



Embedding **eTwinning** in national educational policies from practice to policy

Monitoring Report 2021



Erasmus+

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KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key findings

- Among the national policies and approaches analysed, eTwinning is embedded in national educational policies to varied degrees, with specificities depending on national contextual factors.
- eTwinning's alignment with the scope and/or the content of national educational policies and curricula, although present in many cases, can be further strengthened to better embed eTwinning in national systems.



- eTwinning is mostly aligned with and supports the implementation of national policies on teachers' professional development, especially for 21st-century skills.
- When involvement in eTwinning is recognised at official level, this may be either formally or non-formally accompanied by a certain type of reward (e.g., salary, promotion, positive non-formal impact on evaluation).
- Some Initial Teacher Education institutions have already included eTwinning in their curricula.
- eTwinning's overall objectives are part of and/or consistent with the national competence-based approach of the curricula.
- eTwinning introduces and promotes innovative pedagogical approaches that foster pupils' participation, motivation and learning, which are key priorities in all countries.
- Internationalisation among pupils, teachers and schools, one of the key assets of eTwinning, is a priority for all the countries analysed.
- eTwinning increases pupils' motivation, energy and commitment for eTwinning projects, but also for other school subjects.

Key recommendations

- Promoting or referencing eTwinning in national official documents would legitimise the importance of eTwinning among teachers who are less keen to challenge their methodology and teaching practice.
- Enhancing participants' understanding of the links between Erasmus+ and eTwinning, to maximise their impact, through closer cooperation and coordination between the National Erasmus+ Agencies and the National Support Organisations.
- Promoting eTwinning as a bigger “package” in conjunction with other projects and activities would benefit all parties involved.
- Strengthening eTwinning in Initial Teacher Education and initial training for school leaders would prepare future teachers and principals for innovative practices and encourage national policies to accommodate their needs.
- Providing support to eTwinning Ambassadors would facilitate the uptake of eTwinning also at official level, through a bottom-up approach.



Executive Summary

eTwinning – The community for schools in Europe – is a free online educational community of more than 946,000 registered users, the majority of whom are teachers at every school level. They work together online in a range of activities from projects between schools at national and international level, to collaborative spaces and professional development opportunities. The action is funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme.

For the past seven years eTwinning's monitoring activities have comprised the following approaches:

1. A quantitative large-scale survey of eTwinners' teaching practices and professional development activities and needs, carried out in 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2019.
2. A complementary qualitative monitoring activity, comprising upscaling the self-assessment pilot on teachers' competence development – "Monitoring eTwinning Practice (MeTP)" – carried out in 2015 and 2017.
3. A mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative analysis of eTwinning School practices conducted in 2020.

In this context, the focus of the 2021 qualitative Monitoring Report is to **investigate the impact of "embedding eTwinning" in national policies on three main areas: professional development and recognition, curriculum integration and innovative pedagogy**. The Report adopts an integrated approach by combining data obtained from the conducted focus groups with the desk research carried out at national and European level.

Specifically, the **first chapter** provides an overview of the eTwinning monitoring activities completed so far, with a focus on policy-related aspects, which delimit the impact areas of eTwinning on the national educational policies. The **second chapter** outlines the aim of the present Monitoring Report, describes the methodology adopted and illustrates the framework based on which the qualitative data were obtained and analysed. The **third chapter** adopts a mixed approach by synthesising the data deriving from the desk research and the focus groups per country, an approach

that facilitates an enriched contextualised understanding of the national status of eTwinning. The **fourth chapter** presents the results according to the aims defined, by adopting an integrated approach based on all country data, while the **fifth chapter** presents the concluding remarks.

The results of the Report confirm those of the previous editions and move one step further by providing some initial evidence on the embedding of eTwinning in national educational policies, given the diverse national contexts. Specifically, it was reported that eTwinning

impacts teachers' personal, professional and career development by improving their key competences and pedagogical knowledge and skills, and by bringing internationalisation to teachers' careers. Such elements have been found to be in line with the national educational policy objectives of the countries involved in the Report. As far as Initial Teacher Education is concerned, although the action is on its first steps and several challenges have arisen, it was noted that **eTwinning enhances future teachers' key**

competences. Concurrently, eTwinning is acknowledged to have **inspired national initiatives and practices** for teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and to have **expanded the available offers**, providing support to an increasing number of teachers, especially during the pandemic. In a few countries, eTwinning CPD is officially recognised and rewarded, while in other cases it is unofficially perceived positively in teachers' careers, evaluation and/or career advancement interviews.

Additionally, it was illustrated that eTwinning is **unofficially integrated in the majority of national curricula**, although several Ministries reinforce eTwinning via circulars and other policy



documents such as national strategies and action plans. In this regard, it was acknowledged that eTwinning is **compatible with the competence-based approach of several countries** and/or aligned with the competences that pupils are expected to gain, as reflected in the national objectives set out in legislation or the national curricula. It was also stressed that there is a significant **impact on pupils' key competences and on raising their motivation**, which are also considered key priorities across the countries participating in the Report, without, however, any direct link with early leaving. Despite the fact that eTwinning projects can be directly implemented by teachers, **school leadership has also been reported to be an important lever of implementing eTwinning** across all countries, by encouraging teachers, supporting them at practical level and endorsing a whole-school approach which results in long-lasting effects. In this regard, both the national Ministries and the NSOs encourage the engagement of school leaders in eTwinning and aim at strengthening their involvement in their future actions.

At pedagogical level, eTwinning has been reported to **impact schools' image since it contributes to schools' internationalisation and openness** both at local/regional and international level, as well as to schools' innovation, acting as role models for other schools. Both schools' internationalisation and innovation constitute objectives of the national educational systems of all countries involved in the current Monitoring Report, thus, eTwinning is also aligned with the respective national educational policies. Moreover, it has been noted that eTwinning **has impacted teachers' pedagogical practices in teaching and assessment** by introducing various digital apps/tools and pupil-centred approaches such as project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and mainly authentic and situated learning, which all promote pupils' learning. In this regard, it was suggested that eTwinning constitutes more an overarching methodology rather than a tool or action, which has resulted in **reshaping teachers' image**, since eTwinning teachers and Ambassadors are considered more innovative, active and social, and as **frontrunners with advanced digital and collaborative competences**. Specifically, it was highlighted that both eTwinning teachers and Ambassadors have a strong sense of belonging to the eTwinning community, actively supporting other teachers by sharing ideas and solutions and organising webinars and courses. This **peer-learning**

approach is also endorsed by several countries, where teacher networks constitute a fundamental element of the educational system.

Finally, the Report mapped the challenges that the countries have faced in their attempt to embed eTwinning at national level, and the further actions and support that are needed in order to maximise the uptake of eTwinning in national educational policies. Indicatively, it was reported that **expanding eTwinning to non-involved teachers** is a remaining challenge for all countries, since there are several misconceptions among teachers and school leaders that the current Report has identified. Additionally, **contextual factors** such as educational reforms, well-established approaches such as the use of school textbooks and aspects related to funding and visibility have been described as factors that hinder the embedding of eTwinning at national level. Nevertheless, the focus group participants have outlined several **further actions and the kind of support needed** to strengthen eTwinning, including the production of information leaflets, the valorisation of eTwinning in Erasmus+, the promotion of eTwinning in conjunction with other projects and activities and the emphasis on Initial Teacher Education and school leadership.

1. Overview of eTwinning Monitoring Activities

The concept of monitoring presents a highly diversified spectrum of interpretations depending not only on the context and the content in which it is applied, but also on the scope and focus that it adopts. However, in general terms, monitoring can be seen as a systematic process of collecting data regarding the implementation of a programme, project or practice, in order to gain valuable learning and make informed decisions for the future.



In that sense, the Central Support Service (CSS) has been monitoring eTwinning for the last fourteen years in relation to various aspects including teachers' practice, competences and professional development, school projects, community building, shared leadership and pupils' participation.¹ As an integral part of the action's long-term monitoring programme, monitoring eTwinning provides insights on the responsiveness, engagement and effectiveness of the support provided, while

at the same time informs the CSS about prospective advances that may lead to better outcomes.

Depending on the scope of the monitoring activity, various approaches, either qualitative or quantitative, have been employed so far, including website analytics, user analytics, surveys, case studies, as well as collecting data during workshops, meetings and conferences. Yet, for the last six years, a mixed method approach (Creswell, 2009) has been adopted by integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to better explore, understand or further build on the results.

Given this context, the present chapter of the 2021 eTwinning Monitoring Report provides an overview of the eTwinning monitoring

1 An exhaustive overview of the monitoring activities content is beyond the scope of this chapter. Further information and details may be retrieved from: <https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/newsroom/research-monitoring.htm>

activities completed so far, with a focus on policy-related aspects, which delineate the three impact areas of eTwinning on the national educational policies and highlight areas that have guided the current monitoring activity. In other words, and slightly modifying the quotation from Maya Angelou, the aim here is to become aware of

“where we come from, in order to know where we are going.”

1.1. Previous eTwinning Monitoring Activities

During the first steps of eTwinning three reports were produced by the Pedagogical Advisory Group in the form of “Reflections on eTwinning”, with the aim of exploring and providing some initial evidence on the contribution of eTwinning to pupils, teachers and schools.

The first report laid emphasis on collaboration in eTwinning and highlighted four main topics: collaborative teaching and collaborative learning, teachers’ professional development, the role of ICT and the added value of eTwinning. The Report also highlighted that **eTwinning may have a major effect on school policy towards the teaching of certain aspects of the curriculum**, while at the same time it provides relatively easy ways of participating in international projects. However, the Report also indicated that **both the culture of the school and the national educational policy play a significant role in the implementation of collaborative pedagogical approaches** and the adoption of collaborative pedagogical practice in teachers’ everyday practice (Galvin, Gilleran, Hogenbirk, Hunya, Selinger & Zeidler 2006a).

The second report focused on pedagogical issues in eTwinning such as the content and the responsibility of learning, and the pedagogical relationship between teachers and learners (Galvin, Gilleran, Hogenbirk, Hunya, Selinger & Zeidler, 2006b). Finally, the third report addressed pupils’ and teachers’ cultural understanding and integration, and teachers’ professional development (Galvin, Gilleran, Hogenbirk, Hunya, Selinger & Zeidler, 2007). In relation to teachers’ professional development, the Report acknowledged that **joining an eTwinning action can be part of a policy**

for professional development of the teachers involved, as well as a part of a whole-school policy for the school as a learning community. Namely, it was highlighted that schools may **generate a policy paper on eTwinning in order to raise the involvement of the whole school and make it part of the school policy and school life, with the aim of improving the key competences of learners and of the staff** (Galvin, Gilleran, Hogenbirk, Hunya, Selinger & Zeidler, 2007).

In 2008-2009 a refurbished eTwinning platform was launched, based on implicit and explicit suggestions from the community of over 50,000 eTwinners registered at that time, including new Web 2.0 tools, learning events and eTwinning Groups. That year's Monitoring Report showed, among other things, that **teachers suggest that official recognition for the time and effort spent on projects, and for the skills developed, would improve eTwinning in the future** (Crawley, Gilleran, Scimeca, Vuorikari & Wastiau, 2009). Moving on, the 2009 Report explored the new features of the platform as well as the social and professional benefits of eTwinning. Among the main findings, it was emphasised that **eTwinning supports teachers' professional development** through workshops, learning events, and training events organised by National Support Services² (Crawley, Gerhard, Gilleran & Joyce, 2009).



In 2010, the Report aimed at identifying the **relationship between eTwinning and professional development in general, as well as at exploring the practice in professional development policy in three countries** (Estonia, Poland and Spain). The main conclusions reached were:

- eTwinning supports the goals of professional development programmes at least to some extent in 58% of the 31 participating countries
- the status of eTwinning as part of the formal professional development and

2 This is the former name of the National Support Organisations (NSOs) which operate at national level.

career advancement programmes is an important feature in these countries

- in most countries, eTwinning remains limited to teachers who are “innovators” in using ICT for cross-country school collaboration
- eTwinning allows for upskilling teachers’ key competences for lifelong learning
- eTwinning is not a trigger for professional development, but an added value.

Based on these conclusions it is stated that **eTwinning may have a greater impact at European, national and local level, if it is given recognition as the “professional development network”** (Vuorikari, 2010).

In order to explore further the impact of eTwinning, the 2011 Monitoring Report focused on pupils’ participation in eTwinning activities. Through the analysis of 24 case studies, the Report highlighted that **eTwinning supports inclusion in mainstream education and promotes pupils’ emotional engagement** (Wastiau, Crawley & Gilleran, 2011). In 2012, eTwinning teams³ were in the spotlight of the Monitoring Report. The Report acknowledged that **access to resources and information, professional development, rewards and recognition constitute incentives and enablers** for the eTwinning teams. On the contrary, **time demands, technological deficiencies, lack of training, official support and recognition, and non-motivated colleagues** were seen as obstacles (Vuorikari, 2012).

In 2014-2015, the eTwinning monitoring activities consisted of two parts: a quantitative large-scale survey of eTwinners’ teaching practices and professional development activities and needs, and a small-scale qualitative pilot study tracking the progress of teachers’ pedagogical and digital competence development while working in eTwinning projects. Among the key messages, it was stressed that **over half of all respondents (57%) stated that an eTwinning certificate is useful for their career development**. The Report also suggested that in order to **ensure a sustainable and school-wide impact, eTwinning should be**

³ eTwinning teams are defined as two or more school staff (teachers, librarians) working together on eTwinning activities.



more effectively embedded at the level of the whole school. Additionally, school heads and senior school management should be involved to raise awareness of eTwinning and heighten the chances of eTwinning practices to influence school policy (Kearney & Gras-Velázquez, 2015).

In 2016, the Monitoring Report evaluated and reported on the use of the MeTP (Monitoring eTwinning Practice) reflection tool⁴ in self- and peer assessment to track teachers' competence development during eTwinning activities. The Report showed that **to enhance the recognition of teachers' work on the MeTP, it would be helpful to include the starting level and ultimate level of the competences, on the certificate received** (Kearney, 2016). Moving on to 2017, the Report illustrated that:

- teachers working in innovative schools⁵ report a higher perceived impact of eTwinning
- the **introduction of targeted national policies** in collaboration with the National Support Services may raise teachers' participation from less innovative schools
- **eTwinning teachers and Ambassadors, pupils, the NSS and head teachers are the main actors in developing eTwinning, while Ministries and other educational authorities are not considered to have any real impact** (Kearney & Gras-Velázquez, 2018).

Given that the MeTP activity of 2016 was a pilot initiative, the 2018 Report presented and reported the results of a newly updated framework, accompanied by an enriched methodology which included the collaborative competence. Among other findings, the Report indicated that the teachers involved in this self-reflection process **perceived MeTP as tool that enhanced their motivation to participate in more eTwinning activities, as they can track their competence development which in turn boosts their self-efficacy** (Pateraki, 2018). In 2019, the third edition of the monitoring survey confirmed several results of the previous ones and provided new insights. Specifically, the Report highlighted that:

4 The current MeTP tool can be accessed by eTwinners at: <https://metp.etwinning.net/>

5 Schools in which *"teachers strongly agree or agree that there is involvement in innovative practices, promotion of collaboration among teachers, active participation in international projects, and engagement in self-evaluation"* (Kearney & Gras-Velázquez, 2015: 18).



- eTwinning has a positive effect on the development of teachers' professional identity in terms of growing their confidence in their own abilities and fostering a sense of citizenship at both national and European level
- there is an **increasing role of Ministries of Education in providing information for eTwinning**, but they are among the least influential in helping the development of eTwinning in schools
- at **Ministry level across Europe, there is an unevenness in their official response to recognising eTwinning Professional Development activities** (Gilleran, 2019).



Finally, the 2020 Report explored how eTwinning Schools⁶ operate and endorse a shared leadership approach by examining their practices through a mixed method analysis. The Report revealed that **eTwinning Schools may serve as examples for other schools since they constitute innovative and inclusive learning organisations** that establish a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration. Based on these remarks, the Report suggests that the eTwinning School Label may constitute a step-by-step guide for schools in order to integrate the eTwinning School Mission as part of each school's mission. However, ways to involve the whole school community (teachers, pupils, principals, parents) in eTwinning activities are needed. In doing so, **eTwinning Schools need to receive more recognition and support at all levels, European, national and regional, as guidance cannot rely solely on eTwinning (via the CSS, NSS, the platform itself) but should become part of the common practice of national educational policies** (Licht, Pateraki & Scimeca, 2020).

6 eTwinning Schools are schools registered in eTwinning for more than two years, that have at least three active eTwinning teachers, organise promotional activities and participate in professional development opportunities and eTwinning projects. eTwinning Schools have been selected via a rigorous process which identifies their level of activities, their understanding of Internet safety issues, and their potential for acting as Ambassadors, promoters, and leaders who model eTwinning for other schools. eTwinning Schools are examples of how whole schools can benefit from eTwinning (Licht, Pateraki & Scimeca, 2020: 5).

2. Methodology

Each year, the annual eTwinning Monitoring Report endeavours to capture the key accomplishments and milestones of eTwinning in relation to [various topics](#), as well as the areas of further development and improvement, to promote eTwinning and support pupils, teachers and schools in an effective way.

The focus of the 2021 Monitoring Report is to **investigate the impact of “embedding eTwinning” in national policies on three main areas: professional development and recognition, curriculum integration and innovative pedagogy**. The notion of “embedding eTwinning” derives from the assumption that eTwinning encompasses a set of both tools and methodologies which can – and should – serve national educational policies and support teachers for their own specific needs. “Embedding” is then seen as a way to **promote, recognise, leverage and further deploy eTwinning at national level**.

The notion of impact has been further operationalised based on the following sub-areas:

Areas	Actions	Impact on:
Professional development and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal integration in the system of teachers’ pre-service and in-service career development Policy framework in collaboration with other partners/actors at national level Initial Teacher Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers’ professionalisation in 21st-century skills Stimulating career development and (re)shaping teachers’ image
Curriculum integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher-based approach (e.g., own initiative) School-based approach (e.g., role of school leadership) Systemic approach (e.g., in textbooks, official curricula) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internationalisation of curriculum Transversal and soft skills Key competences for teachers and pupils
Innovative pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European collaboration Integration of new pedagogies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European dimension Methodological and pedagogical upskilling for schools and teachers Tackling early leaving

Table 1: Areas of eTwinning’s impact on national policies.

The aim of this Report is to:

- explore whether and to what extent eTwinning has been “embedded” in national systems
- identify the challenges that arise in the attempt to embed eTwinning in national policies, and the further actions and support needed
- illustrate the impact at systemic level according to policy-makers and power users on the three aforementioned areas
- collect evidence of impact at national and European level through the use of focus groups and identify any potential trends and patterns across the countries.



The data obtained for the 2021 qualitative report derive from the results of discussion in eight **focus groups** that were completed in April 2021 and involved eight countries: Finland, France, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey. The selection criteria reflect both a geographical distribution and the anticipation of evidence in these countries, based on information received in the workshop carried out with the Ministries of Education in the eTwinning Conferences in 2019 and 2020. Each focus group was dedicated to one country and was composed of at least one representative from the national Ministry of Education, the National support Organisation (NSO), an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Institute, a school head and a power user (eTwinning Ambassador or experienced eTwinner). However, in some focus groups, there were more than one representative from the Ministry and/or the ITE Institution.

Data analysis was performed through content analysis, based on the framework illustrated in Table 1. We created categories and subcategories of the related content by country (data reduction) and looked for potential similarities across data (data clustering). Data were obtained through **desk research** and input from documents, circulars, regulations at national level and the discussions in the focus groups. It should then be noted that the data provided below, although grounded as much as possible on the evidence gathered through desk research, also unavoidably reflects the perceptions of the focus group participants and should be interpreted with this in mind.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AT COUNTRY LEVEL

The present chapter adopts a mixed approach by synthesising the data which derived from the desk research and the focus groups. The data analysis at country level allows for a deeper understanding, while this integrated approach supplements and enriches the analysis; thus leading to more concrete, validated and contextualised results.



3.1. Finland

The Finnish educational system is based on national structures which provide guidance at the local-regional level, since there is a high level of autonomy and local decision-making, reflecting the principle that *“the education system is based on trust and responsibility”*.⁷ In this context, the focus group data suggest that eTwinning can be one of the tools that teachers may use in their everyday teaching practice, but the final decision for doing so (or not) depends on them. Additionally, it was reported that the curricula are developed in a democratic way; an expert group of teachers, school representatives and the Finnish National Agency for Education under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture produce the curriculum collaboratively, while at a later stage all teachers, some of whom might be eTwinning teachers, principals, municipalities, parents, and

stakeholders may provide their comments and recommendations (Halinen, 2018).

Regarding **teachers’ Continuous Professional Development (CPD)**, it was acknowledged that eTwinning has impacted teachers’ digital competence in terms of using diverse digital and mobile applications in their teaching. In turn, it was emphasised, that teachers’ image has also been affected since they are considered more innovative, and more inclined to develop their own work and try new things without being afraid of making mistakes. This is an important remark since digital learning, innovation and teachers’ competence are included in the five strategic priorities of the Finnish education system (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016a). It was also highlighted that although all Finnish adults and teachers are more digitally competent than before the pandemic, eTwinners have a different base with a diversified and rich array of tools and more advanced skills. As

⁷ Further information can be found at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/finland_en

highlighted in the focus group discussion, Finnish teachers had a number of tools to work with during the pandemic, including eTwinning. However, some teachers were more proficient than others, and some schools were better prepared. Apart from using new digital tools, eTwinning has also impacted their pedagogical practice since they experiment with different approaches and adopt a student-centred and inclusive approach. This is further supported by the research conducted by Ilomäki and Lakkala (2012) who highlight that good eTwinning projects provide teachers with a new perspective on teaching and pedagogical practices, and by Auramo (2017), who concluded that eTwinning impacts teachers' personal and pedagogical development and practices.

Additionally, it was highlighted that eTwinning promotes teachers' personal and professional development through the Learning Events organised at central level and through the events organised by the NSO, the Ambassadors and colleagues of the National Agency, which all improve teachers' knowledge and skills. Although in Finland, there are no credits for professional development at all (Eurydice, 2021) and therefore there is no official recognition for the eTwinning offers, still the main benefit of eTwinning is seen as a way of introducing innovation and internationalisation in teachers' careers, resulting in more open and networked teachers. This is particularly important since one of the main challenges in Finland is to promote teachers' collaboration, and their local and international networking (Lavonen, 2020). Moreover, based on the focus group data, the same applies

to schools, as eTwinning contributes to schools' internationalisation and attractiveness. Given that special emphasis is laid on schools' internationalisation, as described in the Finnish pyramid model (Finnish National Board of Education, 2021), eTwinning supports pupils, teachers and schools to promote their intercultural competence and benefit from an international activity. This is also in line with the Finnish Action Plan report for Global Education which clearly states: *"To develop Finnish education, students, teachers and schools need to actively participate in international collaboration"* (Doyle, 2017: foreword).

As regards **Initial Teacher Education** (ITE), the connection between eTwinning and teacher education is considered important, since *"bringing all these tools into teachers' careers early is key"*, as reported in the focus group. Indicatively, eTwinning has been introduced in the University of Eastern Finland (UEF) and the staff warmly welcomed this initiative, while it has also expanded in two other universities. Additionally, based on the Finnish Teacher Education Development Programme, the working methods of the institutions need to be, *inter alia*, communal and learner-oriented providing physical, digital and social learning environments (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016b). Such elements can be provided by eTwinning with the aim of supporting teacher educators and future teachers at national and international level.

Regarding **curriculum integration**, the focus group participants commented that there are national core curricula at national

level which outline the objectives, the core content and other instruction-related aspects. However, decisions on how these learning objectives will be met, and to a certain degree the details of the content and of the pedagogical approaches to be used, are made at a local level. In this regard, the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014) contains several elements that relate to what eTwinning touches upon, such as digitalisation, project-based learning, and multidisciplinary and cross-curricular teaching (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). Therefore, the focus group participants emphasised that eTwinning is in line with the Finnish educational policy and the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, which is rather promising for facilitating its integration in teachers' practices at national level with the backing of the NSO and the Finnish National Agency for Education.⁸

Although eTwinning is quite well known and widespread in Finland, it is not used by every school or every educational provider, since the decision-making power is at the municipal and school level. Therefore, as indicated in the focus group, both teachers' leadership and school leadership are key in promoting and embedding eTwinning across Finnish schools. Specifically, at personal level, pupils benefiting from eTwinning are those whose teachers are more active and dynamic in taking initiatives, while, at school level, school principals play an important role in providing teachers and Ambassadors with the necessary resources (e.g., time) to carry out eTwinning projects. Nevertheless, the focus group data suggest

that this might have both a positive and a negative interpretation. On the one hand, both levels of leadership may lead, to a certain extent, to inequality not only in relation to eTwinning but also to the internationalisation of education in general. On the other hand, it reflects the fact that eTwinning can be embedded in Finnish schools, due to the autonomy and flexibility of teachers and municipal authorities in designing the local curriculum, which, according to Lavonen (2020), allows innovative approaches to be introduced across the educational system.

Additionally, in the Finnish core curriculum for compulsory education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016), the goals are formulated in such a way that teachers should encourage students to collaborate in international projects, get networked and use ICT tools, aspects that are all covered by eTwinning according to the focus group participants' views. Specifically, the collected data suggest that eTwinning impacts pupils' digital, linguistic, collaborative and intercultural competences and promotes their innovative, creative and critical thinking skills. However, according to Saarinen and her colleagues (2019), Finnish teachers still face challenges regarding the integration of transversal competences into classroom teaching and learning. Hence, it can be assumed that eTwinning can be further embedded among Finnish teachers with the aim of supporting them in addressing transversal competences in their teaching practice. For instance, a Finnish study (Pudas, 2015) on global education as part of Finnish basic education

8 Further information can be found here: <https://www.oph.fi/fi/ohjelmat/mika-etwinning>

acknowledges the contribution of eTwinning as a cross-border activity, reported both by teachers and pupils, that contributes to the development of their global competence. As far as pupils' linguistic competences are concerned, the focus group members agreed that eTwinning enhances pupils' multilingualism, especially in terms of self-confidence, an aspect that is acknowledged in the Finnish Procedural Recommendations for developing Finland's national language reserve (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

At the same time, as well as pupils' competences, eTwinning also impacts the pedagogical dynamics of the classroom. During the focus group, it was highlighted that eTwinning is inclusive, it enhances pupils' motivation and equal participation and provides the time and space for pupils' flourishing, elements that are in line with the basic principles of Finnish education (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture & Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). For instance, in the focus group discussion it was reported that working with digital tools in eTwinning gives voice to the quiet pupils, since they do not need to fight for space, as well as time for those who may be a little bit slower in comparison with the rest of the classroom. Additionally, eTwinning projects acknowledge pupils' competences in certain tasks that teachers might not be aware of, such as expressing themselves and creating visual artefacts. At policy level, these features are also aligned with the national objectives as set out in the Finnish Basic Education – Excellence through Equity for All Report (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018).

In terms of **pedagogical approaches**, during the focus group it was illustrated that: *“eTwinning has been a real revelation as it offers different kinds of student-centred and hands-on learning methods, project-based learning, digital tools and especially authentic and collaborative learning.”* This is also highlighted in Pudas' (2015) research on global education, in which she acknowledges the successful implementation of eTwinning in providing opportunities to organise real-life activities and authentic communication contexts, and in increasing pupils' motivation and active participation. Furthermore, the focus group discussion indicated that co-teaching and co-learning, teaching and learning together with students, is an approach that the Finnish educational system promotes; in that respect, it was suggested that the eTwinning methodology is highly compatible with this approach since collaborative learning occurs among pupils, but also between pupils and teachers. This pattern was reported to be evident also in Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) and in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), since there are collaborative work, project-based learning, hands-on learning and international cooperation that serve their needs. During the pandemic, the teacher training school under the University of Eastern Finland used eTwinning as a way of promoting collaboration by engaging future teachers in small thematic groups. This collaborative peer-to-peer support echoes the objectives of the Teacher Education Development Programme (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016b), indicating that eTwinning can be a practical way of promoting collaborative work in Initial Teacher Education.

According to the focus group discussion, some of the challenges pertaining to embedding eTwinning in the national educational system include policy- and culture-related factors. Specifically, eTwinning cannot be explicitly written into the national legislation or the national core curricula, as concrete references to specific projects and initiatives in official documents are not a common practice. According to participants' views, this suggests that softer tools than legislation or directives should be deployed in order to further embed eTwinning in Finnish educational practices. An alternative suggestion was to make concrete references to eTwinning in the local curricula at the municipality level, so it can be further promoted at local and school level. The basis of this argument lies in the fact that the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education provides public education providers, municipalities and private education providers with the flexibility to create local curricula and annual plans which need to be aligned with the national core curriculum but may also address local specificities (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). Moreover, based on the collected data, it was reported that in order to maximise the promotion of eTwinning at school level, it is important to raise awareness among the directors of culture and education, as well as among school principals. For instance, it was recommended that eTwinning could be included in national seminars and conferences addressed to school leaders and offer a professional development path for school leaders at European level. Additionally, it was noted that the eTwinning Ambassadors should

also be supported in their work as they have an important multiplying effect, while introducing the role of the "eTwinning Head Teacher Ambassador" might also be an effective way of promoting eTwinning among school leaders.

Another challenge, described during the focus group discussion is the Erasmus accredited schools which have raised a lot of interest among school principals and municipalities due to the long-term funding of international activities. To tackle this challenge, the focus group data indicate that eTwinning could be approached in conjunction with other projects and activities that can provide answers to interesting questions such as *"How can I develop my own school?"* or *"How can I internationalise my school?"*. It was commented that eTwinning could be brought from its own world to the spheres of other activities and be promoted as a whole. Moreover, the focus group participants suggested that eTwinning Schools could be renamed or rebranded to reflect that they are not just schools in which eTwinning projects are implemented. At a broader level, since eTwinning supports many of the quality criteria for the accreditation process of Erasmus+, such as inclusion, sustainability and ICT, it was highlighted that eTwinning could be promoted as a tool that contributes towards this direction at European level.

Finally, the participants highlighted that teachers depend on good-quality school textbooks because learning and teaching is based on local authorities and teachers following the national curricula for which they may choose the material

they deem appropriate. Integrative and multidisciplinary modules⁹ are required in the national curricula. Thus, it was recommended that additional guidance and inspiration should be provided to teachers and school principals to motivate them and

engage them both in eTwinning and peer-to-peer learning. eTwinning materials could be then produced and promoted with the aim of showcasing how eTwinning can be integrated across school subjects.



3.2. France

The French national policy encourages schools¹⁰ to develop international collaborations with other partners (French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 2016). Based on the focus group data, eTwinning is seen as a useful tool that contributes to schools' internationalisation, providing opportunities for transnational collaborative projects among pupils and teachers. Also, in preparation for the French Presidency of the Council of the EU, the French Ministry of Education has called on schools to intensify their involvement in European activities and announced an ambitious goal of 100% of schools establishing a partnership with a European school by June 2022 (French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 2021a). This call appears in a circular which identifies eTwinning as a key tool for schools, along with the Erasmus+ programme in general (French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 2021b). In addition to the circular, a Ministry

guide titled "*Le guide des possibles*" (Guide to Possibilities) for schools during the European school year 2021-22 promotes the use of eTwinning very strongly (French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 2021c).

Along with the circular and the guide for schools, the Ministry also commissioned a report on ways of increasing the involvement of French schools in European projects and more generally creating a European culture within the school system. This report, written by Ilana Cicurel, Member of the European Parliament, strongly promotes eTwinning as a key component in the process of "Europeanisation" alongside Erasmus+ more generally (Cicurel, 2021). eTwinning is frequently cited in the report and its use by teachers is also included in two of the key recommendations:

- Recommendation 5: strongly encourage teachers to participate in

9 Multidisciplinary learning modules (MLs) are study periods of integrative instruction based on cooperation between subjects. Their implementation should showcase the school's values and conception of learning. The Learning modules express in concrete terms the principles that guide the development of the operating culture of basic education and support the development of transversal competence.

10 Further information can be found at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/france_en

an introductory training module to the eTwinning Platform

- Recommendation 7: make school partnerships available to all by the end of 2022, using eTwinning as the preferred tool.

This report was presented during a meeting between the Minister of Education and the Rectors of French school regions (*académies*) in July 2021, at the presence of the French Ambassadors to EU member states, as well as of Ms Cicurel and the Secretary of State for European Affairs, Clément Beaune. The NSO was also invited to present eTwinning in an opening session for the recent reform of raising internationalisation in language teaching and learning, where heads of international development offices, inspectors and regional directors of the school system were present. Thus, it is observed that there is a strong institutional commitment, recognition and visibility of eTwinning at national level, that is further reinforced by integrating eTwinning in ministerial circulars.

Regarding the impact of eTwinning on **teachers' continuous professional development**, it was highlighted that eTwinning has brought up a Europe-wide approach in training and transformed the tool-centric national approach to training into a more pedagogy-based approach. This seems to be in line with the reference of the French report of the General Inspectorate regarding teachers' international professional development and its impact on their perceptions, and on their pedagogical and technological competences (Tardy, Canvel, Maestacci & Hermit, 2018).

Moreover, the focus group participants commented that eTwinning has also contributed to the creation of webinars as a way of providing training to teachers and Ambassadors. This is a rather interesting statement, since many French teachers, mostly from primary education, experience difficulties in accessing training offers (Paris, 2021). As reported during the focus group there are now approximately 80 webinars that have been organised so far.

Participating in eTwinning also impacts teachers' digital, multilingual and citizenship competence. As discussed in the focus group, eTwinning teachers are more open-minded and willing to discover new things, more adaptable, enthusiastic, dynamic and flexible with advanced collaborative and digital skills. eTwinning teachers have a high sense of belonging, they are social and interested in building and extending their network. Based on participants' views, eTwinning teachers are more confident in joining a network in which they can communicate their needs, get answers to their questions, support others and not feel alone. Such qualities are reflected in the French Education Code, something that illustrates the impact of eTwinning on enriching and empowering teachers' career identity in relation to the national policy (République Française, 2021).

As regards **Initial Teacher Education** (ITE), some French universities have already embedded eTwinning in their curriculum, providing official credits to future teachers. During the focus group discussion it was reported that eTwinning is embedded in some non-compulsory, interdisciplinary courses which adopt project-based learning

approaches; specifically, eTwinning is introduced in the first year of the Master's degree and then in the second year. However, not all ITE Institutions follow the same model, as this is highly dependent on the institution and the staff involved. In this regard, it was stated that there are already new teachers who have experienced eTwinning in their initial teacher training and they are now using eTwinning in their practice. According to the feedback received so far, these teachers suggest that eTwinning has changed their perception of teaching and learning, since they cannot imagine either learning or teaching without digital tools or projects and collaborative work within and outside of schools. The French report *"Le guide des possibles"* has recommended that *"an initiation to the eTwinning platform should be offered to all [future teachers] and that eTwinning can be used in pedagogical experimentations"* (Cicurel, 2021).

Regarding **recognition**, according to the data collected for this report, school inspectors perceive Erasmus+ positively in teachers' career progression, but since very few know eTwinning, it is not widely recognised. However, the French Guide for national education inspectors explicitly mentions eTwinning as a means of searching for international partners, and schools are encouraged to get involved (Agence Erasmus+ France / Education Formation, 2018). Also, the same guide acknowledges eTwinning as a platform that teachers can use in order to search for training offers in Europe. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that eTwinning does not provide any concrete benefits in terms of promotion or salary, although participating

in eTwinning projects is viewed favourably in teachers' career advancement interviews. It should be, however, noted that eTwinning professional development opportunities are officially included in the training plans of the local authorities and the academic regions (Institut des hautes études de l'éducation et de la formation, 2021), but they are not officially recognised, as in the case of the incoming and outgoing mobility programmes (Tardy, Canvel, Maestacci & Hermit, 2018).

As far as **curriculum integration** is concerned, eTwinning is considered a tool and is therefore not compulsory for students and teachers. However, as already mentioned, eTwinning is supported by the national authorities at policy level. Based on the focus group, for the last several years, eTwinning has been mentioned in ministerial circulars and has been connected with language-learning activities in secondary education (French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 2021d). eTwinning is also integrated in the annual week of languages, and there is also a guide and a webinar where eTwinning is included (French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 2021e). In the context of the new Language Learning Plan, which aims to foster foreign language learning throughout schooling (Taylor & Manes-Bonnisseau, 2018), several teachers embed eTwinning in their activities with the aim of involving pupils in transnational distance learning. Additionally, the focus group data suggest that eTwinning is also embedded in citizenship-related activities undertaken by schools or in multidisciplinary projects where teachers use project-based learning.

In terms of **integrating eTwinning at school level**, the role of school principals has been acknowledged as an important factor for disseminating eTwinning and persuading teachers to get involved. In this respect, it was highlighted that the support of the principal encourages teachers and helps them to implement eTwinning projects in their schools. Nevertheless, not all school principals are aware of eTwinning; for this reason, the NSO has developed a short training course for school principals to provide them with the essential information and further promote eTwinning. Also, the Erasmus+ guide designed to support school principals in their work acknowledges the benefits of eTwinning and illustrates how eTwinning activities can be organised at school level (Union Européenne, 2015).

A direct outcome of embedding eTwinning in school activities can be observed in pupils' competences. eTwinning contributes to the development and/or improvement of their digital and multilingual skills, as well as their citizenship competence due to their interaction with people of various cultural backgrounds (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2019). When pupils are involved in eTwinning projects, they interact with other pupils from Europe and their minds are broadened, promoting their intercultural competence (Agence Erasmus+ France / Education Formation, 2017a). Hence, eTwinning is explicitly mentioned in the French Guide for the teaching of modern foreign languages (Agence Erasmus+ France / Education Formation, 2017b), as a tool that can foster pupils' multilingual competence in real-life contexts, indicating that eTwinning is aligned with the skills and

competences set out in the French national curriculum. During the focus group it was also emphasised, that eTwinning raises pupils' motivation and commitment while collaboratively working in international projects, since they feel more confident and interested in being part of a European network. This is also evident in the French proposal for foreign language learning which highlights that pupils' motivation for learning new languages is promoted when learning is linked to projects (Taylor & Manes-Bonnisseau, 2018).

Finally, as regards the impact of eTwinning on **teachers' pedagogical approaches and practices**, the focus group participants identified several benefits. In terms of internationalisation, it was acknowledged that eTwinning is the place where teachers can get trained for European projects, functioning as a key entry point for Erasmus+. Moreover, eTwinning is seen as a pedagogical incubator for new teaching practices and student-centred approaches that can support both teachers' work and pupils' learning via differentiated and more inclusive learning and teaching approaches. For instance, it was described that in an unruly class, pupils behave better during eTwinning projects as they are and feel more engaged in the activities. Furthermore, based on participants' views, one of the greatest pedagogical contributions of eTwinning is that it offers an authentic context for interdisciplinary intercultural work. This is an important aspect for teachers, since interdisciplinarity is strongly encouraged by the French Education Code (République Française, 2021) but, as highlighted in the focus group, it is not always easy to implement.

It was reported that eTwinning provides both the space and the support for teachers to set up interdisciplinary projects in a way that is more natural for teachers and pupils. eTwinning is clearly identified and promoted by the Ministry as a key tool for school partnerships, particularly during the 2021-22 school year “*Une année scolaire européenne*” (French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 2021b). This confirms that eTwinning is considered important and useful for schools at national authorities’ level; however, as described in the focus group, eTwinning is not visible enough at local/school authorities’ level, although recent visibility for eTwinning may help to change this, since there are many challenges, as outlined below.

First, it was stated that many teachers still believe that eTwinning is only for foreign language teachers and that people participating in eTwinning are expected to fully master a language in order to communicate. Many teachers also think that eTwinning is for secondary education due to the time demands and the technical knowledge required, resulting in a low popularity in primary education. Moreover, some schools in several areas do not have the proper infrastructure such as access to the Internet and IT equipment, factors that hinder the implementation of eTwinning projects at school level.

Furthermore, the constant educational reforms, the extensive school system with many teachers facing different challenges, along with the expansion of eTwinning to teachers not already involved, are seen as additional challenges for the embedding of eTwinning at national level. Another

challenge mentioned in the focus group discussion is the fact that French teachers have a high level of self-consciousness, something that probably makes them reluctant to share their practices as they are concerned about being judged by other people. Finally, the link between Erasmus+ and eTwinning is not clear for teachers, although this is explicit in the French Erasmus+ call (French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports, 2019). Based on the focus group data, it was stated that teachers want to be involved in European projects and Erasmus+ as they want to secure financial support for their students through Erasmus+ funding. Therefore, more teachers are aware of Erasmus+ than of eTwinning. However, regional international relations offices may play an important role in promoting eTwinning as a way to get involved in international collaborative projects.

In order to tackle these challenges, it was reported that further information and training for teachers, and further support to eTwinning Ambassadors should be provided. For instance, apart from the testimonials, more good practice of eTwinning projects should be included on the website to illustrate the process of building and implementing an eTwinning project. Another suggestion is that Ambassadors could create some tutored projects with ready-made activities, where they will build an eTwinning project collaboratively with the other teachers. It was also noted that having one teacher per school, not necessarily the language teacher, might help spreading eTwinning in schools. At a broader level, raising awareness about what eTwinning is and what it offers across

all school levels, was reported as another action that could tackle the aforementioned challenges. Regarding school principals, the NSO already introduces eTwinning in the initial training courses addressed to head teachers and inspectors, but not in their continuous training. Based on the focus group data, strengthening this aspect is seen as an action that might lead to better outcomes.

Nevertheless, in order to realise all the above-mentioned actions, the focus group participants identified the additional national and European support which should be in place. At the technical level, it was stated that the current eTwinning

portal is not particularly user-friendly and therefore the new platform would need to be easier to navigate. At teacher level, having short, tutored projects with practices and activities, in which teachers could be directly involved, would demystify several of the misconceptions that teachers have. At national level, if the aim is to expand eTwinning in a school system-wide approach, the number of staff working in the NSO should be increased. Finally, at European level, there are several programmes that are not connected with one another. Establishing links among them and having eTwinning backed up with other programmes would strengthen the dissemination and visibility of eTwinning.



3.3. Greece

In Greece, eTwinning is the most popular programme across the educational system.¹¹ 75% of Greek schools have been involved in it, based on the data obtained from the focus group. It was reported that the strong connection between the Ministry of Education and the NSO has increased the embedding of eTwinning at national level. Specifically, at policy level, eTwinning has been included for several years in the ministerial circulars as a recommended action that can be connected with the extracurricular activities taking place in schools (e.g., environmental projects, wellbeing). It was noted that, although there were two different annual circulars, one for school projects and one

for eTwinning, there is now one circular that promotes a stronger connection between eTwinning and school projects, as well as an apparent connection with the curriculum. Additionally, in the recent introduction of the “Skills Workshops” in primary and secondary education, the embedding of eTwinning is facilitated since it is aligned with its policy objectives and the development of pupils’ competences (Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2021).

The NSO, with the assistance of the Ministry of Education, has supported teachers’ **continuous professional development** through various actions. Indicatively, it was commented that the Annual National eTwinning Conference, the eTwinning

11 Further information can be found at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/greece_en

platform, along with a new MOOC platform for delivering annual courses on pedagogy and distance learning, provided to teachers free of charge, are contributing to their professional development and are promoting their involvement in eTwinning projects. Moreover, the Greek NSO is now planning the launch of a scientific journal for teachers in which they will present their innovative ideas in eTwinning and in collaborative projects in general. The focus group participants also highlighted that continuous professional development is an important feature of Greek teachers; hence, the training offers about various Web tools and diverse alternative pedagogical and methodological approaches have impacted both their competences and their perception of eTwinning as a learning community. For instance, during the pandemic, the Greek NSO organised more than 80 webinars to support teachers in the transition from face-to-face to online distance teaching (Greek National Support Organisation, 2021).

As far as **Initial Teacher Education** is concerned, although “eTwinning for Future Teachers” has only recently been launched at national level, the focus group indicated that it has yielded a great response. Specifically, as soon as the action became known, several universities wanted to join, suggesting that eTwinning is well known not only in compulsory school education but also in tertiary education. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused several delays and raised obstacles regarding its implementation. In general terms, both ITE and teachers’ continuous professional development are important strategic objectives of the Greek Pedagogical

Institute (2010), acknowledging that training courses should be tailored to teachers’ needs. In this respect, eTwinning serves those needs based on the report of the Greek NSO which describes the impact of eTwinning on teachers’ training needs (Konstantinidis, 2010).

The focus group data indicate that the Ambassadors have also played an important role in **disseminating** eTwinning among teachers and schools, supporting the whole eTwinning community at national level. It was stated that the active network of eTwinning Ambassadors, along with the eTwinning professional development opportunities, have attracted thousands of teachers and boosted the sense of community as they can ask questions and receive support based on their needs. Thus, the focus group participants emphasised that eTwinning offers an empowering learning community that Greek teachers and learners really appreciate. Regarding school leadership, it was highlighted that the huge majority of principals promote the implementation of eTwinning in their schools and support their teachers in their projects. This might be the case due to the Greek annual ministerial circular which clearly states that school leaders should facilitate and support teachers in implementing eTwinning projects in schools (Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2020). Based on the focus group it was acknowledged that school leaders play an important role in facilitating the implementation of eTwinning projects at school level. For instance, they encourage and support teachers in relation to their time schedule due to the strict curriculum

constraints and the bureaucratic processes that need to be followed.

The focus group also suggests that eTwinning has promoted teachers' digital and linguistic competences and broadened their vision through the transnational collaborations that teachers and schools can develop. In this regard, the annual circular that is disseminated to all schools acknowledges that eTwinning can promote teachers' international professional development through the different eTwinning opportunities available (Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2020). At national level, it was mentioned that there are courses on the use of tablets and smartphones in distance learning, that teachers attend and adopt in their teaching practice. Also, teachers' evaluation of the annual courses indicates that they increase their collaborative skills as well as their digital and pedagogical competences. This finding seems to be compatible with the national policy for developing teachers' digital competences, as reflected in the Greek Action Plan for Digital Skills (Greek Ministry of Administrative Reconstruction, 2019), in which eTwinning is explicitly described. Although, according to the focus group data, eTwinning professional development is not officially linked to teachers' evaluation, eTwinning projects are recognised and provide extra points to assess teachers' projects, as well as being seen positively in teachers' career interviews. It was also mentioned that in the new legislation for teachers' assessment, eTwinning and Erasmus+ projects will play an important role for those who want to work in experimental schools.

Despite the lack of formal recognition, though, the focus group participants highlighted that eTwinning makes teachers more respected in the teacher community and the wider school community. Specifically, it was reported that eTwinning teachers are highly appreciated by parents and pupils, as well as by other teachers and the Greek Ministry. eTwinners are also considered more resilient and inventive, pioneers in certain fields who show the way to other teachers, inspiring them and supporting them when needed. As described in the focus group, such was the case during the pandemic, where eTwinning teachers supported other colleagues and schools with their digital and pedagogical needs. However, an important challenge noted by the focus group participants is that eTwinning is implemented by active and innovative teachers; thus it remains limited to those who are considered frontrunners. This is an important aspect regarding the wider uptake of eTwinning at national level, which would need further research (Kampylis, Bocconi & Punie, 2012).

Apart from the impact on teachers' image, eTwinning has also impacted schools' image. Based on the collected data, the awarded eTwinning Schools seem to act as role models for other schools. It was also mentioned that eTwinning Schools support other schools and teachers practically via the training events that they organise and the general assistance that they offer. This aspect is further supported by the research conducted by Mpoukla (2018), which highlights the contribution of awarded eTwinning Schools in sharing their practices with colleagues. Thus, the focus group participants emphasised that eTwinning

is disseminated across the whole school ecosystem (pupils, parents, teachers, schools, local community), since awarded eTwinning Schools and several eTwinners are included in press releases and social media groups, spreading the word about eTwinning.

In terms of **curriculum integration**, eTwinning is not officially included in the school curriculum, rather it is strongly encouraged and recommended. As noted during the focus group discussion, eTwinning contributes to the internationalisation of the school education system and brings added value in autonomy and flexibility which in turn leads to creativity. Hence, eTwinning constitutes an auxiliary measure which is aligned with the national objectives set (Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2020), supporting the whole school community in promoting the European dimension. Regarding flexibility and creativity, the data collected indicate that since there is no official instruction to implement eTwinning in the curriculum, eTwinning is informally connected with the curriculum areas, providing teachers with freedom and flexibility. Nevertheless, according to the research conducted by Giotopoulos (2018), the fact that eTwinning is not officially connected with certain curriculum areas causes difficulties for some teachers.

In this regard, the current ministerial policy development of “Skills Workshops” in primary and secondary education (Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2021), provides teachers with the flexibility to implement workshops on various topics, such as digital skills, STEAM, wellbeing,

environmental sustainability, citizenship, creativity and initiative-taking, life skills and soft skills. In this context, eTwinning is recommended and encouraged as an action that can be connected and/or implemented during these workshops (Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2020), while the focus group data suggest that eTwinners have been very well trained in the aforementioned topics due to their involvement in eTwinning projects. One of the challenges mentioned by the focus group participants in relation to embedding eTwinning in the learning process refers to secondary education, as in primary education there is greater flexibility. By contrast, in secondary education there are different disciplines and limited time that do not favour the implementation of European projects (Kostis, 2018).

Furthermore, the ministerial circulars strongly encourage schools to connect eTwinning with the curriculum areas, especially in primary schools, since there is a high compatibility with the topics and competences that can be addressed via eTwinning (Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2020). In this regard, the focus group discussion highlighted that eTwinning has impacted pupils’ digital, intercultural and linguistic competences, as well as improved their social leadership and collaborative skills. It was also mentioned that eTwinning has impacted pupils’ metacognitive competence since they have learned to use various ICT tools with the aim of supporting and promoting their own learning. More specifically it was reported that some pupils who face particular difficulties with certain school subjects feel more valued during eTwinning projects,

due to teamwork and collaboration. This is further supported by external research findings that acknowledge the contribution of eTwinning to pupils' (and teachers') competences (Arampatzis, 2020).

Such references also reflect the impact of eTwinning **on teachers' pedagogical practices**, as well as on the wider Greek educational strategy (Komninou, 2010). Specifically, it was highlighted that eTwinning and eTwinning teachers open pupils' and schools' horizons due to the international collaborations developed in the context of the eTwinning projects, as well as promoting equal learning experiences. As an example, pupils from rural areas have the chance to see places and discuss with pupils from other countries (Galanos, 2018). This is something that in turn boosts their motivation for learning not only during eTwinning, but in general, since they are more interested, focused and curious (Mpoukla, 2018). In general terms, as stated by a teacher participating in the focus group, *"eTwinning has not only changed our learning and teaching strategies, but also made our learners feel connected to what they are learning every day at school."* This statement implies an interplay between pupils' learning and teachers' practices. According to the focus group participants, eTwinning promotes authentic learning and enhances pupils' ability to better connect what they learn with their everyday life (e.g. via STEM and STEAM approaches), while it also provides a space to engage parents in the learning process. In fact, as described during the focus group, parents are really interested in getting involved in projects and sometimes, if they are not, they might feel that they

are excluded. Moreover, it was reported that teachers integrate several digital tools and apps in their teaching, as well as diverse pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning, inquiry-based learning and flipped classroom, as a direct result of eTwinning projects. This was particularly evident during the pandemic, where eTwinners borrowed several of the techniques and tools that they had been using in eTwinning and transferred them into their physical and virtual classrooms, suggesting that eTwinning has contributed to a blended learning approach. These references seem to be in line with the results of a research study that inquired into the impact of eTwinning on teachers' pedagogical practices (Arampatzis, 2020).

Another point raised during the focus group discussion was that eTwinners adopted a blended learning approach also while supporting other colleagues, especially during the pandemic, boosting the communal sense of eTwinning. An online peer-teaching and peer-learning approach was reported to help teachers in using online tools and innovative pedagogical approaches that led to effective and efficient online learning with their pupils. It should also be acknowledged, that, based on the focus group data, this peer-learning approach is also evident among pupils, since they learn from one another without feeling that they are undervalued. Finally, eTwinning has impacted teachers' practices by introducing cross-curricular and interdisciplinary approaches in everyday teaching. As stated in the focus group, eTwinning offers a way of making the curriculum more flexible due to cross-curricular approaches; hence eTwinning is

seen more as a methodology than as a tool. This is particularly important as, in previous years, teachers used to rely heavily on school textbooks, while the current national policies focus on developing pupils'

competences through transversal topics and cross-curricular, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teaching and learning (Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2020).

3.4. Poland



In Poland, as reported by the focus group participants, the Ministry of Education and Science has a leading role in promoting eTwinning at policy level, but the crucial role is that of the Polish NSO regarding teachers and schools. In general, eTwinning is a rather popular programme in terms of the use of new technologies across the educational system¹² (Hejwosz-Gromkowska, 2016). The Ministry strongly encourages innovation in school practices, adopting a wide perspective without providing specific guidelines on what innovation is or is not. In this regard, in the focus group discussion it was mentioned that eTwinning has been included in the national core curriculum with the aim of strengthening its institutional support, raising awareness and increasing teachers' motivation. It was stressed that the work of the NSO is essential in promoting and supporting teachers through professional development opportunities, information and guidance, and their collaboration with eTwinners and Ambassadors.

Specifically, it was highlighted that eTwinning offers several opportunities for professional development, free of charge, aiming at teachers' competences, including digital work, languages, networking, collaboration, time management and creative thinking. The Polish NSO report "Teachers Online", provided additional evidence on the impact of eTwinning on teachers regarding the use of digital tools and online teaching during the pandemic, and the expansion of the available professional development opportunities (Fila, Jeżowski, Pachocki, Rybińska, Regulaska, & Sot, 2021). Moreover the focus group data suggest that when eTwinning is presented as a teachers' community which offers professional development opportunities, more teachers are attracted. For example, during the pandemic, the Polish NSO trained 22,763 teachers within the specially dedicated campaign "Distance Education with eTwinning", including various forms of online training such as workshops, seminars, Moodle course, regional workshops and regional conferences (Polish National Support Organisation, 2020).

eTwinning has impacted teachers' **continuous professional development** in relation to their competence development.

As mentioned in the focus group, eTwinning not only increased teachers' self-confidence since eTwinners were more prepared to

12 Further information can be found at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/poland_en

cope with the pandemic and emergency remote teaching, but also supported teachers' wellbeing with its communitarian approach and the relationships among teachers. As described by an eTwinner: *"The pandemic has been a difficult situation for teachers as well, and in my case, eTwinning has been the 'fireplace' with partners, colleagues and friends."* In this regard, the impact of international collaboration on teachers' competences and teaching practices within the eTwinning community was also acknowledged by the focus group participants.

In terms of **official recognition of teachers' professional development**, as described during the focus group, in Poland teachers need to meet certain obligations for their career progression (e.g., widening the scope of school activities, being coordinator of an international project, etc.) and eTwinning responds to all these requirements. Additionally, it was noted that the eTwinning portfolio is frequently used in teachers' evaluation to provide evidence to the head teacher, the regional authorities (representatives of the city) and/or the regional centre. It was also highlighted that several eTwinners are rewarded in other national and international schemes (Microsoft educators, finalists of the Polish teacher prize and of the Global Teacher Prize), highlighting that eTwinning might have partially contributed to their career progression. Hence, it was concluded that the impact of eTwinning can be observed not only on teachers' professional development but also on their career development.

Regarding **Initial Teacher Education**, eTwinning has already been embedded

in the curricula of some universities. For instance, it was mentioned that in a postgraduate programme of English Literature there is a dedicated course for eTwinning lasting one semester, while some students select eTwinning as a topic of their Master's thesis. According to the focus group, eTwinning has a positive impact on students' competences (linguistic, digital, intercultural, pedagogical) and on those students who want to study in the Erasmus+ programme of their university, since they can have an international experience before their actual physical mobility. Additionally, as described by the ITE representative, *"eTwinning promotes self-learning, self-regulation and self-evaluation for students, elements that are essential for those who want to become good teachers."* In turn, the focus group participants noted that future teachers feel more confident as they can apply what they learn (digital tools and pedagogical methodologies) right at the beginning of their career, while informing future students that eTwinning is included in the core curriculum gives an added value.

Since 2017, eTwinning has been formally integrated in **school curricula**, namely, in the new curriculum for modern foreign language teaching (Rapacka & Wójcik, 2017). Although the curriculum refers to modern foreign language teachers other subject teachers are also encouraged to integrate eTwinning in their teaching practice as an innovative way of implementing the national curriculum, since eTwinning is aligned with the key competences and competence-based approach of the Polish school curricula (Polish Ministry of Education and Science, 2021). In fact, according to Nawrot's research (2018),

83% of the teachers' participating in the survey partially or totally agreed with the statement that the eTwinning activities fit with the national curriculum. Moreover, eTwinning is compatible with the topics and competences that the Polish Vocational Education and Training system promotes, as highlighted in the national report "VET with eTwinning" (Foundation for the Development of the Education System, 2020).

In this regard, eTwinning contributes to pupils' key competence development, wellbeing and motivation for learning. Specifically, it was illustrated that eTwinning helps students to develop their key competences (communication, collaboration, intercultural) and offers them a new way of learning via the eTwinning projects, something which is further supported by external research evidence (Gajek, 2010). According to Lew-Starowicz (2019), the Polish curriculum suggests eTwinning as a project-based approach using online tools in order to promote pupils' competence development. Also, the focus group participants mentioned that through international collaborative work, pupils' minds are broadened, and since there is authentic learning, pupils become more confident in applying their knowledge and skills in practice. Additionally, it was suggested that eTwinning has supported students' wellbeing during the pandemic and it could be also used as an action for supporting students to get back to normal school life in the post-COVID era.

At **school level**, it was also stressed that eTwinning has contributed to opening schools to the local and international

community. This statement is particularly important since schools' internationalisation is reflected in the national objectives set in Poland (Pachocki & Fila, 2020). In turn, it has been observed that schools' image has also been impacted, since eTwinning is seen as an added value in school activities and attracts new students. However, in this context, the focus group participants emphasised that school leadership plays an important role in initiating eTwinning projects in schools. This is in line with the first Polish NSO eTwinning survey which explored the impact of eTwinning projects on teachers' competences with regard to their preparedness during emergency remote teaching, as well as the challenges and difficulties that they have faced. Namely, the report acknowledges that school principals are perceived as a source of information about eTwinning (Fila, Jeżowski, Pachocki, Rybińska, Regulaska, & Sot, 2021). During the focus groups, it was also described that some school principals encourage teachers to get involved in eTwinning, providing teachers with the space to grow both personally and professionally, but some exceptions are also evident.

At **pedagogical level**, it was reported that eTwinning has introduced several innovative approaches in teachers' practices such as collaborative learning and pupil-centred teaching. As described in the focus group, *"innovation is when someone is trying something new that has not been done before, so innovation varies among teachers and schools."* Indicative examples mentioned were the various digital tools and the wider new technologies, project-based learning, inquiry-based learning,

cross-curricular approaches and alternative assessment methods. Additionally, it was acknowledged that eTwinning offers authentic learning, where pupils can develop their competences and exercise their skills in real-life contexts. All the aforementioned elements are reflected in the Polish Ministerial Ordinance for pre-primary, primary and secondary education, in which eTwinning is explicitly mentioned (Polish Ministry of National Education, 2017). The pandemic has been seen as a factor that triggered innovation, as many teachers were not used to teaching online or with digital tools. For instance, it was reported that during an eTwinning project, teachers could not conduct pupils' assessment, due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic; so, teachers organised a conference where pupils described what they did and learned during the project as an alternative form of assessment. All the aforementioned are further supported by the results of the Polish NSO report "The meaning of eTwinning", which concluded that eTwinning has a positive effect on changing teachers' way of teaching by introducing more innovative pedagogical practices (Foundation for the Development of the Education System, 2016).

However, certain challenges have arisen in the attempt to **embed eTwinning in the national educational system**. As mentioned in the focus group discussion, some teachers believe that eTwinning is relevant only for specific subjects (e.g., modern foreign languages), while others think that in order to participate in eTwinning projects one needs to fully master a foreign language. In this regard, a recommendation described in the focus

group is to strengthen eTwinning in other school activities and across other school subjects, in light of the upcoming school curricula reform. According to Pietrzak (2009), there are 38 different school subjects in the Polish educational system in which eTwinning projects have been implemented, indicating that there is a wide range of available options. Additionally, it was reported that there is a kind of stereotype, even among head teachers, that international collaboration and similar programmes like eTwinning require a high level of proficiency in a foreign language. In this respect, it was also acknowledged that when eTwinning is promoted as an action that contributes to pupils', teachers' and schools' internationalisation, only few people are interested. This is the reason why the Polish NSO lays emphasis on the aspect of professional development, which attracts more teachers and principals. Hence, a future step described in the focus group would be to produce informative materials to approach and engage school principals, less experienced teachers and teachers who do not know eTwinning and raise awareness of the benefits of eTwinning. According to Waligóra-Huk (2015), both beginners and more experienced teachers in eTwinning can find something on the platform which meets their needs. Hence, it was suggested that eTwinning should be further communicated and promoted since Polish schools have the obligation to run innovative pedagogical projects (Polish Ministry of National Education (2017) and eTwinning projects meet this requirement.

Another challenge mentioned is that the status of eTwinning is not strong enough in **Early Childhood Education and**

Care. However, due to the introduction of eTwinning in Initial Teacher Education, the focus group indicated that there are already several recent graduates who work in kindergartens implementing eTwinning projects. A further step suggested by the focus group participants would be the integration of eTwinning in the Early Childhood Education and Care curricula, which might also enable the uptake of eTwinning in pre-primary education, especially in relation to school principals. Nevertheless, as pointed out in the focus

group discussion, although the integration of eTwinning in the core curriculum for modern foreign languages has been an important positive step, further actions should be taken, since there was only a slight increase in eTwinning projects run by Polish teachers. This reflects the fact that making a concrete reference to eTwinning in national formal legislation should be seen as the first step for increasing the embedding of eTwinning at national level but it does not necessarily guarantee better results on its own.



3.5. Portugal

Based on the focus group discussion it was acknowledged that eTwinning constitutes a rather popular educational action in the Portuguese educational system,¹³ to which the Ministry has devoted lots of resources with people working within the Ministry, along with the work and support provided by the NSO and the Ambassadors network. Specifically, it was mentioned that the Ambassadors, who are teachers working in the field, provide concrete support to teachers, while working in close collaboration with the Ministry. This keeps them up to date regarding ongoing policy developments. The recognition of the importance of the network of Ambassadors by the Ministry of Education in Portugal is also reported by the provision of 50% of their monthly salary by the Ministry. Due to this close collaboration, the Ambassadors can combine both practical and policy

knowledge, in order to effectively support teachers and provide dissemination of eTwinning at national level. During the focus group discussion, It was also pointed out that since the Portuguese eTwinning Ambassadors network is not very large, there is an ongoing training of trainers to disseminate eTwinning, as well as the role of the “eTwinning mentor”, a teacher in every school awarded the eTwinning School Label, who acts as a reference point in order to motivate and support teachers at school level.

Regarding **teachers’ continuous professional development**, eTwinning was reported to impact teachers’ competences both at personal and professional level, a statement which is further validated by the Monitoring Report of the Portuguese NSO (2020). As discussed during the focus group, apart from gaining knowledge on diverse

13 Further information can be found at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/portugal_en

digital tools and apps, eTwinning teachers feel more confident in using and integrating ICT in their teaching. In this respect, the contribution of eTwinning to teachers' digital competence has been acknowledged at national level, resulting in embedding eTwinning in the respective national policy for teachers' professional development (Directorate-General for Education, 2020). Additionally, the focus group participants highlighted that Portuguese teachers have the opportunity to become aware of contemporary pedagogical approaches that they can directly implement in their everyday practice through the available eTwinning professional development opportunities. For instance, there are two different MOOCs, one for beginners and another for more advanced teachers, with a high completion rate (Portuguese National Support Organisation, 2021a).

In terms of **recognition**, the data obtained from the focus group indicate that Portugal has an already established system for recognising teachers' professional development, in which an external council checks the content of the training and decides whether it will be recognised or not based on certain criteria. Specifically, when teachers return from a training event abroad, they can submit the certificate and the training content to this council, which then decides if this training will count (or not) for teachers' professional development. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that, nowadays, when eTwinning training events are presented to this council, it is easy to receive accreditation.

As described in the focus group discussion, eTwinning teachers adapted to online

teaching pretty easily during the pandemic, since they were already used to working online with digital tools and project-based approaches. In this respect, the NSO has organised more than 50 webinars supporting more than 1000 teachers during the pandemic, attracting more and more participants (Portuguese National Support Organisation, 2021b). As emphasised by the focus group participants, the success of these webinars made them part of the monthly activity schedule. Additionally, it was reported that through the international events and the wider eTwinning community, teachers are also able to exercise and improve their linguistic and intercultural competence by interacting with teachers and professionals from other countries. This is further supported by Benevides' (2019) research, which concludes that eTwinning and eTwinning Groups contribute positively to teachers' professional development.

As far as **Initial Teacher Education** is concerned, the data collected illustrate that more and more institutions and student teachers (future teachers) are involved in eTwinning projects with greater enthusiasm and commitment in the eTwinning activities. As described by the focus group participants, it is really important for them to be aware of the opportunities offered by eTwinning before they start their career, both for their professional identity and their competences. Additionally, it was reported that in Portugal it is really important to prepare future teachers on how they will work with their pupils, as well as the way(s) in which they will implement in practice the 'Student's Profile at the end of Compulsory Schooling'. Hence, eTwinning is suggested and practically exercised as one of these

ways, enhancing the notion that “*eTwinning is not a project, rather a methodology*”.

eTwinning has also impacted **teachers’ and schools’ image**. As reported during the focus group discussion, eTwinning teachers are seen as innovative and creative teachers, who have advanced digital and collaborative competences. They enjoy sharing their knowledge and are more open and willing to support others, something that was particularly evident during the pandemic. Additionally, it was mentioned that usually eTwinners are happier and more resilient teachers who focus on their work and try to do their best. At school level, it was described that the awarded eTwinning schools operate as role models, mentors and multipliers that support other teachers via the training events that they offer and disseminate eTwinning in their local communities. Specifically, it was highlighted that eTwinning is disseminated through events where teachers and school principals receive the eTwinning Quality Label, as well as via news and press releases that promote the awarded eTwinning teachers and schools at local and/or regional level.

Regarding **curriculum integration**, the focus group participants stated that eTwinning is well embedded in the school curricula of compulsory education, resulting in large numbers of teachers being involved. Although eTwinning is not explicitly mentioned in the core curriculum, it was described that the people who were involved in drafting the Guidelines for the Educational Vision and the Student’s Profile at the end of Compulsory Schooling (Secretário de

Estado da Educação, 2017; Martins, 2017), were aware of eTwinning and therefore integrated several of its elements (e.g., interdisciplinarity, project-based learning etc.). Specifically, the Student’s Profile is seen as the basis for all school decisions related to curriculum development, the organisation and management of curricula, and the pedagogical-didactic methodologies to be used in teaching (Martins, 2017; Portuguese National Support Organisation, 2019). Thus, it can be concluded that eTwinning is aligned with the main reference policy document related to Portuguese compulsory education. In this regard, the focus group emphasised that the Ambassadors, while visiting schools and/or presenting eTwinning, always acknowledge the links between eTwinning and the measures of the Ministry to inform and support teachers on how to integrate eTwinning in the school curriculum.

As mentioned earlier, in Portugal, eTwinning is not viewed as an educational project or action, rather as a methodology. Based on the focus group discussion, eTwinning is not just teaching with digital resources, but mostly about raising pupils’ engagement and improving their motivation and competences. Specifically it was stated that eTwinning is an approach to working with pupils targeting their 21st-century competences such as “*creatial*” (both creative and critical) thinking and problem-solving. This is highly relevant for the Portuguese context, since eTwinning is compatible with the key competences and competence-based approach of the national curriculum (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2018a; 2018b). Moreover, it was stressed that eTwinning

is a way of making the curriculum more flexible through the pedagogical approaches available in eTwinning. This is also in line with the Project for Autonomy and Curriculum Flexibility (Gabinete do Secretário de Estado da Educação, 2017) and the principles and regulations concerning the design, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum for primary and secondary education, in order to achieve the “Student’s Profile at the End of Compulsory Schooling” (Martins, 2017). Additionally, eTwinning was described as a methodology for developing schools’ internationalisation, due to the openness of eTwinning and its outreach across other countries. Specifically, the focus group participants noted that some schools and head teachers have a strategic plan for promoting their schools’ internationalisation, in which they lay great emphasis on European projects including eTwinning. Since schools’ internationalisation is also of great interest for the educational town councils of the local communities, which consist of principals and teachers’ representatives, these councils have also been described as levers for integrating European projects and eTwinning in local communities.

As far as **pupils** are concerned, based on the data collected from the focus groups, eTwinning promotes project work and therefore collaboration, leadership and communication; thus, pupils are able to improve their language skills, work with their peers and learn from one another. In addition, it was stressed that eTwinning contributes to pupils’ intercultural competence, which is a rather important priority as reflected in the Portuguese National Strategy for Citizenship Education

(Monteiro, 2017). According to the focus group participants’ views, all these aims can be met in eTwinning projects that promote pupils’ learning by offering an authentic context where students can connect school learning with their everyday-life conditions and needs. Another benefit of eTwinning which was highlighted in the focus group is that it also offers the space to accommodate pupils’ interests and ideas, promoting their ownership of eTwinning projects and their learning in general. Although a link to early leaving cannot be drawn directly, eTwinning has been reported to increase pupils’ motivation, engagement and commitment during the learning process. Additional research evidence confirms that eTwinning is successful in raising pupils’ motivation (Jacinto, 2014) and enhancing their linguistic, intercultural and collaborative competence (Serdoura, 2011; Almeida, 2014; Barbosa, 2017).

To carry out eTwinning projects at school level, the role of **school leadership** was acknowledged as an important factor that may facilitate or hinder the process. In fact it was highlighted that *“headteachers act and should act as role models and also bring others into eTwinning.”* Although eTwinning can be implemented without the formal support of the school leaders, according to participants’ views, when school leaders are committed to the project, then the impact is greater with longer-lasting effects on schools. The focus group data suggest that many school principals in Portugal are committed to eTwinning, supporting teachers and mitigating the feeling that they are left alone. For instance, it was mentioned that when principals and teachers are familiar

with eTwinning, they can be more flexible in curriculum management (e.g., ways of teaching, of connecting with other students and teachers) and they can better relate it to the school's vision, endorsing a whole-school approach that does not impact only one class. In this respect, it should be mentioned that the NSO and the Ministry have created the figure of an "eTwinning mentor" who is nominated by the headteacher and is responsible for collaborating and coordinating eTwinning related activities within schools awarded the eTwinning School Label.

As regards **teachers' pedagogical practices and approaches**, the impact of eTwinning can be observed both at practical and attitudinal level. Specifically, the data obtained from the focus group suggest that eTwinning has introduced various digital tools, cross-curricular and inter/multidisciplinary approaches in everyday teaching, which have been acknowledged as a revolution especially in cases where teachers used to rely heavily on school textbooks. This in turn has been reported to lead to the adoption of pupil-centred pedagogical approaches, which are fundamental but difficult to implement. As highlighted in the focus group discussion, eTwinning facilitated teachers' professional development and their methodologies in this direction. This is particularly relevant given that pupils' active involvement and pupils-teacher interaction are both reflected in the Portuguese Legislation for compulsory education (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2018a; 2018b). Moreover, it was noted that eTwinning has evolved from isolated projects into classroom projects. Such project- or

inquiry-based approaches allowed teachers to make the school curriculum more flexible and to develop collaboration with other subject teachers. All the above are consistent with the Monitoring Report of the Portuguese NSO (2020), in which teachers described the impact of eTwinning on their capacity to use digital tools and their pedagogical practices. As a result, eTwinning projects promote authentic learning and collaborative learning not only among pupils, but also among teachers. For instance, as reported in the focus group, several eTwinning teachers prepare formal and informal training for other teachers. Promoting this peer-learning approach is regarded by the focus group participants as an innovation which greatly contributes to the effectiveness of the Portuguese eTwinning network.

A remaining challenge mentioned in the focus group refers to the expansion of the action to teachers who are less engaged with European projects and those who adopt more traditional approaches, such as the use of school textbooks and blackboards. It was indeed stressed that targeted training for school principals is needed, focusing not only on technology but also on pedagogical knowledge. Additionally, further reflection is needed on the way(s) that eTwinning can be connected with the curriculum, by providing concrete examples that will support teachers in their work and alleviate potential conflicts with school principals. In this regard, the focus group participants recommended that more good practices should be disseminated and more resources for inspiring teachers should be produced. For instance, it was specified that the preparation of kits, lesson

plans and small videos on how to embed eTwinning transversally in the school curriculum across different subjects would be beneficial for both experienced and non-experienced teachers in eTwinning.

Additional further actions described in the focus group, with the aim of maximising the uptake of eTwinning at national level, include the certification of eTwinning MOOCs, a greater penetration in Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) schools, and building collaborations with universities to support future teachers in applying eTwinning at the beginning of their career. In terms of additional support needed, at technical level it was

suggested that the different eTwinning databases should be integrated into one single database where someone could find what (s)he is looking for based on filters (e.g., projects, validated practical resources, professional development opportunities, school levels). Furthermore, creating easy and short practical kits combined with videos could inspire existing eTwinners and support the less experienced. Finally, a rather important feature that would further support the embedding of eTwinning at national level is the valorisation of eTwinning in Erasmus+ and their interconnection especially with KA1, since many people consider them separately.

3.6. Slovenia



The data obtained from the focus group discussion indicate that eTwinning is highly embedded in the Slovenian educational system¹⁴ with 70% of primary and 77% of secondary schools, including IVET, already being registered in the eTwinning platform. As illustrated by the focus group participants, this has been achieved with the support of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the work of the NSO and the active eTwinning Ambassadors network, who have all contributed to strengthening eTwinning at national level. Another point stressed is that strong emphasis has been placed on the connection of eTwinning with Erasmus+, leading to an increasing number

of teachers using eTwinning in their KA1 and KA2 projects. In fact, it was noted that 70% of those who have run eTwinning projects have also run KA2 projects. As a result, the expansion of eTwinning to the remaining 30% of teachers who are still not engaged with eTwinning projects is regarded as a challenge by the focus group participants. To tackle this challenge, it was mentioned that in the upcoming Slovenian Action Plan on Digital Education, teachers will be expected to develop at least one international collaboration in a five-year period and therefore eTwinning could be promoted and linked to this necessity.

Regarding **teachers' continuous professional development**, it was noted

14 Further information can be found at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/slovenia_en

that eTwinning has positively impacted teachers' digital competence, something that will be acknowledged in the upcoming Slovenian Action Plan on Digital Education by integrating eTwinning as a measure for developing ICT skills. Moreover, eTwinning has also been reported to impact teachers' collaborative competence, since they are more open and willing to share their knowledge with other colleagues and support them, endorsing a communitarian approach where people exchange information and learn from one another. This is particularly important since knowledge-sharing is strongly related to teachers' professional responsibility in Slovenia, with the aim of supporting other educational staff within and outside of the school (Zavašnik, Lenc, Slapšak & Šraj, 2019). An indicative example of such an approach, as mentioned in the focus group, was evident during the pandemic, where eTwinning teachers not only organised distance learning at their school level by suggesting and selecting platforms and tools, but also offered seminars for their colleagues from other schools to guide and support them.

The focus group participants also highlighted that teachers became keener on developing international collaborations through the international professional development opportunities and the eTwinning projects. In fact, the study of the impact of the eTwinning Programme on School Education in Slovenia concluded that eTwinning impacted teachers' international collaboration to a greater extent than the Lifelong Learning Programme, because of the complexity of the latter (e.g., administrative-contractual obligations) (Lenc, Pečjak, Šraj & Abramič, 2016). Furthermore, it was stressed that

eTwinning has inspired a new set of activities that promote teachers' professional development. For instance, several webinars were organised on how to use different digital tools and how to use eTwinning in remote teaching, resulting in a great response with more than 1,000 attendees. Hence, the NSO concluded that webinars seem to be an effective way of delivering professional development, something that will become a permanent activity in the post-COVID era.

With regard to the **recognition of professional development** opportunities, until recently, Slovenia was only able to officially recognise the professional development activities, webinars and short training courses organised by the Ministry or the National Educational Institute. However now all eTwinning webinars offered by the National Agency, as well as the eTwinning continuous professional development opportunities are officially recognised. In earlier years the seminars' duration used to be 8-16 hours, but now there are shorter courses (1-2 hours). As a result, it was noted that teachers can create a "package" by gathering 8 hours of webinars in order to receive official recognition. Furthermore, according to the focus group, teachers in Slovenia need to collect points for their career development, which are further translated into higher salaries and promotions (teacher, mentor, adviser). In this context, eTwinning provides these points, depending on the project duration and on whether teachers are eTwinning Ambassadors or participate with lectures in national and international conferences.

In general, the data obtained from the focus group indicate that eTwinning constitutes a recommendation for teachers and schools that they can choose to implement in their teaching practice. Additionally, it was stated that the Ministry strongly encourages schools to integrate eTwinning in their annual plans, promoting a whole-school approach. On similar lines, the Slovenian impact study concluded that eTwinning has become a constant feature of schools' annual work plans with the aim of improving the efficiency and quality of the educational process within and outside of the curriculum (Lenc, Pečjak, Šraj & Abramič, 2016). Furthermore, although eTwinning is not explicitly integrated in the national **curricula**, it was reported that several eTwinners are involved in the School Subject Taskforces that propose changes in the curriculum. It was also acknowledged that some eTwinning Ambassadors and teachers are members of the teams that prepare teachers' books, so they integrate, to a certain extent, new things that they learn from eTwinning. In this way, the focus group data suggest that eTwinning teachers and Ambassadors introduce several elements of eTwinning in the school curriculum, increasing their in-between compatibility.

In **Initial Teacher Education**, the focus group noted that the NSO has invited some institutions to the eTwinning thematic conference, after which some of them started thinking of implementing eTwinning in their curriculum. It was emphasised that since universities have a certain degree of autonomy regarding their curricula, they can integrate eTwinning more easily in elective courses or add elements in existing subjects. This was acknowledged as a positive step

by the focus group participants, as future teachers feel more confident in applying what they learn right at the beginning of their career. Nevertheless, the focus group data suggest that the lack of recognition for teacher educators in Initial Teacher Education institutes is seen as an important challenge that reduces motivation and participation.

As regards the impact of eTwinning on **pupils**, this can be observed in relation to both their competences and their attitude towards learning. The focus group participants stated that due to eTwinning, students are now more interested in taking foreign language courses and collaborating. It was also mentioned that some pupils, when they complete primary education and move to secondary school, ask their teachers if they have Erasmus projects. Thus it can be assumed that such references reflect the impact of eTwinning on pupils' linguistic, collaborative and intercultural competence. This assumption is further supported by the results of the Slovenian impact study, which illustrates the contribution of eTwinning to pupils' key competence development (Lenc, Pečjak, Šraj & Abramič, 2016). Additionally, it was highlighted that eTwinning has helped pupils to make appropriate use of the technology in order to promote their learning, the best example being the pandemic, where both teachers and pupils involved in eTwinning had fewer difficulties in distance learning. In this regard, eTwinning is explicitly mentioned in the Strategic Guidelines for Further Implementation of ICT in Slovenian Education until 2020 (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2016) as a type of project that enhances pupils' digital competence, and, as mentioned during the focus group,

it will also be included in the upcoming Slovenian Action Plan on Digital Education. Furthermore, it was reported that pupils are more motivated because of eTwinning, since the projects create an authentic learning environment that promotes pupils' ownership, allowing them to determine the topics and activities, thus taking on more responsibility. Interestingly, though, it was emphasised that this energy and motivation are transferred to the rest of the lessons and are not limited only to eTwinning projects. In that respect, eTwinning has been acknowledged as a successful activity that raises pupils' motivation in general (Lenc, Pečjak, Šraj & Abramič, 2016), as well as in Early Childhood Education and Care (Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training, 2017a).

In relation to **school leadership**, the focus group participants highlighted that the school principal acts and should act as a role model by supporting the school activities. Indeed, in most cases school principals were reported to encourage schools' international activities and specifically eTwinning, which was seen as promising for guaranteeing long-lasting effects on schools. This finding is highly relevant to the national objectives of Slovenia that aims at promoting schools' internationalisation (Flander, 2018). Additionally, it was stressed that school principals support the development of eTwinning in schools by helping teachers to become familiar with the eTwinning platform, to make the first steps with registration, and become aware of the possibilities offered. Against this background, the Slovenian guide suggests that the eTwinning team should consist of the school management and the school

staff (Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training, 2017b), while the Erasmus+ guide acknowledges the supportive role of school principals in eTwinning and European school projects in general (Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training, 2020). For this reason, the NSO invites teachers and school heads (around 100 school principals per year) in the annual seminar for Erasmus KA2, in which eTwinning is included.

According to the data collected, eTwinning has introduced teachers to several innovative features, which they are now able to apply in their everyday teaching, and this in turn has a direct impact on pupils. Thus, it was reported that eTwinning has promoted not only the use of ICT in the classroom, but also a cross-curricular and interdisciplinary approach which has led teachers to increased collaboration. Moreover, it was stated that eTwinning makes learning more flexible as it offers more choices, personalisation and active involvement, factors that boost pupils' learning and their self-confidence. Hence, it can be assumed that eTwinning has introduced several innovations, since school textbooks are the basic teaching material for achieving the educational objectives and standards of the curriculum (Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2021a). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the national curricula also propose a variety of pedagogical and teaching approaches in order to make learning more diverse and interesting for pupils (Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 2021b).

Based on the focus group participants' views, the adoption of pupil-centred pedagogical approaches, like project-based learning, has helped some teachers to discover their pupils' abilities and promote a more inclusive learning environment where all can participate, irrespective of their abilities or social background. This is particularly important in the light of the recent Slovenian consultation on an inclusive, safe and supportive school space (Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia for Education and Sport, 2020). Authentic learning was also mentioned as a pedagogical approach that has been further promoted by eTwinning, since pupils can interact with other pupils in a real-life context and engage in everyday-life topics. For these reasons, it was reported that eTwinning teachers are seen as more innovative, creative and flexible, promoting internationalisation and the European values. At the same time, they are considered really open and willing to share their knowledge with the aim of supporting other colleagues via seminars and webinars that they organise on various topics (e.g., digital tools, activities, assessment). Thus, the observations above indicate that eTwinning has a positive impact on enriching teachers' pedagogical practices and impacting their image, something that is further illustrated in the report on the impact of eTwinning in the Slovenian school system (Lenc, Pečjak, Šraj & Abramič, 2016).

Finally, some further actions were identified during the focus group discussion with the aim of **strengthening the embedding** of eTwinning at national level. First, it was

suggested that eTwinning should be further promoted by the Ministry and the National Institute of Education. Given that it is the biggest institute for school education in Slovenia, it was emphasised that if its school advisers were informed about eTwinning, this might help with the promotion of eTwinning both at school and national level. In this respect, it was stressed that the Ministry is already trying to promote eTwinning in the National Education Institute, which is one of the eight public institutions in the field of education responsible for providing and updating the curricula as well as for teacher training. Additionally, it was proposed that during the training courses of the Institute, some eTwinning teachers could be invited to share their work and inspire other teachers. Another recommendation for maximising the visibility of eTwinning was to include it in the national policy documents regarding teachers' professional development, as well as creating posters and factsheets about the professional development opportunities available with all the necessary information in one place, including eTwinning. At European level, it was suggested that eTwinning could be one of the indicators for assessing digital or ICT-related activities in schools, by combining it with SELFIE or using the eTwinning Quality Labels with other labels (e.g., Safer Internet) to contribute to the digital strategy of the school. Additionally, a conference just for policy-makers, maybe combined with EMINENT,¹⁵ would be an efficient way of focusing and reflecting on how eTwinning could be further strengthened at European level.

15 EMINENT stands for "Experts Meeting in Education Networking" and is an annual event organised by European Schoolnet. Further information can be found at: europeanschoolnet.org



3.7. Spain

The focus group discussion indicates that eTwinning is a project widely known and implemented across the Spanish educational system,¹⁶ which is regionally supported by a Committee with representatives from each of the autonomous regions. Nevertheless, it was reported that as with any other project, eTwinning is not included in the legislation, but there are indirect connections with some features of eTwinning such as collaborative work, the use of digital tools and pedagogical methodologies. Additionally, it was mentioned that since the NSO works closely with the National Erasmus+ Agency, eTwinning is nationally disseminated in conjunction with Erasmus+, resulting in an increased number of schools being aware of or having run eTwinning projects. There are 16,283 registered Spanish schools in the eTwinning platform (Servicio Nacional de Apoyo eTwinning España, 2021a), that correspond to 51% of Spanish schools (Servicio Nacional de Apoyo eTwinning España, 2021b).

As far as teachers' **continuous professional development** is concerned, it was reported that eTwinning has helped many teachers to acquire digital and pedagogical knowledge that they can directly apply in their classrooms. That was particularly evident in the pandemic, where eTwinners were more digitally competent and prepared, as well as willing to support other colleagues, not only in terms of the

ICT tools used, but also of the pedagogical practices that they could implement. In this respect, Bang Sampol et al. (2021) illustrate how eTwinning is related and could be further linked with teachers' digital competence as described in the national reference framework of the 2020 Resolution of the General Directorate of Evaluation and Territorial Cooperation (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020). As well as teachers' competences, eTwinning also supports teachers' career development. According to the focus group data, many regions across Spain have included the **recognition** of eTwinning projects in teachers' careers, helping teachers to acquire points/credits which are translated into a modest salary increase. As noted, however, each autonomous community has its own internal processes for recognising eTwinning. For instance, the INTEF, a unit of the Ministry of Education in charge of teacher training and digital education, recognises teachers' participation in conferences and workshops as permanent teacher training, when this is requested and all the requirements are met (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional & Consejo Escolar del Estado, 2020). Nevertheless, this kind of recognition is not applicable either for university staff or for student teachers (future teachers), who just receive a certification from their professors. On a positive side, however, it was reported that, despite the lack of recognition in universities, people are still involved in eTwinning with the aim of acquiring

16 Further information can be found at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/spain_en

knowledge, skills and methodologies through the international collaborations developed.

eTwinning was also acknowledged to impact **teachers' and schools' image**. Specifically, the focus group participants indicated that eTwinning is usually associated with hardworking and innovative teachers since eTwinning projects require creativity and extra time. Additionally, it was commented that eTwinning teachers inspire other colleagues and the whole school, something that has a systemic impact on the reputation of the school. In this respect, it was reported that awarded eTwinning schools act as role models and are recognised by parents and other schools of the local community. It was also mentioned that, in small towns, the municipalities refer to eTwinning as an educational project to promote education at municipal level.

Regarding **teachers' initial education**, it was stated that eTwinning has been included in the study plan and the curriculum of some teacher training institutes in some regions. The feedback received so far suggests that future teachers are satisfied with their participation in the projects, especially when they visit schools that work with eTwinning and other European projects. As indicated by the focus group participants, the integration of eTwinning in Initial Teacher Education is not fully developed in Spain, since the potential of the programme is not fully perceived and understood by university staff. It was, however, highlighted that promoting eTwinning in Initial Teacher Education is seen as beneficial, since future students will be trained in eTwinning and experience the projects before they start their careers.

As far as **curriculum integration** is concerned, it was stressed that in general, including specific projects in the curriculum or the legislation is not a common practice; hence, eTwinning is not explicitly included in official documents, but it is reflected through broader topics, such as digital education, interculturality, internationalisation, school collaboration and pupils' key competences. For Initial Teacher Education, as reported by the ITE representative, a recent reform of the institution's syllabus foresees the inclusion of a project in each of the courses for all the degrees offered. Although this is not applicable across all universities and institutions due to different internal regulations, it was viewed as a great opportunity for introducing eTwinning in future teachers' studies.

As regards the impact of eTwinning on **pupils**, the focus group data indicate that eTwinning has contributed to improving their competences and increasing their motivation. Specifically, it was reported that pupils enhance their digital, linguistic and intercultural competences in authentic contexts while working in eTwinning projects. Regarding pupils' digital competence, eTwinning seems to be in line with the Organic Law 3/2020 (Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2020) which promotes the development of pupils' digital competences across all educational levels. Regarding pupils' linguistic competence, it was reported that many pupils have registered in foreign language classes because of eTwinning, while it has also boosted pupils' self-confidence and motivation for staying on track and not leaving. For instance, it was described how eTwinning helped Roma pupils from a school with a low success

rate to become aware that there are also other Roma pupils in other countries, something that raised their self-confidence and motivation. Similarly, the research conducted by Muñoz Cano (2016) concluded that eTwinning raises pupils' motivation for learning foreign languages, as did the research by Sebastián Algora (2017) for rural areas, by Zamanillo Mateo (2018) for Early Childhood Education and Care and by Sendón-Rico (2020) for IVET. Additionally, the focus group participants mentioned that during the pandemic, eTwinning was the only way of ensuring pupils' socialising, while developing an international project with other partners, as well as promoting their initiative-taking while preparing activities with the support of their teachers.

Similarly, the impact of eTwinning on **student teachers** (future teachers) was discussed in the focus group, indicating that eTwinning improves students' linguistic and digital competence, but also contributes to teamwork, leadership and conflict resolution in cases where some students are more assertive. Moreover, it was noted that student teachers (future teachers) are really interested in connecting and collaborating with students from other countries, something that has promoted their intercultural competence and cultivated their empathy. An indicative example described was that students were anxious for their peers in Croatia due to the earthquake in Zagreb. Finally, as reported in the focus group, *"another interesting thing with eTwinning is that students want to learn things about the teaching profession in other countries, they discuss the curriculum, the life of a teacher and then they compare it with our system."*

At school level, the role of **school leadership** was acknowledged as an important lever for disseminating eTwinning, since the school principal is in contact with the inspectors who approve the school plans, but also with pupils' parents. In this respect it was also highlighted that it is of great importance that inspectors are aware of eTwinning as things might be more easily set in motion. Additionally, it was reported that when head teachers are involved or believe in this kind of projects their commitment encourages teachers in implementing and improving the realisation of eTwinning projects, while, at practical level, they can also facilitate the implementation of projects by providing teachers with the necessary resources, such as time and technical equipment. This is highly important since lack of both time and adequate equipment were identified as barriers that limit the use of ICT in schools, based on a recent pilot using the SELFIE tool, conducted by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, along with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) in Seville (Castaño Muñoz et al., 2021).

Regarding the impact of eTwinning on pedagogical innovation, it was initially, highlighted that what constitutes an innovation – or not – depends on the school and the teachers. On a broader level, though, the focus group participants suggested that eTwinning has contributed to promoting innovation at school level by offering the possibility of creating international projects that can be implemented by those who are both less and more experienced. In this respect, the eTwinning Ambassadors organise several seminars and workshops for

other colleagues on how to use eTwinning and other digital tools by using concrete examples from their projects. Additionally, it was acknowledged that eTwinning has contributed to schools' openness in terms of collaborating both with the European and in some cases with the local community, including municipalities, Town Halls, public libraries, etc. Moreover, it was reported that, since the beginning of the year 2020, the Spanish Education Law (Ley Orgánica 3/2020) refers to the integration of various teaching methodologies, such as project-based learning and collaborative learning in pupils' key competence development (Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2020). According to the focus group participants, eTwinning offers such approaches and therefore it can be further linked with this policy objective. Specifically, it was stated that although many teachers are aware of project-based learning, they need more guidance on how to implement it. Hence, eTwinning constitutes an approach that transforms such pedagogical approaches into actual practice by providing concrete examples. For instance, Anaya García-Tapetado (2020) has combined eTwinning with project-based learning and competence-based learning in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

Finally, some future actions were discussed in the focus group with the aim of increasing the dissemination of eTwinning at national level. For instance, it was proposed to reduce (by 1 hour) the teaching hours of teachers involved in eTwinning, as happens with other programmes. Additionally, since in some regions the educational innovation programmes are not connected with eTwinning or Erasmus+, the regional authorities could be informed about this potential, in order to benefit from both. It was also suggested that the school inspectors, who monitor whether schools are abiding by legal requirements, should be informed about eTwinning in the training of the educational management staff (e.g., head teachers, inspectors). Additionally, it was stated that there is a plan for creating an eTwinning group for cooperating and promoting eTwinning at university level, since the main challenge reported in the focus group lie is Initial Teacher Education. As far as future teachers are concerned, it was noted that linking eTwinning with mobility credits would raise the visibility of eTwinning as a type of virtual mobility in tertiary education.



3.8. Turkey

During the focus group discussion it was reported that eTwinning constitutes the most influential teachers' network

across the Turkish educational system,¹⁷ for which the Ministry of National Education has created the conditions for it to flourish by providing technological equipment

¹⁷ Further information can be found at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/turkey_en

and improving Internet connectivity on a wide scale. At policy level, eTwinning is in line with the 2023 Education Vision of the Ministry, as it addresses eight of its objectives regarding teachers' professional development, foreign language education and digital learning (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2021). Nevertheless, there is no explicit reference to eTwinning either in this document or in any other official document, since concrete references to specific projects or actions in national documents are not a common practice. It was also mentioned that since the NSO operates within the Ministry, and since the local authorities work together and under the jurisdiction of the Ministry, there is a centralised approach in disseminating eTwinning at national level, an approach that has raised its visibility and dissemination. Additional elements that were indicated by the focus group participants as instrumental in promoting the embedding of eTwinning in Turkey are the commitment and enthusiasm of the eTwinning team in the Ministry and the NSO, as well as the eTwinning Ambassadors network. In this regard, the local authorities in the regions nominate teachers to become eTwinning Ambassadors, whose activities are monitored twice a year by the Ministry.

eTwinning was reported to impact the national practices for delivering **professional development** addressed to teachers. Namely, it was acknowledged that the word and concept 'webinar' was first introduced in Turkey by eTwinning. During the pandemic, more than 1,000 courses were organised by eTwinning Ambassadors and more than one million teachers were trained via webinars organised by the

NSO and eTwinning Ambassadors (Turkish National Support Organisation, 2021). Additionally, it was stressed that the NSO has created the first MOOC platform in Turkey offering several courses to teachers. In this regard, the focus group participants emphasised that a dedicated team of content developers, who are eTwinning teachers, create and translate materials on the use of eTwinning, TwinSpace, various pedagogical topics, and Web 2.0 tools for other teachers. Notably, it was mentioned that sometimes teachers do not use other resources for their professional development, since eTwinning covers most of teachers' needs through the available offers.

Based on the focus group data, eTwinning has also impacted teachers' **continuous professional development** itself and inspired the Ministry of National Education in relation to policy actions and future educational initiatives. Regarding teachers, it was highlighted that eTwinning is a person-oriented activity, a tool for improving teachers' qualifications and competences in foreign languages and digital tools. An indicative example described was that eTwinning teachers were ready to teach during the pandemic and effectively use the technology in their curriculum, due to their involvement in eTwinning projects. This is further supported by the conclusions of the ministerial study conducted by Ulutan (2019), which illustrates the contribution of eTwinning to teachers' linguistic and digital competence, especially compared with those not involved in eTwinning. Additionally, the research of Başaran, Kaya, Akbaş & Yalçın (2020) suggests that eTwinning adds value to teachers' professional development and

increases their motivation. As far as official recognition is concerned, the Ministry used to provide teachers with 15 points for the national or European Quality Label, but with a recent reform, this is no longer the case. Yet, other types of “unofficial” recognition are foreseen, such as the organisation of special ceremonies where the District Governor awards the certificates to recognise and appreciate teachers’ efforts and motivate beginners.

In turn, it was noted that eTwinning impacted **teachers’ image**, since eTwinning teachers are seen as the frontrunners of the educational system, who adopt innovative approaches and disseminate them to their colleagues across schools at local and national level. This peer-learning approach was also acknowledged as an effective practice for transferring information and knowledge among teachers by the ministerial study on the impact of eTwinning (Ulutan, 2019). Additionally, it was pointed out that the teaching profession is the third most trusted vocation in Turkey, but when it comes to eTwinning, eTwinners are seen as more innovative and are respected by school principals and regional authorities for being involved in eTwinning. Moreover, it was stressed that becoming an eTwinning Ambassador is also regarded as a prestigious post for teachers, since they benefit from the support of the Ministry.

As far as schools are concerned, it was mentioned that being an awarded **eTwinning School** is important both for the school and for Erasmus+, as eTwinning and Erasmus+ are promoted in an integrated approach at national

level. As with eTwinners, it was reported that the awarded eTwinning Schools receive certificates by the Ministry, they are recognised by the regional authorities and act as role models for other schools. Concurrently, it was reported that when teachers select the schools where they want to teach, they usually prefer those with an eTwinning Quality Label, and the same applies for parents while choosing schools for their children. In this respect, the focus group participants mentioned that some private schools use eTwinning as an incentive to draw parents’ attention. Moreover, it was acknowledged that other policies of the Ministry have also been influenced by eTwinning. eTwinning has been used as a case study for inspiring other educational initiatives, such as the upcoming EdTech Hub, an educational technology ecosystem based on teachers’ networks, in which eTwinning schools will also be used as a pilot.

Regarding **initial teacher education**, the focus group data indicate that although the eTwinning Initial Teacher Education action has only recently been introduced in Turkey, the response so far has been positive. Namely, there are 48 universities involved in eTwinning with 104 ITE members and more than 1,044 student teachers are registered and carrying out eTwinning projects. However, it was reported that due to the pandemic, student teachers (future teachers) had returned to their family homes, where some do not have access to the Internet, or the necessary technological equipment, factors that have hindered the implementation of eTwinning projects. In general terms, though, as described during the focus group, student teachers

want to be involved in eTwinning and in international projects, as they are really interested in knowing their peers from other countries.

At **curriculum** level, eTwinning is not explicitly included in the school curricula, but some school textbooks include the eTwinning logo, promoting its visibility. Based on the focus group discussion, it was indicated that the eTwinning Quality Label emerges as a lever for integrating eTwinning in the curriculum. Namely, it was reported that since curriculum integration is one of the criteria for award of a label, teachers are requested to pay attention to how to embed eTwinning in their everyday projects and practice. Based on the focus group data, eTwinning is embedded in an integrated approach via project-based learning, since it is aligned with the topics and competences of the national curriculum. This is further supported by Ulutan (2020), who highlights that teachers can create eTwinning projects in accordance with the national curriculum.

The role of **school leadership** was also acknowledged as an important factor for promoting eTwinning at school level. Specifically, it was emphasised that school principals should adopt a shared leadership approach by involving teachers and pupils, since eTwinning projects are co-created by them. In addition, it was noted that school principals should support teachers in practical terms by providing them with the necessary resources and encourage them so they do not feel alone. Accordingly, the Turkish eTwinning impact study highlighted that school administrations should encourage and support teachers in project work and the use of technology

(Ulutan, 2019). Nevertheless, the focus group participants commented that some teachers face difficulties in persuading school principals to allow them to implement eTwinning projects. In such cases, the Ambassadors organise some meetings with the school heads to provide them with the necessary information and try to change their view.

According to the focus group data, **pupils' competences** have also been impacted by eTwinning, something that was particularly evident during the pandemic, when pupils were already familiar with online learning. Additionally, it was mentioned that several pupils enjoy technology, computers and mobile phones and they perceive learning as "fun", elements that are all reflected and provided in eTwinning, resulting in increased motivation. Moreover, as described by Başaran, Kaya, Akbaş & Yalçın (2020), eTwinning supports the goals of the national educational system in terms of developing pupils' 21st-century skills (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2017). Specifically, the focus group participants highlighted that pupils' linguistic competence in foreign languages has been improved, since eTwinning provides an authentic context for the active use of foreign languages, as well as their collaborative and intercultural competence, since they work with their peers from other countries. Similar findings were reported in Akdemir's research (2017) on teachers' perceptions regarding the competences that pupils develop via eTwinning.

Finally, it was noted that eTwinning has affected **teachers' practices** by introducing various pedagogical approaches that further

promote the integration of eTwinning in the Turkish educational system. Specifically, the focus group participants reported that eTwinning is one of the best ways to change teaching by introducing innovative pupil-centred approaches like interdisciplinary and cross-curricular learning, as well as project- and inquiry-based learning or problem-based learning. Such references are in line with the 2023 Education Vision that sets students' learning at the centre and reinforces pupils-centred methodologies (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2021). In addition, Bozdağ's research (2015) suggests that the majority of teachers discovered eTwinning while searching for innovative teaching methods. In this regard, it was reported that the upcoming innovation and incubation centre of educational technologies (EdTech Hub) will have a professional learning lab that will mainstream teachers' innovations that have been implemented in their classrooms. Furthermore, as indicated in the focus group discussion, eTwinning does not affect curricula in a direct way, rather it helps teachers in implementing the curricula in an easier and alternative way. As a result, it was mentioned that eTwinning affects the climate of the classroom, since pupils become more involved in the learning process, while, according to Yeşil (2020), eTwinning also impacts the school climate in terms of innovation, collaboration and openness. Additionally, the focus group participants noted that eTwinning facilitated the integration of educational technologies, and of various digital tools and apps in teaching and assessment, elements which are seen as important in Turkey, since they contribute to quality education that strengthen pupils' motivation (Döğrer, 2016).

4. Integrated Analysis

4.1. Status of Embedding eTwinning in National Policies

eTwinning is a bottom-up initiative that has been launched at a micro level in the school classrooms of 43 European and neighbouring countries by inspired and committed teachers and school heads. However, the 2020 Monitoring Report¹⁸ on schools awarded the eTwinning School Label acknowledged that further work and aid needs to be in place in order to embed eTwinning activities more effectively in national systems across countries, as it can provide a powerful means of support to national educational policies. The present chapter illustrates some initial evidence on the ways and the challenges of embedding eTwinning, along with the further actions and support that are needed to strengthen eTwinning at a national level.

Based on the data obtained from the focus groups, it can be observed that eTwinning is embedded in national systems and policies at the following two systemic levels, with three distinct approaches (A-D, A-C, B-C):

Macro	(A) Integration within the national Ministry of Education	(B) Integration within a national agency or institution
Meso	(C) Direct links/references to eTwinning	(D) Indirect links/references to eTwinning

Table 2: Levels of eTwinning embedding in national policies.

At a macro level, a factor that reflects the embedding of eTwinning in the national system is the structure of the national scheme in terms of the **position of the NSO**.¹⁹ In the majority of the countries included in the Report (Finland, France, Spain, Portugal and Turkey), the NSO operates either within the Ministry or as an entity under the Ministry with a dedicated eTwinning team, while in the remaining countries (Greece, Poland and Slovenia) the NSO

18 Licht, A., Pateraki, I., Scimeca, S., (2020). *eTwinning Schools: towards a shared leadership approach – Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the eTwinning School practices*. Central Support Service of eTwinning – European Schoolnet, Brussels. Available at: <https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/newsroom/research-monitoring/full-report-2020---etwinning-s.htm>

19 <https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/support/national-etwinning-support-ser.htm>

operates within a national agency or institution which works closely with the national Ministry.

At a meso level, references and/or links to eTwinning in **national official documents** such as legislation, ministerial circulars, curricula, strategic frameworks and/or action plans have emerged as an indicator that reflects the embedding of eTwinning in national education systems. More specifically, eTwinning is clearly mentioned in national official documents in France, Greece, Slovenia and Poland. With this approach, eTwinning constitutes an institutional recommendation – not an obligation – for teachers and schools that they can choose to implement in their teaching practice. However, in some countries (e.g., Finland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey) making concrete references to specific projects or actions in national documents is not a common practice and therefore eTwinning is not explicitly included. Nevertheless, in these countries there are descriptions of pedagogical and methodological approaches and tools that reflect the methodology and scope of eTwinning such as internationalisation, cross-curricular approaches, collaborative projects and digitalisation. In all cases, though, eTwinning is promoted as a soft tool that teachers and schools may benefit from.

Most of the countries in which the NSO operates within the national Ministry of Education make indirect references/links to eTwinning in their national official documents such as Finland, Spain and Turkey, while France and Portugal make direct references/links. On the other hand, all countries in which the NSO operates within a national agency or institution (e.g., Greece, Poland, Slovenia) make direct links and references to eTwinning in their national official documents. Regarding the last group of countries, a possible interpretation suggests that the integration of eTwinning in the national official documents aims at strengthening institutional collaboration with the national Ministry and promoting the embedding of eTwinning at a systemic level. Given the limited number of countries included in the Report, a crosscheck with quantitative data regarding the “penetration of eTwinning per country”²⁰ seemed to be precarious. Nevertheless, the qualitative data from the focus groups suggest that the governance structure may constitute one of the multiple contextual factors that affect the way and the extent to which

20 Central Support Services (2021). *eTwinning Trends 2005-2020*. Internal document.

eTwinning has been embedded at meso and macro level across national education systems.

Based on the focus group data, there are **several challenges** that countries face in their attempt to embed eTwinning in their national educational systems. These challenges can be systemised under four main categories:

1. The first one relates to **misconceptions about eTwinning** such as “eTwinning is for foreign language teachers”, “you need to master a foreign language to participate”, “eTwinning is for secondary education”, “eTwinning is kids playing and learning.”
2. The second category illustrates the **contextual factors which hinder the uptake of eTwinning** that are generated by three main factors. The first one relates to the constant national educational reforms that cause difficulties in implementing eTwinning, while the second refers to national educational approaches such as the existence of well-structured textbooks that lead to textbook- and subject-based learning and teaching. The third factor stems from the lack of Internet access and equipment in many regions, especially in rural areas.
3. The third category of challenges relates to **going beyond ‘pioneers’**. Based on the focus groups, eTwinners are the most active and innovative teachers and it is therefore really difficult to expand eTwinning and engage teachers who prefer more traditional teaching approaches. In this regard, a similar challenge in some countries is to persuade school principals to allow their teachers to implement eTwinning projects in their schools.
4. The fourth category of challenges relates to **funding, visibility and the gap between Erasmus+ and eTwinning**. That is to say, the connection of eTwinning with Erasmus+ is not always visible across countries, an element which affects the embedding of eTwinning at a national level. Another challenge that is more relevant to visibility is that the potential of eTwinning is not fully understood by ITE institutions, while the lack of recognition for teacher educators hinders the embedding of eTwinning in tertiary education in several countries.

The participants of the focus groups have also identified **further actions and the kind of support needed** to strengthen eTwinning

and further embed it in their national educational systems. Some indicative actions suggest that:

- practical materials (good practices, kits, videos, lesson plans) that indicate how eTwinning can be integrated across school subjects should be created and promoted for all school levels including Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Vocational Education and Training (VET).
- eTwinning Ambassadors should be supported, while school principals and directors should be informed.
- eTwinning should be approached in conjunction with other projects and activities and promoted as a bigger “package”.
- eTwinning would benefit from synergies with local authorities (regional international relations offices, municipalities) and/or other national stakeholders (institutes, associations).
- the promotion of eTwinning Schools (schools awarded the eTwinning School Label) should be strengthened to reflect that they are not just schools in which eTwinning projects are implemented.
- the visibility of eTwinning should be further implemented in national official documents.
- eTwinning should be introduced in initial training for teachers, but also in initial and continuous training of school heads and school inspectors.
- future teachers, teacher educators and ITEs should be recognised for their work.



Based on the collected data it is suggested that **further support** should target the valorisation of eTwinning in Erasmus and their linked connections especially with Key Action 1 (KA1). eTwinning could also be promoted again as a tool that contributes to the Erasmus+ accreditation process at European level, since eTwinning supports many of the quality criteria. Moreover, eTwinning could be one of the indicators for assessing digital or ICT-related activities in schools (e.g., combining it with SELFIE) or use the eTwinning Quality Labels with other labels (e.g., Safer Internet) to contribute to

the digital strategy of the school. Additional areas of support that emerged include:

- European training for school leaders;
- provision of incentives to teachers and ITEs for their engagement with eTwinning;
- a user-friendly and easy-to-navigate platform connecting other European programmes and operating as a single access point;
- increasing the number of staff to allow a school system-wide approach;
- organising a conference just for policy-makers, maybe combined with EMINENT;
- European frameworks for developing synergies with other bodies and stakeholders in order to safeguard and maintain the status of eTwinning.

4.2. Impact of Embedding eTwinning on National Policies

The present chapter illustrates the key findings of the collected data on the impact of embedding eTwinning on national policies and specifically regarding professional development and recognition, curriculum integration and innovative pedagogy.

4.2.1. Professional Development and Recognition

The area of professional development and recognition explored the actions that the countries have developed for improving teachers' professionalisation and recognition, including both initial teacher education and continuous professional development, as well as the impact of eTwinning on reshaping teachers' image.

First, eTwinning has impacted teachers' professional development in terms of **introducing internationalisation in teachers' careers** by promoting their personal/professional development through international activities and events that connect teachers throughout Europe. For instance, in Finland, a [Finnish pyramid model](#) is used to describe schools' internationalisation. eTwinning is a tool for internationalisation supporting students and teachers to promote their intercultural competence and benefit from an international



activity. In Greece, the [annual circular](#) that is distributed to all schools stresses that eTwinning can promote teachers' international professional development through the different eTwinning offers, as does the [report of the French General Inspectorate](#). In Portugal, a [recent research study](#) suggests that eTwinning and eTwinning groups contribute positively to teachers' professional development, and the same is evident in the [Turkish impact study](#). Similarly, a [Slovenian national study](#) concluded that eTwinning impacted teachers' international collaboration in a significant way.

Moreover, eTwinning has **inspired a new set of activities that promote teachers' professional development** such as national eTwinning conferences, seminars, webinars and annual courses. For instance, in the focus groups it was reported that webinars seemed to be an effective way of delivering professional development offers in Finland and Slovenia, something that will become a permanent activity in the post-COVID area. According to the Turkish focus group, webinars and MOOCs were first introduced in teachers' professional development by eTwinning, while other ministerial policies regarding teacher training were also impacted, such as the upcoming EdTech Hub, an educational technology ecosystem based on teachers' networks. Greece has also been organising the Annual National eTwinning Conference and is about to launch a new MOOC platform offering annual courses on pedagogy and distance learning, and a scientific journal for teachers to present and disseminate eTwinning innovations. Similarly, in Portugal, there are two different MOOCs, one for beginners and another for more advanced teachers, with a high rate of completion.

Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, eTwinning **expanded the professional development opportunities** through webinars and other learning events, supporting teachers in their the offline-online transition. According to the focus group input, the French NSO has organised approximately 80 webinars, and similarly in Slovenia there was a great response with more than 1,000 participants attending webinars. In Portugal, the NSO has organised approximately 53 webinars supporting more than 1,000 teachers during the pandemic, attracting more and more participants. The success of these webinars made them part of the monthly activity schedule. Likewise, the Greek NSO, with the support of the Ministry, organised more than [84 webinars](#) during the pandemic, to support teachers in their work, and the same



applies for Turkey, where more than 1,000 courses were organised by Ambassadors and more than 100,000 teachers were trained through webinars by the Turkish NSO. In this regard, the focus group data show that **eTwinning teachers were better prepared to cope with the pandemic and emergency remote teaching.**

In fact, the Polish national study "[Teachers Online](#)" confirms this assumption by providing evidence on the impact of eTwinning on teachers regarding the use of digital tools and online teaching during the pandemic, and on the expansion of professional development. During pandemic time March 2020 – May 2021 the Polish NSO trained 22,763 teachers within the specially dedicated campaign "Distance Education with eTwinning", including various forms of online training (workshops, seminars, courses on Moodle platforms, regional workshops, regional conferences). Thus, teachers' **professional development and digital competence have been directly impacted by eTwinning.** In this regard, eTwinning is compatible with the Portuguese policy for developing [teachers' digital competences](#), the upcoming Slovenian Action Plan on Digital Education and the [Greek Action Plan for Digital Skills](#).



eTwinning has also contributed to **reshaping the image of teachers** in the school and the wider local community. In the majority of the countries, it was highlighted that eTwinning teachers are particularly **appreciated by parents, pupils, other teachers, headteachers and the Ministry**, and to a certain extent by the wider local community, because of their dedication and their less traditional approach to project work and learning. One way of showcasing this appreciation might be through the recognition that eTwinners receive for their work. The **majority of the countries seem to have already established processes for recognising eTwinning** activities at national level, although several differences can be observed since national/regional institutional structures vary across countries. More specifically, it has been noted that when eTwinning is recognised, this may be either **formally or non-formally accompanied by a certain type of reward** (e.g., salary, promotion, positive non-formal impact on evaluation).

For instance, in France, eTwinning training opportunities are **officially included** in the [training plans](#) of the regional education authorities called Academies, while in Slovenia, eTwinning Learning Events (short online courses), webinars and other similar training opportunities have recently been officially recognised by the national system. In Spain, many regions have included the recognition of eTwinning in teachers' careers, although each autonomous community has its own "internal" processes for this. In Portugal, there is an established system for recognising teachers' professional development with the support of an external council that performs checks on the content of the training. In Slovenia, teachers need to collect a certain number of points for their **career development** and eTwinning provides these points, depending on the project duration. Additionally, eTwinning Ambassadors receive these points. Therefore, eTwinning contributes to **teachers' promotion** (teacher, mentor, adviser) and in the end to a higher salary. Similarly, in Spain, eTwinning helps teachers to acquire points/credits, which leads to a modest **increase in their salary**. By contrast, in France eTwinning does not provide any benefits in terms of promotion or salary, although participating in eTwinning projects is viewed favourably in teachers' career advancement interviews. In Poland, teachers need to meet certain obligations for their career progression (e.g., widening the scope of school activities, being the coordinator of an international project, etc.) and eTwinning meets all these requirements.



In Greece, eTwinning professional development is **not officially linked** to teachers' evaluation, but eTwinning projects are recognised and give extra points in assessment of teachers' projects. Likewise, in France, eTwinning is appreciated in the evaluation performed by headteachers and inspectors, while in Poland, the eTwinning portfolio is frequently used in teachers' evaluation to provide evidence to the headteacher, the regional authorities

(representatives of the city) and/or the regional centre. By contrast, in Finland there are **no credits for professional development** activities at all and therefore none for eTwinning. In Turkey, the Ministry used to provide teachers with 15 points for the national or European Quality Label, but with a recent reform, this is no

longer applicable. Yet other types of “unofficial” recognition might include the organisation of special award ceremonies to recognise teachers’ efforts and provide motivation to beginners, where the District Governor awards the certificates.

Regarding **recognition in Initial Teacher Education**, the majority of the countries indicated that there is no official recognition and/or reward for ITE staff involved in working with eTwinning. In cases where eTwinning is not officially embedded in the curriculum, students receive a certification from the professors, which has however no official impact. In this regard, introducing eTwinning into ITE is a relatively new endeavour in these countries. In conjunction with the university and school closures due to the pandemic, the data obtained from the focus groups provide some initial indications of the countries’ experience so far. That is to say, that all countries reported a **growing interest and response from several national institutions** to join eTwinning and that therefore a slow but clear progression can be observed.

4.2.2. Curriculum Integration

The area of curriculum integration explored the impact of eTwinning on aspects that fall under the topics of internationalisation of the curriculum, pupils’ key competences and school leadership.

All countries participating in the current Monitoring Report indicated that eTwinning is **informally integrated in the official curriculum** through topics such as international collaborative projects, European dimension, languages, digitalisation, project-based learning, key competences and cross-curricular teaching and learning. Therefore, it can be suggested that these **contextual links strengthen and facilitate the integration of eTwinning in the school curriculum**, promoting innovation and internationalisation in school teaching and learning. In Poland, however, this link has been formalised since 2017, when eTwinning was directly and explicitly included in the [new curriculum for modern foreign language teaching](#). Based on the focus group data, in cases where **curriculum development is subject to public consultation**, eTwinners may be among those who suggest and integrate several methodological elements (e.g., project-based approaches, international collaborative projects, digital tools) that they may have learned from eTwinning.

This seems to be evident in the personal experience of one Ambassador in Finland who proposed modifications in the curriculum, as well as of some Ambassadors and eTwinning teachers in Slovenia. Additionally, in Slovenia some Ambassadors and eTwinning teachers are also involved in the taskforces that prepare the teachers' books, so they can, to a certain extent, embed new features that they learn from eTwinning.

In addition, eTwinning also **contributes to implementing the key competences and competence-based approach** of the [Finnish](#), [Polish](#), [Spanish](#) and [Portuguese](#) national core curricula. Moreover, a [Slovenian impact study](#) concluded that eTwinning has become a constant feature of schools' annual work plans with the aim of improving the efficiency and quality of the education process within and outside the curriculum. In other cases, **eTwinning is reinforced through ministerial circulars and national guides** regarding, internationalisation and language learning (e.g., [Finland](#) and [France](#)), citizenship education ([Portugal](#)) and other curricular (e.g. "[Skills Workshops](#)" or extracurricular activities in schools ([Greece](#))). In Turkey, some school textbooks include the eTwinning logo, while the eTwinning Quality Label emerges as a lever for integrating eTwinning in the curriculum.

Based on the focus groups' contributions, integrating eTwinning in the school curriculum is associated with **multilevel benefits regarding pupils' key competences**, learning, motivation and wellbeing. For instance, the focus groups reported that pupils' **multilingual competence** is improved as they feel less insecure while using a foreign language and learn from one another while communicating. This active use of foreign languages contributes to students' literacy and multilingual competence. In relation to the **cultural awareness and expression competence**, eTwinning offers the opportunity to communicate with other pupils from Europe. Through such interactions, pupils' minds are broadened towards others; they gain knowledge of different cultures and languages and develop respect for other people's rights. Pupils' **digital competence** has also been impacted in terms of using various digital tools for learning and expressing themselves. Indeed, it was reported that teachers sometimes discover their pupils' abilities through eTwinning. Pupils' competence development is further validated by the consistency of eTwinning with the national curricula, as well as by additional evidence that

acknowledges the impact of eTwinning on pupils. Indicatively, the [French guide for teaching modern foreign languages](#) makes explicit reference to eTwinning projects and intercultural exchanges for promoting linguistic, cultural and digital competences. In Greece, a [2020 research study](#) concluded that eTwinning enhances pupils' digital, cultural, civic and linguistic competences, as well as their collaborative and social skills. The Polish NSO report on [the meaning of eTwinning](#) and the [Slovenian impact study](#) both illustrate the contribution of eTwinning to pupils' key competences development.

At the ITE level, some institutions of the countries involved in this Report have already **embedded eTwinning in their undergraduate and/or postgraduate curricula**, either as an autonomous elective course, or as a topic in lectures of other courses or **as a research topic** in students' Master's dissertation, while they carry out eTwinning projects. Based on the focus group data, the integration of **eTwinning in ITE curricula has impacted future teachers** by promoting the competences already referred to (multilingual, cultural awareness, etc.). According to the Polish focus group, eTwinning has a positive effect on students who want to take part in their university's Erasmus+ programme, as they have gained international experience before their actual physical mobility. Additionally, future teachers in Slovenia, Spain and Portugal feel more confident as they can apply what they learn (digital tools and pedagogical methodologies) right at the beginning of their career. As described by the Polish ITE representative,

“eTwinning promotes self-learning, self-regulation and self-evaluation for students, elements that are essential for those who want to become good teachers.”

School leadership has also been acknowledged as an important factor with regard to integrating eTwinning in schools. Based on the collected data, school leaders (principals, headteachers, directors) emerge as the main lever of support for the achievement of eTwinning projects. Although eTwinning can be implemented without the support of the school leaders, according to participants' views, when school leaders are committed to the project **the impact is greater with longer-lasting effects on schools**, as stated in the Portuguese and Slovenian focus groups. Specifically,



the Portuguese NSO invites headteachers and mentors (eTwinning coordinator in each school) from schools with the eTwinning School label, to a monthly meeting to support and spread the eTwinning practice in classrooms. This initiative has been very well received by schools and has positive results that are reflected in greater numbers of projects and teachers by these schools.

In general, most school leaders are positively disposed to and warmly support eTwinning, especially those who have a keen interest in improving the internationalisation activities of their schools. Hence, the Greek annual [ministerial circular](#) clearly states that school leadership should facilitate and support teachers implementing eTwinning projects. Likewise, the [Slovenian guide](#) suggests that the eTwinning team should consist of the school management and the school staff, while the [Erasmus+ guide](#) acknowledges the supportive role of school principals. According to the [Polish eTwinning survey](#), school principals disseminate information about eTwinning, while in France eTwinning is presented in headteachers' initial training. The [Turkish eTwinning impact study](#) stresses the encouraging role of the school administration in supporting teachers in project work and the use of technology.

4.2.3. Innovative Pedagogy

The area of innovative pedagogy explored the impact of eTwinning on aspects of topics such as the European dimension, methodological and pedagogical upskilling for schools and teachers, and pupils' motivation. It should be noted that in the majority of the focus groups, it was stated that **innovation refers to approaches and practices which teachers have not used in the past**, or at least not in the same way. Therefore, innovation is highly diversified, since teachers and conditions in classes, schools and educational systems differ across countries. For instance, the rapid switch to remote teaching during the pandemic was an innovation for many teachers, if not for all.

According to the data obtained from the focus groups, eTwinning provides teachers with **autonomy, flexibility and openness** in terms of collaborating with other colleagues, both at school and European level, and of implementing their national curricula. More specifically, eTwinning allowed teachers and schools to open up to the local community, as well as to the wider European community, by **developing synergies and engaging other stakeholders**. For instance, a [Finnish study](#) on global education as part of the Finnish basic education acknowledges the contribution of eTwinning as a cross-border activity reported both by teachers and pupils. Additionally, the [French teachers' guide](#) suggests eTwinning as a way of finding European partners and setting up exchanges.

Concurrently, it was stressed that eTwinning offers pupils and teachers the opportunity to meet, communicate and collaborate with their peers from other countries. The **public image of schools** has been also reported to be positively impacted by integrating eTwinning in schools in general, as well as the **awarded-receiving eTwinning Schools and the values that they reflect**. In some countries, internationalisation is increasingly featured as an asset that is favoured by parents and students. Hence, in some cases, eTwinning features as an added value in school activities in order to attract new students (e.g., Poland, Turkey), or to promote education at a municipality level (e.g., Spain). The eTwinning National Quality Label and the eTwinning School flag (given to eTwinning Schools) constitute the two main ways of raising visibility, while in some events and award ceremonies, regional and local broadcasters, newspapers and social media groups acknowledge eTwinning activities and schools' accomplishments. eTwinning contributes both to opening schools to the local society and to schools' internationalisation as reflected in the national objectives of [Finland](#), [France](#), [Slovenia](#), [Greece](#), [Poland](#), [Portugal](#) and [Spain](#).

Additionally, eTwinning has impacted teaching practices by introducing **cross-curricular and interdisciplinary approaches** in everyday teaching. In some countries, this has been acknowledged as a revolution, especially in cases where teachers rely heavily on textbooks (e.g., in Portugal and Greece). However, some teachers still encounter difficulties in adopting such approaches or prefer the traditional textbook approach. Based on the focus groups, eTwinning is perceived as a **"flexible" methodology** that teachers can implement in their classrooms, having a direct influence on



their pupils through different pedagogical approaches. Besides, this flexibility constitutes a component of national approaches regarding teachers' autonomy and curriculum flexibility (e.g., in [Finland](#), [Greece](#), [Portugal](#)).

Additionally, several **pupil-centred and collaborative pedagogical approaches** were introduced by eTwinning projects and professional development opportunities, nudging teachers to implement them in their non-eTwinning projects and eventually in their main teaching practice. In this regard, in the focus groups, the participants made several references to project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning and flipped learning. These findings seem to be in line with the [Finnish national curriculum](#), which lays emphasis on pupils' active involvement and pupil-teacher interaction, with the Portuguese Decrees (Law [54](#) and [55](#)) and the [Student Profile for Compulsory Education](#), and with the [Turkish 2023 Education Vision](#), which sets students' learning at the centre and reinforces pupil-centred methodologies. Also, the [French proposal for foreign languages learning](#) reports that pupils' motivation for learning new languages is promoted when learning is linked to projects. Additionally, both a [Slovenian](#) and a [Greek](#) study and the [Polish report](#) conclude that eTwinning has a positive effect on changing teachers' way of teaching by introducing more innovative pedagogical practices.

Another area where the focus groups mentioned eTwinning as having a direct effect was that of pupils' motivation, and, in this regard, we attempted to identify any potential link between eTwinning and early school leaving. The focus group data indicate that **eTwinning increases pupils' motivation, energy and commitment for eTwinning projects, but also for other school subjects**. This is evident due to the integration of their ideas and interests, their high involvement and engagement in the learning process, and the opportunity to connect what they learn with their everyday life, contributing to authentic, social and situated learning. Nevertheless, although eTwinning raises pupils' motivation, it would not be safe to reach a conclusion on the direct effects of eTwinning on early school leaving, as there is no official evidence supporting this assumption. Additional national evidence confirms that eTwinning is regarded as a successful activity that raises pupils' motivation for learning, according to indicative findings of [Finnish](#), [French](#), [Greek](#), [Polish](#), [Spanish](#), [Slovenian](#), [Portuguese](#) and [Turkish](#) studies and reports.



5. Concluding Remarks

This Report shows that eTwinning has gained some important ground towards a more systemic approach being officially adopted at national level. Among the countries analysed, **eTwinning is embedded to varying degrees** in national educational policies; both the way and the extent that eTwinning is – or can be – embedded depend strongly on additional national contextual factors (e.g., legal, political, cultural). Yet, **eTwinning’s consistency with the scope and/or the content of national educational policies and curricula**, although present in many cases, can be further strengthened so that eTwinning can be better embedded in national systems or better aligned with national policies.

When attempting to embed eTwinning in national policies, the countries **encountered challenges** such as misconceptions about eTwinning, the expansion of eTwinning beyond pioneer teachers, contextual factors (e.g., educational reforms), and funding and visibility in relation to Erasmus+. In this regard, some **further actions that could tackle these challenges** include giving further support to eTwinning Ambassadors, teachers and school heads, promoting eTwinning in national official documents, developing synergies with local authorities and national stakeholders, and promoting eTwinning as a bigger “package”, in conjunction with other projects and activities. For instance, improvements are needed in cooperation and coordination between the Erasmus+ National Agencies and the eTwinning NSOs to better promote and implement the links between Erasmus+ and eTwinning, to better valorise eTwinning components of Erasmus+ projects, and to foster better understanding of Erasmus+ opportunities by eTwinning users (particularly new opportunities for accreditations).



Regarding the three impact areas, eTwinning contributes to **teachers’ professional development** by supporting the competence development of teachers, particularly in the area of 21st-century skills and internationalisation in their careers. eTwinning has also inspired countries to develop a new set of professional development activities at national level and expand their offers, as in the case of the pandemic. Yet, although eTwinning

activities are officially recognised in the majority of the countries examined, rewards may be either formal or informal. With regard to ITE, all participating countries indicated that there is a growing interest and response by the institutions and future teachers.

As far as **curriculum integration** is concerned, eTwinning is officially integrated in the Polish curriculum and unofficially integrated in all the other countries. This integration is reflected in alignment of eTwinning with broader topics and objectives, as well as with the competence-based approach of some national curricula. Hence, the role of school leadership has been acknowledged as an important factor that facilitates eTwinning in schools. Additionally, eTwinning is also embedded in the undergraduate and/or postgraduate curricula of some ITE institutions, positively impacting participants' key competences by offering opportunities for international collaboration and interaction. This impact is also evident in school students.

The focus groups reported that eTwinning has also impacted **teachers' pedagogical practices** and introduced innovative pupil-cantered and collaborative approaches that raise pupils' motivation, elements which are in line with national educational policies. eTwinning also provides teachers with autonomy, flexibility and openness in terms of collaborating with other teachers at international level and developing synergies with other stakeholders in their practice, which is again in line with national objectives in the majority of the countries. Moreover, the award-receiving eTwinning Schools have impacted the public image of schools in general regarding openness, internationalisation and the values they reflect.

Finally, some trends/patterns identified across countries show an unofficial integration of eTwinning in the national curricula in the majority of the countries. However, several countries also strengthen and promote eTwinning at national level by explicitly including it in ministerial circulars and national action plans/strategies. In those cases where making concrete references to specific projects is not a common practice, eTwinning is indirectly linked to further policy objectives, such as in professional development, curriculum integration and innovative pedagogy. In this respect, eTwinning complements and supports teachers' needs, curricular objectives, both in school education and ITE, and introduces innovative approaches that foster pupils' participation, motivation and learning.

Glossary

TERM

DEFINITION

Ambassadors (eTwinning)

Experienced eTwinners working at local and national level to support other teachers and promote eTwinning. Ambassadors are appointed by their NSO and are there to support eTwinners.

Central Support Service (CSS)

The European eTwinning office run on behalf of the European Commission by European Schoolnet in Brussels. The CSS is responsible for the central coordination of eTwinning activities across Europe.

eTwinner

A teacher involved in eTwinning and registered on the eTwinning Portal (it can also be other school staff, but we refer to teachers as they are the vast majority).

eTwinning

A European action that promotes school collaboration and networking between schools in Europe. For more information, go to the eTwinning Portal: www.etwinning.net

eTwinning Plus was a twin action which provided a platform for schools in Europe's immediate neighbourhood and linked them with schools participating in eTwinning. Since autumn 2020, eTwinning Plus has been incorporated within the eTwinning platform. The former eTwinning Plus countries are: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Jordan, Lebanon, Moldova, Tunisia and Ukraine.

eTwinning Project European National

A European project is set up by at least two schools from two different countries to collaborate in any educational topic. It then has to be approved by the NSO in both countries. As from 2014, national projects can also be set up by at least two schools from the same country, as a first step to European collaboration.

eTwinning School Label

The eTwinning School Label is a recognition for schools (as opposed to recognition for individual teachers) introduced in the autumn of 2017. The scope of assessment to obtain the label is very broad, and stretches across the range of eTwinning activities that a team of teachers in a school may be involved in. The label can only be granted if the school head/senior manager certifies the accuracy of the information contained in the application.

TERM**DEFINITION**

**eTwinning
Groups
(eTwinning)
+ Featured
groups**

Communities within eTwinning for teachers to discuss by subject, theme or topic, providing a way to share ideas and connect with like-minded eTwinners. A full list of Groups is available on eTwinning Live. Featured eTwinning Groups are coordinated by the CSS and deal with topics considered strategically important at European level.

**National
Support
Organisation
(NSO)**

The organisation that represents and promotes eTwinning at national level. Each NSO provides training and support, organises events and runs media and communication campaigns at regional and national level.

**Project Kits
(eTwinning)**

Step-by-step guides to successful projects with concrete ideas for teachers on how to implement a European collaborative project in their class. Kits can be used in their entirety or adapted to specific teaching contexts.

**Professional
Development
Opportunities**

Professional Development Opportunities include webinars, webinar series, short online courses (previously known as learning events), long online courses, MOOCs and Professional Development Workshops. The latter are normally held face-to-face, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these have been transformed into online events during 2020 and 2021. All Professional Development Opportunities are aimed at teachers and school staff who want to improve their skills in various areas, including pedagogy, ICT and collaboration.

Quality Labels

eTwinning awards National Quality Labels and European Quality Labels to project partners who have demonstrated a high level of innovation and success in their project work. National Quality Labels must be applied for through eTwinning Live, while European Quality Labels are awarded once a year (usually in October).

Recognition

eTwinning offers a number of ways for teachers to gain recognition for their work, including European and National Quality Labels, and eTwinning Prizes at national and European level. Pupils are given recognition in the form of National Quality Label certificates.

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ANNEX

The interview guide developed in the context of the present Monitoring Report has been structured based on two main thematic axes as presented below.

A. Embedding eTwinning in national educational systems

1. How would you describe the status of eTwinning in your national educational system, including both general and vocational school education?
2. What further actions do you think are needed in order to promote eTwinning in the national educational policies?
3. What kind of national and European support do you think it is needed in order to promote eTwinning in the national educational policy frameworks and school systems?

B. Impact of eTwinning on national educational policies

B.1 Professional development and recognition

1. How did eTwinning's professional development influence your national educational policy regarding the continuous professional development of in-service teachers in digital literacy and innovative approaches to pedagogy (both general and vocational)?
2. Participation in eTwinning activities has been officially recognised in some countries for teachers' career development. How has this recognition been achieved in your country?
3. Do you regard involvement in eTwinning as a good means to improve the status and image of teachers in your country?

B.2 Curriculum integration

1. Has eTwinning influenced your national curricula, and to what extent?
2. What is the role of school leadership in integrating eTwinning in the school curricula and activities, in your country?
3. Are you aware of any benefits related to teachers' and pupils' competences and performance as a result of the participation in eTwinning European collaborative projects?

B.3 Innovative pedagogy

1. How does eTwinning promote innovation in teaching and learning in your national educational systems?
2. Are there examples of such promotion? Please elaborate
3. Do innovative practices triggered by individual teachers – we assume many are eTwinners – have an impact on the whole school culture and practice?

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Contact us

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For the last 17 years, eTwinning has grown from a grassroots initiative into an active schools' community which has involved, since its launch, more than 937,000 teachers working in more than 217,000 schools across 43 countries. Funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme, eTwinning provides a safe digital platform, where teachers are engaged in various activities: from the design and implementation of European collaborative projects to networking, from participation in virtual groups to professional development and peer-learning.

eTwinning, through its platform available in 30 languages, provides a range of resources and learning opportunities for teachers. Indicatively, topics of these resources include the benefits of engaging with eTwinning, 21st-century skills, use of ICT in education, project kits for inspiration and guidance. Registered teachers have access to eTwinning Live, a restricted area of the platform with more advanced features and possibilities of the eTwinning community. Alongside this, teachers may participate in professional development activities that are offered at national level and focus on fostering their pedagogical, collaborative and digital competences.

At European level, eTwinning is coordinated, on behalf of the European Commission, by the Central Support Services managed by European Schoolnet, a consortium of 32 Ministries of Education. At national level, the National Support Organisations (NSO) promote eTwinning by offering a range of communication and learning activities and provide guidance and support to end-users.

