
 - Contribute to the creation of educational policies that cover all phases of the teaching career.
 - Promote peer learning processes as an effective strategy to reduce early career abandonment, increase teachers' motivation and improve their professional skills.
 - Enhance support for teachers by implementing, improving, and innovating induction processes at the beginning of their professional activity through mentoring.
 - Increase career options by providing mentoring training to experienced teachers and recognizing their role as mentors.
- In the implementation of induction programmes, the **participation of various stakeholders** (educational authorities, school administrations, middle leadership structures, and other teachers, training entities, mentors, and mentees) was considered very important.

Therefore, as mentioned in Policy Brief 2:

- The role of **educational authorities** is crucial in terms of promoting actions to support the implementation of these programmes, adopting measures, defining responsibilities, providing resources, facilitating access to induction programmes and giving authority for adapting them to the needs of each context and to the teachers involved.
- **School principals** should engage in induction programmes, since they are responsible for ensuring the necessary conditions for the implementation, local adaptation and monitoring of induction programmes. Moreover, they contribute to define the criteria for the selection and appointment of mentors and mentees and they involve the school community in supporting mentor training.
- **Middle leadership structures** and other teachers contribute to maintaining an adequate environment for the integration of mentees and creating a network of collaboration with various stakeholders, promoting the success of induction programmes as well as the teachers involved in them.
- **Training entities**, including education institutes, play a very important role in recognizing the importance of induction programmes and their certification. They also facilitate awareness-raising activities for mentors and mentees, providing conceptual clarification and addressing relational,

⁸ Schools with collaborative training practices that will be established and can play a key role in mentor training.

organizational, training-related, contextual aspects and issues related to the monitoring of programme implementation, certification and impact on career progression or entry into the teaching profession.

- **Mentors and mentees** should develop induction programmes in a reflective and collaborative context, taking effective action in response to potential risks and challenges of each specific context.

► MESO LEVEL: IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXTS

- The implementation of the LOOP project has contributed significantly to **improving the quality of services provided by schools**. A well-defined action plan, supported by induction (provided by qualified mentors) and peer collaboration, has allowed for the effective integration and support of beginning teachers, becoming an opportunity for the development of their community.
- It is important that the resources for implementing these actions include the **creation of a technical unit (centralized and/or decentralized)** consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Education, training entities, and schools. This unit should be responsible for the implementation of induction programmes based on mentoring and it represents a great challenge, as it requires the consistent and timely development of technical expertise of all people involved.
- The Working Group considered it very important to establish a **clear definition of certain premises** that should structure the implementation plan of the programmes, including:
 - **The mentor's profile:** the selection of these teachers was based on a set of characteristics that proved to be important for the success of programme implementation. These characteristics were often mentioned by mentees and include the mastery of didactic-pedagogical strategies, professional experience, social and communication skills and interest.
 - The definition of the **matching criteria between mentors and mentees** does not follow strict criteria as it was found that combining various criteria can result in a better match. It is also important to consider that mentor-mentee relationships evolve and mentors are professionals who have high levels of relational competence, capable of adapting their action to different profiles. Therefore, throughout the implementation of the LOOP project, this premise was recorded as having a low level of impact.

Thus, it was concluded that:

- **It was not consensual among participants that mentors and mentees must belong to the same disciplinary or related area.** Opinions varied, with some of them considering that having mentors and mentees from different disciplinary or related areas had a positive impact, since this diversity allowed a broader exchange of knowledge and fostered interdisciplinary collaboration, leading to the emergence of new initiatives and activities.
- **Mentors and mentees do not have to belong to the same school.** On one hand, it was considered that this condition facilitated the development of activities and the implementation of induction. On the other hand, it was found that when mentors and mentees belonged to different schools it encouraged the creation of new ideas and perspectives, providing mentees with a more secure and private situation. Additionally, in situations where mentees were undergoing evaluation, the fact that they belonged to different schools helped to avoid negative assessments, conditionings and impacts that could have interfered with the evaluation process.
- It was important to ensure that the mentor-mentee match could **meet the objectives of local educational development**, envisioning induction supported by mentorship in a collective rather

than individual benefit logic. This approach allowed the implementation to have an impact on the development of broader contexts and working cultures within schools.

- The mentor-mentee match can consider the criterion that the mentor demonstrates a high **level of competency development** in a specific area that is considered important to enhance in as many mentees as possible.
- Experienced teachers who had the opportunity to **attend the mentors' capacity programme**⁹ reveal that felt better prepared to perform this function, as they had the opportunity to know, in detail, their duties and rights as mentors, as well as a comprehensive view of the entire induction programme.
- It was essential for the induction and mentors' capacity programmes to be **adapted to the educational contexts of implementation**¹⁰, taking into account their unique characteristics and effectively addressing the needs of each educational organization.
- The implementation of these programmes extended beyond the individual professional development of the teachers involved, as it also **fostered the development of the organization**¹¹. Mentors, with their highly-developed competency profile and recognized merit among their peers, played a significant role in positively impacting the creation of strong teaching cultures among teachers. This not only enhanced the mentors' individual professional growth but also had a positive influence on the overall development of each school. In addition, it was found that the implementation of this project allowed the creation of new training opportunities, since the training needs were not limited to just one or two teachers in each school but was extended to a larger number of educators.
- It was crucial for school management bodies, as well as their middle leadership structures, to recognize the value of the programmes and, thus, to promote the involvement of participants and provide them with the favourable space and time conditions to carry out the planned activities¹².
- To support the implementation of these programmes and ensure that their activities were carried out with the highest quality, it was essential to establish **collaboration protocols between schools, training centres, and higher education institutes** which created the necessary synergies for the success of these programmes¹³.
- The implementation of these programmes has also resulted in the induction processes strengthening the schools' **capacity to contribute more effectively to the improvement of education and the academic success of their students**. This was achieved by promoting interaction, problem-solving skills and the professional development of teachers¹⁴.
- Throughout the LOOP project's implementation, a **plan for monitoring and following up the induction process** was developed. This plan proved to be essential for clarifying doubts among various participants and overcoming constraints that emerged during the process. Additionally, it became a valuable space for sharing and collaboration among teachers from different schools, with the exchange of procedures and materials. For example, one of the involved schools created a *Handbook Welcome* for new teachers, which other schools found very valuable and adopted, adapting it to their specific educational context¹⁵.

⁹ Hyp.1 and Hyp.6 of LOOP Project.

¹⁰ Hyp.5 of LOOP Project.

¹¹ Hyp.3 and Hyp.4 of LOOP Project.

¹² Hyp.7 of LOOP Project.

¹³ Hyp.7 of LOOP Project.

¹⁴ Hyp.3 and Hyp.4 of LOOP Project.

¹⁵ Hyp.7 of LOOP Project.

► MICRO LEVEL: PROFESSIONALS

- It is essential to **promote teachers' participation in induction programmes** since their implementation depends on it. One of the constraints experienced during the project implementation was the difficulty in finding schools and teachers interested in joining the project. This led to the need to redefine and simplify the previously formulated selection criteria and to contact schools to emphasize the importance of their participation.
- During the implementation of induction programmes, it was observed that **having a common working time between mentors and mentees** facilitated the process. In cases where this need was not initially considered, alternative solutions such as the use of distance interaction tools and after-hours meetings had to be arranged. However, these additional meetings could impose a burden on participants and should be avoided.
- It was crucial during the sessions to **introduce the group of mentors to the mentees**, providing time for their presentation (including sharing information about their academic and professional background) and an interactive moment to facilitate the establishment of an empathic relationship between them. In fact, this project's experience demonstrated that the mentee's lack of knowledge about the mentor tends to trigger anxiety and concern, feelings that damage the implementation of the process.
- **Providing mentees with a series of informative sessions and workshops** at the beginning of the school year to know, in advance, the objectives and content of the programmes, the context in which they are developed, as well as the tasks involved in the process was found to be very important. This action is considered to have contributed to more informed and conscious decision-making at the time of joining the programme, thus reducing the chances of dropping out of the project.
- Throughout the project, it was considered crucial to **recognize the importance of the mentor's role**. It is known that this role is demanding, requires constant training, monitoring and an availability that is not compatible with the hours allocated in the schedule for the exercise for this position.

4.3. POSTSCRIPT

In light of the above, which results from the experience of this project's implementation process, we confirm the following premises:

- **Diversification of career options:** It is observed that the performance of the mentor role increases motivation and contributes to the retention of teachers with several years of experience in the educational system.
- **Induction sustained through mentoring activities:**
 - Supports the professional development of teachers at the beginning of their careers.
 - Contributes to the retention of teachers starting their careers in the educational system.
 - Promotes the social and cultural inclusion of teachers.
- **Mentors' capacity programme:** Increases the interest of teachers in participating in the implementation of induction programmes as it supports their actions.
- **Resources and induction actions** should be planned, safeguarded and adjusted to the needs of professional contexts and their stakeholders.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the actual knowledge gained from the experience of creating and implementing teachers' induction programmes and mentors' capacity programmes among the consortium countries of this project, this document aims to support the definition of a national-level operationalization strategy for mentor-based induction programmes.

The recommendations made in this document intend to support this strategy and they reflect the evidence from the results of the implementation, particularly regarding mentors' capacity, the personal and professional development of beginning teachers and the success of the programmes.

In this regard, the following recommendations do not include practical and operational details (it is considered that these should be carefully considered by technical teams in a contextualized manner during the implementation processes). Instead, they point out lines of action that should be observed in the definition of future actions. Like the conclusions, the recommendations are structured in a multi-level approach: macro, meso, and micro. It should be noted that in this process, each level plays a decisive and inseparable role from the others, hence the definition of a set of specific recommendations for each of them, though properly interconnected, to achieve a solid regulatory framework and ensure the effective professional development of the teachers involved.

It is, therefore, essential to define and establish some of the key elements that have contributed to the success of the aforementioned programmes within the LOOP project.

► IMPLEMENTATION MEANING

This level concerns the definition of the concepts of induction and mentoring and the structuring of the mentoring model with a set of essential rules (including the definition of rights and duties among stakeholders), to design tangible and concrete actions. At this level, the action involves setting legal and regulatory standards, providing resources and deciding on the funding and activities that are essential to implement the strategy and achieve the overall and specific objectives of these programmes. Therefore, it is considered relevant to:

- **CREATE new career opportunities by supporting the implementation of teachers' induction processes and mentors' capacity programmes, with the formal recognition of the role of the adequately trained mentor.** This recommendation requires a concerted policy action to ensure the establishment of a legislative framework that defines the scope, nature and structure of these programmes, as well as the necessary resources and mechanisms for their implementation. In this sense, it will be crucial that the role of mentor and of the new teacher to be officially recognized and compensated either in terms of teaching hours relief or in terms of financial rewards (or a combination of both) and support the organizations with resources and quality training courses.
- **PROMOTE dialogue between teachers' professional organisations, universities, training centres, researchers and national education councils.** The implementation of these programmes requires the involvement and joint action of different levels of decision-making in a context of cooperation among all.

- **AGREE on a common definition of the concepts of *induction* and *mentoring*.** This need stems from the fact that the regulatory frameworks of the partner countries differ in the definition of those concepts, thus requiring a common conceptual approach¹⁶, on which the nature of all action depends.
- **DEFINE the criteria for the selection of mentors.** The experience gained from the implementation of the LOOP project has shown that the method of selecting mentors is crucial to ensure the success of induction. In defining these criteria, it is important to safeguard, in particular:
 - Experience in teaching, knowing that 10 or 20 years of activity result in accumulated knowledge in various dimensions of teaching,
 - Knowledge acquired in the performance of other relevant roles, such as participation in innovative projects and the guidance of internships,
 - Specific training, including participation in the mentors' capacity programme,
 - The performance evaluation obtained in previous years and motivation to perform the role,
 - The relationship with teacher training schools¹⁷ and the expression of interest in participating.
- **ESTABLISH concrete and precise objectives aligned with the purposes of this action.** These objectives should be translated into educational policy measures that can:
 - Contribute to the establishment of educational policies that cover all stages of the teaching career.
 - Promote peer-to-peer learning processes as an effective strategy to reduce early dropout from the teaching profession, increase teachers' motivation and improve their professional skills.
 - Strengthen support for teachers by implementing, enhancing, and innovating induction processes for new professionals through mentoring.
 - Expand career options by providing mentoring training to experienced teachers and recognising their role as mentors.
- **CREATE a technical unit to support the development of the action.** The definition of the regulatory framework should include the allocation of the necessary resources for the development of the action. Therefore, it is considered essential to establish a **(de)centralised technical unit** (including members from the Ministry of Education, training institutions and schools), which will be responsible for implementing mentoring-based induction programmes. It represents a great challenge, as it requires a consistent and timely development of the technical expertise of all people involved.
- **INVOLVE stakeholders in the operationalization of teacher induction and mentors' capacity programmes.** The implementation of teacher induction and mentors' capacity programmes requires a coordinated effort among different partners, including educational authorities, school management bodies, intermediate leadership structures, other teachers, training institutions, mentors and mentees. The contribution of each one of these stakeholders is crucial to achieve the objectives of the induction programmes and the overall success of the action. In this sense, it is important to ensure the participation of:
 - **educational authorities**, aiming at their involvement in promoting actions that support the implementation of induction programmes, taking measures, defining responsibilities, providing

¹⁶ See section 4.1 of this report - 'Key Findings' - for the concepts of *induction* and *mentoring* adopted in the LOOP project.

¹⁷ Schools with collaborative training practices that will be established and can play a key role in mentors' capacity training.

resources, facilitating access to induction programmes and adapting them to the specific needs of each context and of the teachers involved.

- **school management bodies**, as they are responsible for ensuring the necessary conditions for the implementation, localization, and monitoring of induction programmes, supporting the definition of criteria for the selection and appointment of mentors and mentees and involving the school community in supporting mentor training.
- **intermediate leadership structures and other teachers**, whose contribution is essential to provide the necessary conditions to facilitate mentee integration and to create a network of collaboration involving various stakeholders. These actions are considered of great relevance for the success of induction.
- **training institutions**, including educational institutes, with a leading role in recognising the importance of induction programmes and their certification, promoting awareness-raising activities for mentors and mentees, which are essential for conceptual clarification and programme characterization, as well as addressing relational, organisational, training, contextual and programme implementation monitoring aspects, certification, and impact on career progression and/or entry into the teaching profession.
- **mentors and mentees**, allowing them to develop induction programmes in a reflective and collaborative context and to act effectively in anticipation and response to potential risks and challenges.

► **IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXT**

At this level, the aim is to build a strategic and operational action plan that ensures the implementation of induction supported by mentoring, bearing in mind the goal of improving the quality of services that schools provide and ensuring that their teachers feel supported and integrated. Therefore, action implies defining mechanisms to support the development of induction and ensure the quality of the entire process.

Thus, it is considered relevant to:

- **CREATE** a working group to define/adapt the guidelines for the selection of mentors and participants, as well as to identify the necessary resources, including training, implementation structures, monitoring and administrative support. The working group responsible for the implementation of these programmes must collaborate to promote the creation of local networks/communities (it can be supported by an online platform) between mentors from different schools in cooperation with school principals and educational advisors, to exchange good practices, such as sample teaching and reflection on teaching practices and innovative ways of formative assessment.
- **DEFINE** the premises that should underpin the structuring of the programmes' implementation plan including:
 - **Defining the mentor's profile, recommending that he/she assures to have:**
 - mastery of didactic-pedagogical strategies and practices,
 - knowledge of the subject matter they provide mentoring on,
 - professional experience in teaching and learning areas,
 - a strong organizational culture,

- availability to invest time in supporting mentees,
 - interest in performing mentoring functions and supporting mentees,
 - ability to listen actively and communicate effectively,
 - ability to share experiences,
 - ability to provide constructive feedback.
- The **definition of the corresponding terms between the mentor and the mentee(s)**, bearing in mind that there are no infallible criteria, as well as the fact that the combination of a set of different criteria can result in a better match. In this regard, it is also important to take into account that the relationships between mentor and mentee(s) evolve and that mentors are professionals who have high levels of relational competence and, therefore, are prepared to adapt their actions to different profiles. In this context, it is important to consider whether:
 - mentor and mentee(s) **should belong to the same disciplinary field or a related one** (this criterion divided the participants' opinion).
 - mentor and mentee(s) **should belong to the same school**, knowing that this condition can, on the one hand, support the development of activities and the implementation of the induction itself. However, it is also important to bear in mind that belonging to different schools has the potential to create new ideas and perspectives and it prevents a potential influence on the mentee's evaluation process. Therefore, groups that cross boundaries and are heterogeneous can also prove to be successful.
 - mentors should have a level of competence development in a specific area that allows them **to meet the objectives of local educational development**, since sustained induction through mentoring is not conceived from an individual perspective but rather from a collective one, it is important that their actions contribute to the development of broader contexts and working cultures within schools.
- **IMPROVE** the quality of the educational service offered by schools. The design of an action plan that includes the induction of beginning teachers with the support of qualified mentors should ensure **the monitoring and integration of beginning teachers in a peer-to-peer working context**. The aim is to assume these programmes as an **opportunity for the development of the teaching community in each context**.
 - **DEFINE** mentor competencies' development programmes for experienced teachers, so as to help them **to have a deep knowledge of this position, as well as to be better prepared for performing this role**. This training has the following **objectives**:
 - accessing theoretical knowledge (resources) to deepen the understanding of the mentoring activity.
 - understanding the duties and responsibilities of the mentor's role and managing their expectations.
 - identifying priorities and relevant actions for mentoring activities.
 - collaboratively defining norms and guiding protocols for mentorship.
 - developing competencies in various domains relevant to the induction programme.
 - to support the need for having physical private spaces and time slots dedicated to mentor-mentee interactions.
 - access to exercises, activities and learning materials.

- **ADAPT the induction programmes to educational contexts, allowing them to align with the needs and idiosyncrasies of each organization.** Several studies¹⁸ reveal that the **professional culture of schools, the combination of values, norms, and modes of professional practice, have a strong impact on beginning teachers and the work of mentors.** Therefore, it is important to **adapt the principles and practices of any national and/or international professional development project to local contexts.**
- **ENSURE that induction programmes are an opportunity for beginning teachers to:**
 - experience quality induction;
 - reduce the anxiety teachers may feel when starting a new position in a school organization;
 - be empowered with the necessary knowledge to perform roles effectively, fostering positive relationships with their peers and meeting the needs of the organization and context;
 - facilitate the transition from their initial training to professional practice;
 - feel better integrated into the school community;
 - increase their motivation for teaching, thereby increasing their retention in the profession.
- **ENHANCE the development of each educational context through the implementation of induction programmes.** The induction programmes should be regarded as **an opportunity to reform and update the culture of schools and, in that way, increase the enrichment and professional development of the teaching community based on the sharing of knowledge, resources and practices among peers.** It is intended that the impact of these actions goes **beyond the professional development of each teacher involved and has a positive effect on the construction of a solid teaching culture, on the development of the school as a whole, leading, that way, to the improvement of educational service provided in each context.** This implies that school management bodies, as well as their intermediate leadership structures, recognize the **gains of these programmes for the organisation** and, in this way, promote the teachers' participation and ensure the necessary space and time conditions to carry out the planned activities.
- **DEVELOP collaboration protocols between schools, training centres and higher education institutes.** The mentioned before, the implementation of teacher induction and mentors' capacity programmes requires the **involvement of various stakeholders.** It implies developing protocols with them so as to formalize the contributions of each entity to the implementation and success of these programmes.
- **PREPARE a plan for the monitoring and supporting of the induction process** that allows a continuous assessment, structured in an appropriate model according to the nature of this programme. This plan should define the methods for monitoring the participants, as well as help to know the complexity of the intervention and ensure the rigor of the activity, including feedback, assessment of interactions, measurement of satisfaction levels and the learning progress. In this regard, the Monitoring and Supporting Plan should:
 - define the monitoring group that could support mentors and new teachers,
 - define the monitoring objectives,
 - identify key milestones and goals,
 - specify monitoring tools,

¹⁸ Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005, page 696.

- establish a monitoring schedule,
- define responsibilities,
- collect feedback and evaluations,
- analyse data and identify areas for improvement,
- communicate the results,
- implement continuous improvements,
- assess learning progress.

► **PROFESSIONALS**

This level focuses on the professional development of the teachers involved in the induction process, both mentors and mentees. It aims to understand whether the implemented actions, whose purpose is the effective integration of beginning teachers, have contributed to increase the knowledge and competencies of the participants. Therefore, it is important to consider the adequacy of the training processes, bearing in mind that the goal is to improve the personal and professional development of teachers and that this assumes a holistic development, with implications in the fundamental dimensions for the teaching profession as follows: 'knowing' 'knowing how' and 'knowing how to be.' It should be noted that the training to prepare mentors to carry out their role is of particular importance in this context, not only because of its significant impact on teaching professionalism, but also because it is crucial for the success of the induction process. Thus, it is considered pertinent to:

- **PROMOTE teacher participation in the implementation of induction programmes.** Without teachers, there are no induction programmes. They are the reason for the existence of these programmes, and the appeal for their participation is based on a coordinated plan of actions and actors. In this regard, it is considered essential that:
 - a Working Group is set up to receive training to know, in detail, the induction programmes and recognise their value;
 - the Working Group, with the support of a Communication Team, develops a plan to disseminate the programmes in various national structures. Moreover, this plan should be presented at different levels of implementation - national, local and contextual (school);
 - the programmes' dissemination should consist of presenting the programmes through a conceptual approach, explaining their objectives and benefits for the teaching career, providing information about their duration, specifying the activities and the necessary human resources, among other relevant aspects;
 - the programmes should not only be presented to potentially involved teachers but also to the professional community within the school so that other teachers can feel motivated to participate in their activities;
 - the dissemination sessions should involve the school leadership and intermediate leadership structures so that they can be familiarized with the programmes and to make easier the support to their implementation, by providing common time in teachers' schedules as well as spaces that, on the one hand, safeguard the confidentiality and, on the other hand, facilitate the necessary collaborative work between mentors and mentees.

- **ALLOCATE teaching time for the role of mentors and ensure the convergence of non-teaching time for collaborative work between mentors and mentees.** It is important to ensure that mentors and mentees **have common teaching periods** of time to allow them to work collaboratively in the classroom. This is the only way to provide the necessary support for the beginning teacher concerning *classroom management*. In addition, it facilitates the accomplishment of an important aspect of the mentors' capacity programme, which includes classroom observation and, ideally, participation in initiatives in other teachers' classrooms. These opportunities enable the sharing of knowledge among the various participants, making the induction an experience even more fruitful.

The definition of common non-teaching time between mentors and mentees should also be considered, allowing for individual and joint meetings among other activities considered essential for the success of mentoring. The experience of implementing induction and mentoring programmes has shown that providing time for collaborative work is a *sine qua non-condition* to achieve the goals set.

- **INTRODUCE the group of mentors, providing time for their introduction and facilitating the contact between mentors and mentees.** The sooner mentors and mentees get to know each other, the better will be the success of mentoring. Therefore, it is important for each pair to be introduced as soon as possible, helping to overcome any insecurity, fears and doubts that may naturally exist on both sides. It is considered a good initiative to encourage mentors to initiate this relationship, adopting a friendly and encouraging tone. This can be facilitated if the first contacts take more a social rather than a professional character. It is also very important that mentors have effective interpersonal communication skills, can actively build trust, and can maintain confidentiality.

So, it would be beneficial for mentors to be informed about their new role and tasks upfront, e.g. before the end of the school year and before the beginning of the next school year. This means mentors would be trained beforehand the first meeting and would be fully trained and prepared for it before it commences. The sooner mentors and mentees get to know each other, the better will be the success of mentoring.

- **ORGANISE information sessions for mentees** - in a practical format (such as workshops) - the aim is to support mentees in making a conscious and informed decision about their participation in the induction process, thus preventing them from dropping out.
- **ENABLE mentees to be responsible for all decision-making during the induction process and mentors and the mentor, the guardian of the process.** In agreement with the mentor, mentees should:
 - decide on the dimensions¹⁹ they want to work on after the diagnosis by designing a work plan;
 - decide on the activities they want to initiate;
 - request support and guidance whenever needed;
 - adjust the induction programme to their own profile, needs and interests;
 - request the adequate space and time conditions as well as individual support to ensure the success of the induction.

¹⁹ Didactic-pedagogical, disciplinary, bureaucratic/administrative, emotional, social and cultural.