

Self-Reflection Tool on Partnerships in Education

Guidance and Methodology Report



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LEARNERS AND FAMILIES
SHAPING ACTION



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

SELF-REFLECTION TOOL ON PARTNERSHIPS IN EDUCATION

Guidance and Methodology Report



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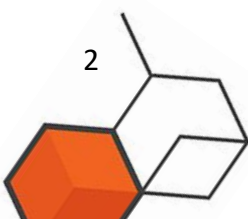
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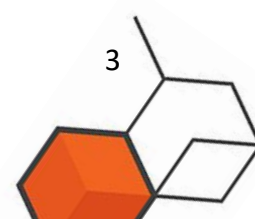
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This *Guidance and Methodology Report* accompanies the *Self-Reflection Tool on Partnerships in Education*. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) developed the tool in the context of the [Learners and Families Shaping Action](#) (LFSA) activity. This report sets out the rationale, development process and intended use of the self-reflection tool, situating it within EASNIE's broader work on inclusive education and partnership.

The tool aims to support decision-makers, schools, families, learners and communities in reflecting on partnership approaches across education systems. It offers stakeholders a shared framework for examining how partnerships are organised, how inclusive and equitable they are, and where further development may be needed.

Grounded in international evidence and EASNIE frameworks, the tool structures reflection across six core areas:

1. Legislation and policy
2. Governance
3. Funding and resource allocation
4. Quality assurance, accountability and system data
5. Capacity building and inclusive leadership
6. Collaboration, communication and co-operation.

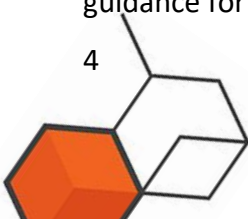
Through guiding questions linked to a simple developmental scale, the tool supports users to:

- reflect on current partnership structures and practices;
- identify strengths, gaps and priority areas for development;
- plan concrete, achievable next steps.

The tool's framework draws on international research, rights-based commitments and existing EASNIE work to identify six core areas that can shape effective partnership. These areas describe the conditions under which participation, collaboration and shared responsibility can become sustained features of education systems, rather than ad hoc initiatives. Key reference points include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, Article 12), Lundy's model of participation (2007) and EASNIE's [Voices into Action](#) activity (2022).

The tool can be used qualitatively and/or quantitatively, in detailed or less in-depth reflection processes, and aligned with national policy cycles, school development processes or peer-learning activities. It is a developmental resource intended to support dialogue, self-review, monitoring and mutual learning across contexts.

The sections that follow explain why partnership matters, outline the systemic challenges the tool addresses, describe the methodology used in its development, and provide guidance for applying and adapting the tool in different national and local settings.





1. INTRODUCTION

Across Europe, decision-makers (such as ministries, municipalities, local authorities, etc.), schools, families, learners and communities share a common aspiration: to create education systems where every learner can flourish. Achieving this aspiration is closely linked to how these different stakeholder groups work together. In this report, this way of working together is referred to as ‘partnership’. Partnership is not an add-on; it is understood as a way of organising responsibility for learning, well-being and inclusion. It is commonly associated with improvements in the quality of education – for instance, by strengthening learning, supporting school improvement and making systems more responsive to learners’ needs. At its best, partnership nurtures trust and shared relationships, creating conditions that can support sustainable reforms and shared ownership among partners.

Partnership, in the context of the LFSA activity, is understood as a way of organising shared responsibility across decision-makers, schools, families, learners and communities. It refers to on-going relationships and ways of working that enable different partners to contribute their perspectives, knowledge and resources to shaping education policy and practice. Partnership goes beyond information-sharing or consultation. It involves creating conditions for dialogue, trust, co-ordination and mutual accountability, so that participation can meaningfully influence decisions and lead to more inclusive and equitable outcomes. The specific form that partnership takes may vary across contexts, but its defining feature is that responsibility for inclusion and quality is held collectively rather than by any single actor.

This *Guidance and Methodology Report* introduces the *Self-Reflection Tool on Partnerships in Education*. The tool is designed for key stakeholder groups across the education system (decision-makers, schools, families, learners and communities). Each group brings a specific perspective and responsibility within the partnership processes: decision-makers create enabling frameworks; schools turn policies into practice; families and communities contribute lived knowledge and support; and learners bring their direct experience of inclusion and participation. These perspectives offer a way of understanding how partnership operates in practice and where it may be strengthened.

In this report, the term ‘methodology’ refers to the process used to design, develop and refine the self-reflection tool, rather than to an evaluative or research methodology. This report explains why partnership matters for improving the quality of education, strengthening trust and advancing equity and inclusion. It also identifies the systemic challenges that can prevent partnerships from becoming part of everyday practice – for example, when engagement remains fragmented, under-resourced or limited to certain groups. In addition, it describes the methodology used to develop the self-reflection tool and provides the rationale for each of its areas: legislation and policy; governance; funding and resource allocation; quality assurance, accountability and system data; capacity building and inclusive leadership; and collaboration, communication and co-operation.

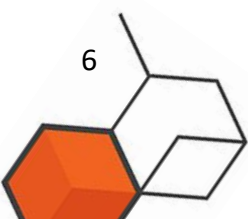
This work brings together international research, comparative policy, EASNIE frameworks and lessons from practice. The tool supports each partner in reflecting on the current





state of partnerships within their context and identifying next steps for improvement. For decision-makers, it offers a structured way to reflect on and track the integration of partnership approaches across education systems. For schools, communities, families and learners, it provides a space for dialogue and shared responsibility.

The tool is not a compliance checklist but a guide to help policy-makers and their partners make progress step by step. It encourages reflection on what is already in place, such as policies, structures, resources, practices and relationships, and so enables users to recognise strengths, identify gaps and plan next steps. In this way, the tool is intended to support more consistent, equitable, resilient and collaborative approaches to partnership, while recognising that contexts differ and that progress often happens incrementally. Its flexibility means it may be used in multiple ways, whether for self-reflection, policy dialogue or system-level reflection and monitoring, and adapted to each country's priorities and realities.





2. WHY PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

This section draws on selected research, rights-based frameworks and practice-based evidence to illustrate why partnership matters. It does not aim to provide an exhaustive review of the literature.

2.1 Research perspectives on partnership

Partnerships tend to be more effective when they move beyond occasional activities and become part of the regular practice of stakeholders across the education system, including decision-makers, schools, families, learners and communities. Long-term studies in the United States of America (USA) suggest that when schools build structured partnerships with families and communities, learner absenteeism tends to decrease. Attendance is often used as an early signal of engagement, making it a meaningful indicator when examining associations between partnerships and learner engagement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Other studies, including the framework described by Epstein and Salinas (2004), highlight that goal-linked, well-organised partnership programmes, rather than ad hoc events, are associated with improvements in learners' academic and social outcomes and may contribute to schools becoming stronger learning communities. The framework identifies six interrelated types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community), illustrating how partnerships can become structured, sustained practices rather than isolated activities. Relevant insights are also reflected in EASNIE work on learner and family participation, including the [Voices into Action](#) (VIA) activity (EASNIE, 2022).

This framework highlights how partnership approaches may be linked to outcomes, such as attendance or engagement, and to wider aspects of the learning climate and sense of belonging.

In addition, qualitative studies shed light on the conditions that appear to support effective partnership practices. Working with schools in high-poverty areas in Michigan (USA), Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) found a shared emphasis on trust, open and regular two-way communication and inclusive opportunities for participation. They also noted that judgement and weak communication create barriers, pointing to the need for welcoming school cultures and culturally competent staff.





Similar dynamics appear in European contexts.

In Dutch secondary schools, Gerdes, Goei, Huizinga and De Ruyter (2022) found that parent-school relations were often limited to passing on information (co-operation). However, when schools created space for parents to be part of decisions – for example, by recognising their input in setting priorities or shaping activities – collaboration was reported to deepen. The study also highlighted that sustained partnerships were linked to access to resources, respect for parents’ expertise, and genuinely shared authority in decision-making.

Relevant insights can also be drawn from work in other education sectors. For example, although focusing on higher education, Álvarez-Arregui and Arreguit (2019) discuss the importance of institutions being connected to their wider social contexts, an insight that may inform thinking about school–community partnerships while recognising differences in setting and governance.

A European review by Alieva (2021) provides further insight into these dynamics. Across studies, when parents talk with their children about goals and learning, often referred to as ‘academic socialisation’ in the literature, learners tend to experience more positive educational outcomes. Conversely, involvement that is limited to overseeing homework is not consistently positive, especially in later years. Opportunities for involvement are not equally available: families facing disadvantages often encounter structural and cultural barriers that limit involvement. The review points to the need for schools and systems to build trust with families who may be less well served by existing approaches (sometimes described as ‘hard-to-reach’) and to address everyday obstacles such as language, childcare or transport, so that partnership functions both as a quality strategy (supporting learning) and an equity strategy (ensuring fair participation).

Alongside research evidence, EASNIE activities, such as [Building Resilience through Inclusive Education Systems](#) (BRIES), identify similar conditions for effective partnership. These include trust, clarity, accessibility and transparency of communication, and shared aspirations for collaboration among learners, families, schools and policy actors. These insights inform the partnership dimensions in the self-reflection tool and are discussed further in the sections that follow.

2.2 Rights-based and inclusion perspectives

Partnerships are grounded in rights-based frameworks that shape how participation, inclusion and shared responsibility are understood and enacted in education systems.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes a clear commitment that children must be able to express their views on matters that affect them and that these views should carry due weight in decisions (1989, Article 12). Building on this principle, Lundy (2007) describes a model that identifies four interdependent conditions





required for **meaningful participation** in practice – space, voice, audience and influence – and stresses that when any of these is missing, participation risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive.



Meaningful participation occurs when learners and their families have the opportunity to express their views, influence decision-making and achieve change in areas that affect their lives.

Their respective opinions must be sought, listened to, valued, promoted and shared in planning, in decision-making and in practice, to include shared opportunities for feedback and further input. Those who were previously unheard or overlooked must be engaged in interactive dialogue with others in more powerful positions than themselves. Such participatory approaches are fundamental to the development, implementation and sustainability of inclusive organisations and education systems (EASNIE, no date).



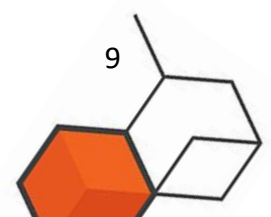
The VIA activity (EASNIE, 2022) illustrates how these principles play out in practice. Although many learners and families are invited to share their views, these views often do not reach the decision-making tables or shape policy and practice. The activity highlights persistent gaps: marginalised learners are rarely included, feedback loops are weak, and participation remains irregular. VIA recommends establishing systemic mechanisms so that learners' and families' perspectives are not only collected but also acted upon.

One of the priority areas in EASNIE's BRIES [Guidance for Establishing a Culture of Effective Communication in Education](#) is 'Creating supportive links in the community around learners and families' (2024a, p. 23):

Supportive links in the community around learners and families can be created by using effective communication to develop good partnerships between decision-makers and communities. Effective communication in education supports the development of relationships and trust among stakeholders. These are key elements for reaching all learners and families (ibid., p. 24).

International monitoring and policy guidance reinforce this direction. UNESCO's *Global Education Monitoring Report (2020)* emphasises that inclusive education is both a process and an outcome, and that this process depends on the quality of relationships among policy-makers, educators, learners, families and communities. Similarly, the Council of the European Union (2022) stresses that meaningful participation of learners and families is a precondition for both quality and equity in education systems.

Evidence on inter-professional collaboration and participation points in the same direction. The OECD (2019) found that when systems dedicate resources for joint work across education, health and social services, collaboration is more likely to be sustained and to support both learners and staff. At the level of participation, Lundy (2018) shows that even early or modest forms of engagement can lead to more meaningful involvement





when adults provide clear feedback and demonstrate how children’s views shape decisions. These findings underline the importance of closing feedback loops, a point that aligns with evidence from VIA.

Taken together, these perspectives show that partnerships matter not only for improving outcomes, but also because they give concrete expression to rights, inclusion and shared responsibility across education systems. Education systems that treat participation as optional may risk reinforcing inequalities. In contrast, systems that uphold participation as a right lay stronger foundations for equity, trust, accountability and collective responsibility.

One area where these foundations become especially visible is in the role of communities. While rights-based frameworks focus primarily on learners and families, evidence increasingly shows that communities, including local organisations, services and networks, are catalysts in making partnerships sustainable. This perspective is explored further through practice-based evidence in the next section.

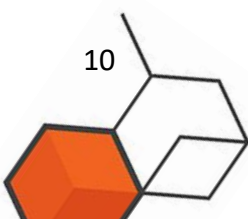
2.3 Community-based perspectives on partnership

Alongside decision-makers, schools, families and learners, communities help make education inclusive and resilient. Here, ‘community’ includes local services, non-governmental organisations, youth and cultural groups, health and social care providers, faith-based organisations, associations and grassroots initiatives. These actors bring resources and knowledge that schools and decision-makers cannot create on their own, helping ensure that education responds to learners’ lived realities and diverse needs.

International evidence points to the importance of communities. The OECD (2021) describes successful schools as community hubs that connect with networks of services and organisations around them. These networks create opportunities not only for learning, but also for learners’ well-being and social development. **By acting as bridges, communities help education systems remain connected to local contexts and keep reforms grounded in everyday experience** (ibid.).

Practice-based evidence from EASNIE activities further illustrates how community engagement, communication and trust operate as core dimensions of effective partnership in different contexts:

For example, evidence from the BRIES activity describes a parents’ café at a primary school in Frankfurt (Germany), initiated by teachers and a school leader to strengthen communication between families and the school (EASNIE, 2024a). BRIES notes that the friendly atmosphere helped involve new parents and enabled parents from non-German speaking backgrounds to interact with the school in a different way. Furthermore, personal exchanges created a basis of trust and more direct communication channels.





BRIES also draws on examples from pre-primary settings during an early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (ibid.):

The examples, from Sweden, Norway and the USA, describe collaboration with parents – for example, through parents’ advisory boards – and joint work to develop shared approaches to information-sharing and safety guidelines. BRIES highlights how parents, as part of the community, can be involved at different stages of establishing a culture of effective communication.

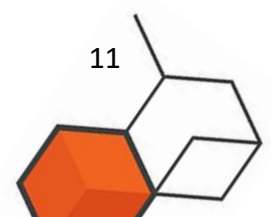
Ireland provides a concrete example of how communities can be placed at the centre of education:

Through the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme, additional resources are directed to schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas so that they can act as hubs for their communities (Department of Education and Skills, 2017; OECD, 2024). An important part of the DEIS programme is the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, which provides trained co-ordinators to strengthen relationships between families, schools and local services. Evaluations report gains in attendance, retention and parents’ confidence in schools (OECD, 2024). These national measures align with the Irish Department of Education’s Statement of Strategy 2023-2025, which mentions equity, inclusion and service integration as cross-cutting priorities (Department of Education, 2023).

Ireland has also introduced Partnership Schools Ireland (PSI). PSI forms Action Teams for Partnerships that bring together principals, teachers, parents, learners and community members to set joint goals for learning, well-being and collaboration. This illustrates how community-centred design can make equity and participation concrete at local level (National Parents Council Primary, 2022).

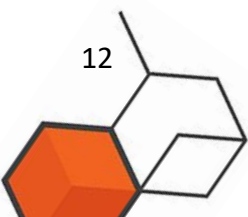
Insights from the European Commission peer-learning activity in Ireland support this direction, showing that schools operating as community hubs and collaborating with health and social services through multi-disciplinary teams are better equipped to address barriers to participation that extend beyond the classroom. Participants noted that when communities are treated as equal partners, rather than as external supporters, families and learners experience education as more relevant and sustainable (European Commission, 2024).

These examples show that communities are not peripheral actors but essential partners. They extend the reach of education systems, provide the social infrastructure that makes participation possible (for example, through family liaison roles, community-based services and links with health and social care) and help strengthen trust between institutions and citizens. The self-reflection tool makes communities visible, giving this dimension of partnership greater prominence and enabling it to become recognised, valued and embedded in how systems work.





Translating these principles into consistent action across all levels, however, remains complex. Section 3 examines the systemic challenges that can hinder partnership development and explains how the self-reflection tool was designed to help address them.





3. SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

Although there is a growing body of evidence for and a clear policy commitment to partnership, partnerships often remain fragile in practice. In many systems, collaboration still depends on the goodwill of individual leaders or teachers rather than on structures that make it routine and sustainable. As a result, opportunities for learners and families are uneven; some benefit from strong support networks, while others are left out because engagement is inconsistent or short-lived.

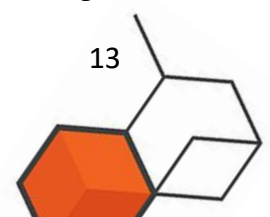
One recurring challenge is **fragmentation**. Decision-makers may set up participation guidelines, schools may run parent councils, and community organisations may offer services, yet these efforts often remain disconnected. Without a coherent framework, partnerships are scattered, visible in some places, missing in others, and their impact is harder to maintain. This makes it difficult to build sustained momentum across the system. Fragmentation needs to be addressed to avoid leaving behind the very families who stand to gain most from genuine partnership, particularly those facing structural barriers to participation.

Equity and inclusion therefore become a central challenge. Research across different contexts consistently shows that families with fewer resources are often the least represented in partnership activities, even though they may have the most to gain. Studies on parental engagement across different contexts highlight the importance of forms of parental engagement often described in the literature as ‘academic socialisation’. This refers to everyday conversations between parents and children about learning goals, expectations and future pathways and is associated with more positive learner outcomes (Alieva, 2021).

However, opportunities for such engagement are not evenly distributed. Evidence from the VIA activity shows that families facing structural disadvantage are less likely to have the time, resources or support needed to engage consistently in partnership activities (EASNIE, 2022). Practical obstacles, such as lack of time, transport, childcare or language support, can reduce families’ ability to participate. Less visible barriers also play a role, including assumptions about which parents are viewed as less ‘capable’ or ‘appropriate’ partners. These barriers shape who participates and whose voices are heard.

Another difficulty is the **risk of tokenism**. Lundy (2007) noted that when learners or families are invited to share their views but these views do not influence decisions, participation may weaken trust instead of strengthening it. Subsequent research (Lundy, 2018) reiterated that participation without impact remains superficial. Evidence from the VIA activity (EASNIE, 2022) illustrates this challenge: many learners and families were given opportunities to speak, yet only a few saw their input considered. Weak feedback loops and the exclusion of marginalised voices can make participation patchy and fragile.

Resourcing and sustainability are further barriers. OECD studies (2019; 2021) show that partnerships are more sustainable when systems dedicate staff, time and funding to joint work across education, health and social services. Without this, even strong initiatives may lose momentum once projects end or key people move on. The European Commission’s peer-learning activity in Ireland (2024) highlights similar patterns, showing





that schools operating as community hubs are most effective when supported by stable funding and formal links with health and social services.

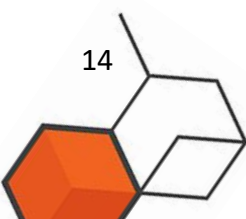
A final challenge lies in **monitoring, evaluation and system learning**. Across education systems, information on participation and partnership is often fragmented across stakeholders and contexts. Even where data is collected, it is not always systematically used to inform decision-making, reflection or improvement. This limits the ability of decision-makers and practitioners to understand where partnerships are strong, where they are weak or absent, and how they evolve over time.

These challenges are reflected in EASNIE work on learner and family participation, which highlights on-going difficulties in how participation is followed up within systems. Evidence from the VIA activity shows that while learners' and families' perspectives are often collected, feedback loops connecting them to decision-making remain weak or inconsistent (EASNIE, 2022). Peer-learning activities linked to partnership and participation similarly point to the importance of strengthening reflection and dialogue across stakeholders to support more sustained change.

3.1 From challenge to opportunity

The task, then, is not to persuade systems that partnership matters – there is already broad agreement on its importance – but to ensure that partnerships are systematic rather than fragmented, equitable rather than selective, and sustainable rather than short-lived.

The self-reflection tool is designed to support decision-makers and their partners in this work by helping them reflect on what is in place, identify where progress is possible, and plan realistic next steps. Its role is both practical and forward-looking: it supports incremental improvement while holding a shared orientation towards partnership as an integral part of how education systems function, rather than as a series of isolated initiatives. In this way, partnership is positioned as a foundation for systems that aim to be inclusive, collaborative and trusted.





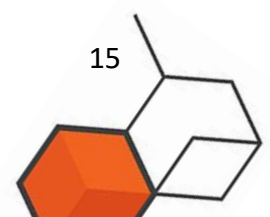
4. METHODOLOGY: DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-REFLECTION TOOL

4.1 Development process

In this report, the methodology refers to the process used to design, develop and refine the self-reflection tool. The tool was developed through an iterative process of review, synthesis and feedback involving collaboration among EASNIE team members, representatives from the LFSA activity countries and an external consultant. This process drew on insights from previous EASNIE activities involving its member countries. From the outset, the intention was to develop a reflective and developmental framework that supports decision-makers and their partners to examine current partnership practices, recognise strengths, identify areas for improvement and plan next steps.

The self-reflection tool followed a structured, multi-stage process that combined evidence review, alignment with existing EASNIE frameworks, and practice insights.

1. **Framework design.** An initial structure was drafted to capture the essential dimensions of partnership across education systems. This design drew on international research and policy literature on partnership and inclusion, as well as existing EASNIE frameworks, particularly the [Country Policy Development Support \(CPDS\) Framework](#) (EASNIE, 2024b) and the VIA activity. These sources informed an emphasis on inclusiveness, participation, accountability and the importance of feedback loops.
2. **Defining areas and goals.** A set of core areas was identified as most relevant for system-level reflection on partnerships. These areas were identified through structured discussion, drawing on existing EASNIE frameworks and shared priorities emerging from previous activities. For each area, corresponding goals were agreed. The areas were deliberately structured to avoid duplication, ensure conceptual clarity and align with EASNIE priorities and terminology.
3. **Integrating research evidence.** The draft tool was then cross-checked against international research on school–family–community partnerships and participation. Rather than reproducing individual studies, this step focused on distilling shared insights from the literature, such as the value of sustained partnerships, the role of trust and communication, and the importance of meaningful participation in decision-making. This helped ensure that the tool was consistent with both EASNIE work and the wider evidence base on inclusive education.
4. **Developing guiding questions.** Based on the areas and goals identified through collaborative discussion, guiding questions were developed to support reflection and dialogue. The wording and focus of the questions were refined to ensure they were usable across different system contexts and reflected shared understandings of partnership practice. Each question is linked to a 0–3 scale, accompanied by short prompts to support interpretation.





5. **Refinement through practice insights.** The draft tool was refined using insights from practice and international guidance on inclusive education and partnership. Evidence from EASNIE’s VIA activity ensured that learners’ and families’ perspectives were embedded throughout. The CPDS Framework (EASNIE, 2024b) provided reference points for alignment with system-level dimensions such as leadership, quality assurance and professional learning. Relevant international guidance, including UNICEF work (2023) on strengthening equitable and resilient education systems, also informed the approach, particularly its focus on removing barriers to participation and embedding children’s rights within education transformation strategies. Insights from EASNIE work, including its peer-learning activities, served to further refine the tool. Learning drawn from these activities was used to test the tool’s relevance across a range of policy and practice contexts.
6. **Final review.** In the final stage, the tool was reviewed, focusing on clarity, consistency of terminology, and usability across different national contexts. Cross-checks with existing EASNIE frameworks and activities ensured coherence with on-going EASNIE work. This stage aimed to balance rigour with flexibility, keeping the tool evidence-informed, while allowing countries to adapt it to their own contexts.

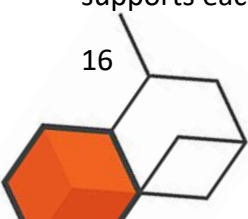
4.2 Purpose and audience

The tool is designed to be used across five interconnected stakeholder levels within education systems: decision-makers, schools, families, learners and communities. These levels reflect how responsibility for partnership is distributed across policy, practice, lived experience and local contexts, in line with EASNIE’s system-level frameworks.

Each stakeholder group plays a distinct role in partnership. Effective partnership does not depend on any single group acting alone, but on how these roles interact and reinforce one another within a shared framework of responsibility.

- **Decision-makers (for example, ministries, municipalities, cantons, local authorities, etc.)** set the enabling conditions through legislation, policy frameworks, governance, funding, and accountability systems. Their role is to ensure that partnership is embedded within system structures, rather than dependent on isolated initiatives.
- **Schools** translate these commitments into everyday practice. They shape cultures of governance, communication and collaboration, and create spaces where families, learners and communities can contribute meaningfully to decisions.
- **Families and learners** bring lived experience that grounds policies and practices in everyday realities, helping ensure that partnership is inclusive, relevant and responsive to diverse needs.
- **Communities and partner organisations** connect education with the wider social environment, contributing networks, services and cultural resources that help sustain collaboration and keep education systems responsive to local contexts.

These roles form a shared responsibility across the system. The self-reflection tool supports each stakeholder group in recognising its own role and understanding how it





relates to the roles of others, increasing transparency around responsibilities and expectations. Although the tool is organised by stakeholder group, it is designed to support dialogue and alignment across groups, helping partners identify shared priorities, address gaps and co-ordinate next steps. In this way, the tool supports both individual reflection and collective development, so that partnership grows coherently rather than in parallel.

Section 4.3 explains how the tool is structured and how its components work together to support reflection across stakeholder levels.

4.3 How the tool works

The tool is a structured yet adaptable framework designed to support stakeholders across the education system in examining partnership systematically, while allowing space for local flexibility. It moves from broad areas of focus to practical guiding questions, encouraging users to connect policy commitments and shared principles with everyday practice.

The tool is organised around six areas that reflect recurring dimensions of partnership drawn from international evidence and existing EASNIE work:

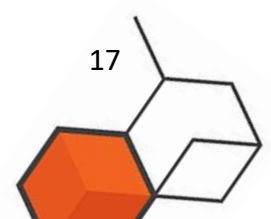
1. **Legislation and policy**
2. **Governance**
3. **Funding and resource allocation**
4. **Quality assurance, accountability and system data**
5. **Capacity building and inclusive leadership**
6. **Collaboration, communication and co-operation.**

These areas aim to capture the conditions that enable partnership to be embedded within education systems, rather than remaining dependent on isolated initiatives. [Section 5](#) explores each area in detail.

Within each area, broad **goals** describe what effective partnership looks like in principle. For example, in the area of resources, one goal focuses on whether funding arrangements support inclusive and equitable participation across families, learners, schools and communities. These goals are not prescriptive; they are reference points that help users reflect on the extent to which enabling conditions are in place.

Each goal is then unpacked through **guiding questions**. These are deliberately concrete, written in plain language and focused on a single idea. Their purpose is not to test or rank performance, but to prompt reflection and dialogue. To support this, each guiding question is accompanied by two elements:

- **Developmental scale (0–3)**. The scale invites users to consider where current practice sits from ‘not developed’ to ‘established’. It highlights stages of development and supports discussion about possible next steps, rather than producing a score.





- **Prompts.** Short cues encourage users to draw on concrete examples or sources of information, such as policies, reports, meeting records, feedback processes or local data. Prompts help move reflection from general statements to specific evidence and experiences, making gaps and strengths more visible.

By combining these elements, the tool supports structured reflection across different contexts. The scale enables discussion of progress over time, and the prompts ground reflection in practice and available evidence.

The tool is self-reflective by design, allowing each stakeholder group to reflect from its own perspective. At the same time, decision-makers can use the tool to bring together perspectives across groups to support system-level reflection, monitoring and learning in relation to partnership approaches.

Across all six areas, the structure helps users consider different dimensions of partnership in relation to one another – for example, distinguishing between resources that enable participation (Area 3) and how equity is monitored through quality assurance and data (Area 4) or between governance arrangements (Area 2) and co-ordination mechanisms (Area 6).

In this way, the tool supports reflection on current practice while pointing towards possible directions for further development. It is in line with international guidance and EASNIE priorities, while remaining adaptable to national and local contexts.

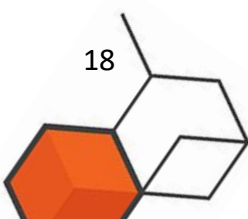
4.4 Using and interpreting the data

The information collected through the self-reflection tool should be viewed as a shared learning resource. Each 0–3 rating and each comment or example represents different stakeholder groups' perspectives on partnership. When these perspectives are analysed together, they offer a fuller picture of how collaboration, participation and inclusion are experienced across the education system, rather than serving as a measure of outcomes.

How different stakeholders can use the data



At **decision-making level**, the tool helps identify strengths, gaps and areas where additional support is needed. Aggregated results may show, for instance, that collaboration between schools and communities is strong in some areas but uneven in others. Decision-makers can use these insights to support system-level reflection and monitoring of partnership development, assess progress across the identified areas, guide policy review, and plan targeted professional learning or capacity-building where participation remains limited.

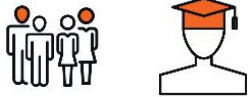




At **school level**, results can be reviewed with staff, families and learners to recognise effective practices, address challenges and plan next steps. For example, a school may find that communication channels (Area 6) are strong, while shared decision-making (Area 2) requires more attention. Regular use of the tool allows schools to track progress and strengthen cultures of collaboration. Such reflection can also be informed, where relevant, by insights from existing EASNIE resources on communication and partnership, such as the BRIES [Guidance for Establishing a Culture of Effective Communication in Education](#) (EASNIE, 2024a).



At **community level**, organisations and networks can use the tool to document what works well locally, highlight barriers that need attention and ensure that community voices are heard in education dialogue.



At **family and learner levels**, the tool builds understanding and agency. Families can reflect on how they are invited to participate, what information or support they need, and how they can collaborate more confidently with schools. Learners can use it in class discussions or learner councils to consider their own role in shaping school life and to express what helps them feel heard, safe and included.

Qualitative and quantitative interpretation

The tool supports both quantitative and qualitative approaches to reflection and evaluation.

- The 0–3 scale provides a quantitative snapshot that allows users to visualise progress across areas or over time.
- Qualitative reflections and examples explain the reasons behind each score, revealing lived experiences that numbers alone cannot capture.

For example, a community group might rate shared decision-making as ‘2 = Developing’ and note that, although families attend meetings, their ideas rarely shape plans. This comment explains the rating and points to useful support, such as facilitation training or clearer communication structures.

When combined, quantitative and qualitative insights provide a balanced understanding of both patterns and experiences. Numbers show **where** systems stand; qualitative reflections help explain **why**. Over time, comparing results across levels and reflection cycles enables decision-makers and partners to observe change, identify trends and sustain dialogue between policy and practice.





Purpose of interpretation

The aim is not to compare or rank schools, communities or countries. The goal is shared learning and mutual accountability. Data from each level enriches another. Decision-makers gain insights into how partnership is experienced locally; schools and communities see how their practices connect with system priorities and with the experiences of families and learners; and families and learners see how their perspectives inform decisions and contribute to collective improvement. Interpreting data in this way turns reflection into dialogue, dialogue into action, and action into more equitable, connected systems of education.

4.5 How to use the self-reflection tool

The self-reflection tool is designed to be used by countries, regions or school communities in ways that fit their context, capacity and goals. It is not a one-off exercise or a reporting requirement; rather, it offers a structured way to create time and space for reflection on partnership and dialogue about what could be strengthened next.

Who can use it?

The tool can be used by decision-makers (often ministries), schools, families, learners and communities, either individually or together. It is most effective when used collaboratively, such as in cross-department ministry teams, school leadership groups or mixed sessions that bring families, learners and community partners together. Bringing diverse voices to the table grounds reflection in both lived experience and policy priorities.

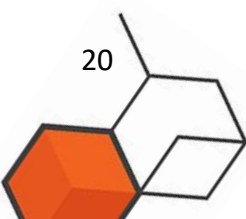
When can it be used?

The tool can be used during policy reviews, strategy updates, budget or resource planning cycles, or peer-learning exchanges. Partners may choose to use it annually or bi-annually, to compare reflections over time and track progress across the tool's areas.

How can it be used?

- Work through the given areas, using the goals and guiding questions to focus discussion and dialogue.
- For each question, consider where current practice sits on the 0–3 developmental scale and note examples, datasets or mechanisms that show how the practice looks in reality.
- Choose the mode that fits: a light internal self-reflection, a facilitated multi-stakeholder dialogue or a deeper review linked to monitoring and evaluation.
- End each session with two or three realistic next steps (noting who will lead, a timeline, and how progress will be recognised), so reflection leads to action.

In practice, decision-makers and their partners can decide the depth and scope of each reflection cycle depending on their priorities, capacities and timing within national or local





processes. Reflection can be brief and exploratory or more detailed and data-driven; what matters is that it informs dialogue and decision-making.

What does it produce?

- A shared picture of how partnership currently works across the core areas.
- A short set of priorities and next steps that can feed policy dialogue, planning or budget proposals.
- Over time, a basis for tracking progress and understanding what is changing, what could be improved, and where support is needed.

Why does this matter?

Using the tool brings evidence, rights and lived experience into the same conversation. It helps decision-makers and their partners move beyond isolated initiatives towards more connected, equitable and sustainable systems of partnership, where reflection and data together drive continuous improvement.

Section 4.6 outlines how the tool can be tailored to different contexts while maintaining coherence across stakeholder perspectives.

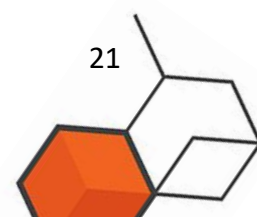
4.6 Adaptation and flexibility

The tool is comprehensive and practical, covering key dimensions of partnership across different stakeholder perspectives while allowing for local adaptation. Each country, region or, where relevant, individual institution can tailor the tool to its context – for example, by combining similar questions, simplifying language or focusing on selected areas that require greater attention. The number of questions and the level of detail can be adjusted depending on purpose, capacity and available time.

EASNIE does not plan to produce separate national or local versions. Instead decision-makers (in most cases the responsible ministries) and partners are encouraged to adapt the tool locally while keeping it consistent with the overall framework. This approach supports the use of the tool as a shared reference point rather than a fixed template, allowing it to remain relevant as priorities, resources and conditions change.

Ultimately, what matters is that the tool supports authentic dialogue grounded in evidence and lived experience, and helps systems move step by step towards stronger, more equitable and more connected partnerships.

Section 5 outlines the core areas that form the foundation of the tool and explains why each is essential for building inclusive and sustainable partnerships across education systems and local contexts.





5. THE CORE AREAS

The tool is structured around a set of core areas that describe the conditions for meaningful, equitable and sustainable partnership. Each area draws on existing EASNIE frameworks, international evidence and practical insights from member countries. Together, they provide a coherent way of examining how collaboration is built and sustained across stakeholder groups within education systems.

The core areas apply to all partners. While their focus and examples differ across stakeholder groups and contexts, the same underlying logic applies: each partner engages with these areas from its own perspective and sphere of responsibility. This shared structure enables the tool to function as a common framework for reflection and dialogue across the system.

Below is an overview of what each area covers.

Area 1. Legislation and policy (curriculum embedded)

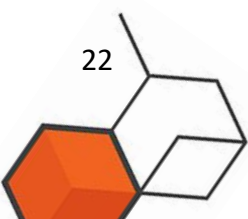
This area covers how partnership is reflected in legislation, education strategies and policy frameworks, including:

- clear articulation of partners' rights and responsibilities;
- mechanisms for co-ordination, accountability and feedback;
- cross-ministerial and cross-sector alignment;
- curriculum and assessment frameworks that support accessibility and respond to learner diversity;
- safeguards that help prevent exclusion and promote equitable participation.

Area 2. Governance

This area covers how governance structures at national, regional and local points of decision-making support participation, co-ordination and accountability, including:

- clear allocation of responsibilities for partner engagement;
- formal representation of partners in councils or advisory boards;
- transparent feedback and accountability mechanisms;
- co-ordination that helps national strategies connect to local realities;
- attention to participation among under-represented groups.





Area 3. Funding and resource allocation

This area covers how financial and material resources support inclusive partnerships, for example by:

- establishing funding mechanisms that enable partnership activities;
- ensuring transparent and accessible allocation processes;
- providing targeted support to partners facing barriers to engagement;
- paying attention to whether resources reach and effectively support their intended groups.

Area 4. Quality assurance, accountability and system data

This area covers how evidence, information and feedback are used to strengthen partnership practice, including:

- reflecting on how partnership resources are used and how they contribute to intended aims;
- collecting and analysing information on accessibility and the quality of engagement across partners;
- ensuring that partner input meaningfully informs policy and practice.

Area 5. Capacity building and inclusive leadership

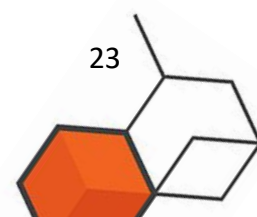
This area covers how the system supports the development of competences, confidence and conditions that allow partnerships to thrive, including:

- embedding partnership-related competences in teacher and leader development;
- providing on-going professional learning opportunities for staff on collaboration and equity;
- strengthening the capacity of families, learners and communities to engage confidently in decision-making.

Area 6. Collaboration, communication and co-operation

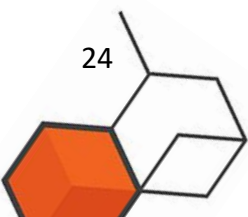
This area covers how communication and co-ordination operate within and across the education system, including:

- structured two-way dialogue among decision-makers, schools, families, learners and communities;
- cross-sector co-ordination (education, health, social services, etc.);
- trusted, inclusive feedback mechanisms with clear follow-up and transparency.





These areas provide a coherent framework for reflecting on both structural conditions and everyday practices that support partnership. By engaging with each area from their own standpoint, different stakeholders can identify strengths, recognise gaps and plan shared next steps.





6. CONCLUSION

Partnership is not a peripheral element of inclusive education systems; it is one of their foundations. It shapes how trust is built, how equity is realised and how quality becomes sustainable over time. Decision-makers play a central role in creating the enabling conditions for this, not by acting alone, but by working alongside schools, families, learners and communities as equal partners in a shared system of responsibility.

The self-reflection tool was developed to support this work. It offers a framework for examining what is already in place, recognising strengths and identifying where further progress is possible. Its purpose is both practical and aspirational: to help systems take concrete steps while holding a broader vision in which partnership becomes part of everyday practice, as a sustained way of working and learning together rather than a temporary initiative.

By bringing together legislation, governance, resources, quality assurance and data, capacity building, and communication, the tool supports countries in working towards systems that are more coherent, equitable and adaptable over time. It promotes an approach that understands progress through collective learning, shared responsibility and continuous improvement.

Importantly, the tool is not a finished product; it is a starting point. It is designed to develop through dialogue, use and reflection grounded in practice. Countries can work with it as a whole or focus on specific areas, depending on their priorities and capacities. Some may use it for self-reflection; others as a framework to support monitoring, evaluation, data use or participatory review. The guiding questions are intentionally open, describing what a strong partnership can look like while leaving space for countries to define what is most relevant in their own contexts.

The tool applies across decision-making, school, family, learner and community contexts and provides a shared basis for reflection and action. While the same core areas are used, they are approached from different perspectives, creating a common language for dialogue and improvement. Countries that wish to deepen this work can draw on EASNIE's broader support through the CPDS Framework (EASNIE, 2024b), as well as related guidance and resources developed by EASNIE, for example, to review legislation, strengthen co-ordination or reach groups at risk of exclusion.

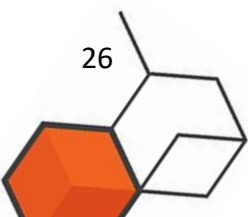
As the tool is used and refined, it can generate shared learning across countries, helping to identify promising practices, persistent barriers, and opportunities for peer exchange. Over time, this collective reflection can strengthen national systems and contribute to the wider European effort to build partnerships that are inclusive, evidence-informed and responsive to change.

Ultimately, the aim is for partnership to become a steady and reliable part of how education systems work, shaping how decisions are made, how trust is built and how responsibility is shared. When collaboration becomes systematic instead of occasional or project-based, inclusion deepens, participation expands, and education becomes more connected, equitable and responsive to every learner.





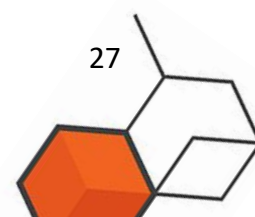
EASNIE will continue working with its member countries in this process, gathering insights, sharing experiences and supporting collective reflection as the tool continues to develop. In this way, partnership becomes not only a shared goal, but a shared journey grounded in reflection, trust and continuous learning, strengthening equity, inclusion and the collective resilience of education systems.





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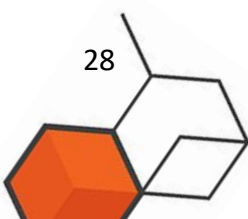
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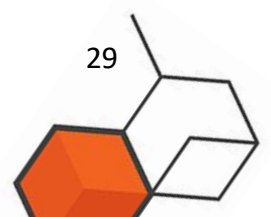
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