



European
Commission



SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

BETTER CONNECTING RESEARCH TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

*Conference Report from NESET II/EENEE
conference held on 23 November 2016, Brussels*



Education
and Culture

The conference *Socially inclusive education: connecting better research to policy and practice* was co-organised by the NESET II and EENEE networks of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture. It was held in Brussels, at the Madou tower¹, on November 23.

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OPENING PLENARY

Moderated by **Mr Jan Pakulski**, Head of Unit 'Studies, impact assessments, analysis and statistics', European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture

Welcome by the Coordinators of the Networks NESET II and EENEE

Dr Jana Huttova, Scientific Coordinator of the Network of Experts on the Social Dimension of Education and Training (NESET II)

Prof Ludger Woessmann, Scientific Coordinator of the European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) and Director of the Ifo Center for the Economics of Education

The Network of Experts on the Social Dimension of Education and Training ([NESET II](#)) and the European Expert Network on Economics of Education ([EENEE](#)) are two advisory networks of experts funded by the European Commission. NESET II and EENEE aim to contribute to the improvement of decision-making and policy development in **education and training in Europe** by advising and supporting the European Commission in the analysis of **social and economic aspects of education policies and reforms**.

Welcome by the Commission

Mr Jens Nymand Christensen, Deputy Director General, European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture

A discussion is needed about how well education systems perform, centred on evidence-based approaches and solutions that would help lay a solid foundation for more **inclusive societies through education**. Although comparable data is increasingly becoming more readily available and accessible, it does not by itself provide sufficient information for policymakers. Rather, the data must be carefully **analysed and evaluated** for it to effectively inform policy decisions and help improve education systems country-by-country, and region-by-region.

Inclusion is an urgent task for Europe and requires improvement in two dimensions: **education** and **security**. While security remains a high priority, the importance of education cannot be underestimated; education is a significant tool to advance **social inclusion, employability** and **tolerant societies**. A strong **economic case** can also be made for improving education; improved skills help workers adapt to rapidly changing labour markets, leading to better employment prospects, economic growth, and alleviating poverty.

Violent extremism can be prevented by addressing marginalisation and exclusion, by promoting civic/social and intercultural competences along with democratic values and fundamental rights, and by integrating students with special needs into mainstream education systems.

The Paris Declaration² represents a joint commitment to improve policies across Europe. Stakeholders and Member States need to work together and share information to strive for inclusion. The odds are too high for any missteps – making the wrong choices today will have lasting and expensive consequences.

² The Paris Declaration of Education Ministers of 17 March 2015 called for action at all levels to reinforce the role of education in promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination, strengthening social cohesion, and helping young people become responsible, open-minded and active members of our diverse and inclusive society. 4

Keynote address

Prof Michel Vandenbroeck, Chairman of the Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (VBJK) and Professor in the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy, Ghent University

An emerging challenge in European societies is **'super diversity'**, where minorities are the majority and there is **no one single homogenous group**, and where diversity is no longer simply an addition to an otherwise homogeneous group, as it was in the 1980's. And as socio-economic differences widen between Member States, so too do education gaps.

While the **impact of early childhood education and care (ECEC) on children** is well documented – there is robust research on the positive impacts of ECEC in terms of both cognitive and non-cognitive development for all children, and for children with lower socioeconomic status (SES) in particular – the potentialities and impact of ECEC **on communities, social inclusion and social cohesion** remain largely unexplored.

Young families are mobile and live in diverse neighbourhoods, and they are often marked by loneliness, fatigue and lack of social support. We know that teachers have influence on parent-parent relations, and that children can also be brokers of relations. In order to facilitate these relations, ECEC services need to reach all families, especially in areas where affordability, availability and accessibility of ECEC services are scarce and where **deliberate non take-up** is increasing. Possible causes of an unequal take-up have been analysed in several waves of research. First, researchers looked at the **characteristics of families** that could explain differences in parental choice (e.g., cultural barriers, work arrangements). A second wave of research analysed **environmental constraints** (e.g., first-come-first-served practice, language and cultural barriers). An ongoing, third wave of research points to the **lack of desirability and usability** of ECEC due to insufficient integration of care and education from a holistic perspective. All of the identified barriers have to be removed in order to foster social cohesion and social inclusion through ECEC.

ECEC holds great potential to foster social inclusion in education, yet from previous European research studies (e.g., CoRe) we know that not all of the necessary conditions are being met. We need to learn more about **different groups of parents** in order to understand **deliberate non take-up**. We need to invest in the **professionalisation** of staff, not only to work with children, but also to work with parents in contexts of diversity. We also need to invest in quality **transitions**, and avoid the risk that overemphasising learning may lead to the discounting of **care**.

Education is one of the very few policy areas in which a real and positive impact can be made on social cohesion and social inclusion, and we must pay it due attention.

SESSION 1

DIVERSITY OF LEARNERS AND TACKLING DISCRIMINATION, SEGREGATION, BULLYING AND VIOLENCE

Moderated by **Dr Maja Nenadović**, international debate coach and project coordinator at Anne Frank House

Modern classrooms, and societies overall, have seen a rise in bullying, discrimination, radicalisation and extremism—phenomena which cannot be separated from the social transformations and growing popularity of far-right parties in Europe—and they present a unique set of challenges for education and inclusion. This session was devoted to understanding how schools can effectively tackle these challenges and foster tolerance and respect for diversity within inclusive communities.

Education policies and practices to foster tolerance, respect for diversity and civic responsibility in children and young people in the EU

Dr Barry van Driel, International Director for teacher training and curriculum development at the Anne Frank House and member of NESET II

Much of Europe has seen increasing polarization, growing nationalism and support for extreme parties among all ages of the population. Teachers and schools are feeling unprepared to deal with the associated, changing realities in their classrooms. Evidence suggests that school workforces are not yet representative of their respective student populations, and teacher-centred monocultural and monolingual approaches still dominate. Nevertheless, many inspirational examples can be found throughout Europe that aim to promote tolerance and respect for diversity in classrooms and communities. The most effective interventions have been found to be those that embrace a whole-school and community-based approach, give sufficient agency to students, and view student diversity as an asset rather than a liability. Future research should build on these findings by pinpointing the aspects of these approaches that are especially effective, and by identifying the conditions under which they are most successful.

How to prevent and tackle bullying and school violence

Prof Carmel Cefai, Director of the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health, Professor at the University of Malta and member of NESET II

There is now a strong body of international research findings that indicate that school bullying can have serious long-term mental and physical health consequences, and influence early school leaving, both for victims and perpetrators. Unfortunately, many EU Member States do not have national school bullying and violence prevention strategies; neither do most EU Member States have common or linked strategies for early school leaving and bullying prevention. As it is, anti-bullying strategies in EU Member States are generally limited to universal prevention approaches, lacking attention to the different needs of certain groups, and with no strategic focus on discriminatory bullying against certain groups (e.g., migrants, Roma, LGBTI, those experiencing poverty, etc.). Key actions are needed at whole-school, family, curricular, classroom, and community system levels. These include social and emotional education, conflict resolution skills for teachers, whole-school approaches that actively involve parents and are linked with family support services and multidisciplinary teams, as well as community outreach programs relying on structured cooperation and communal spaces.

Highlights from the Discussion

The discussion started around the new challenges faced by schools and teachers presented by growing diversity and populist politics, which shape not only how **children from non-dominant groups are integrated** into education and society, but also how **all children should be taught** about changing political and social realities to foster tolerance and civic responsibility to avoid polarization and discrimination. To that end, the participants agreed that **designing schools as safe spaces**, where children and teachers can hold open discussions about controversial issues such as religion, history, gender identities, etc., would be an effective way. Initiatives such as ‘school thermometer’ and ‘save school map’ were mentioned as other effective ways of measuring school environment. **Whole-school approach with collaborative forms of learning** (such as service-learning, peer education, cooperative learning, socio-emotional education) and ensuring that **students are active in the education process** were again emphasized as the most effective ways of changing young persons’ attitudes and behaviours.

The participants emphasized that fostering tolerance and civic responsibility is also **a broader societal issue**, and schools alone are limited in their capacity to promote change. Different stakeholders and sectors (such as education, social policy, labour market, integration sector, health policy, etc.) need to work together to ensure equity and inclusion in society.

It is difficult to design a universal formula for social inclusion. And yet, there are a number of **inspiring practices and policies** that schools and education systems can use to create inclusive bully-free environments. So the pressing question is: **how can these examples be effectively transferred across different contexts?** The participants emphasized that **superficial implementation** of policies aimed at inclusion (e.g., mixing students without following the principles of contact theory and providing targeted support, designing intercultural and socio-emotional learning (SEL) curricula without giving voice to the students and communities themselves) **can reinforce segregation and inequalities**. Furthermore, in some contexts the whole-school approach is adopted only in specific schools (e.g., low SES schools or segregated schools); this is not an inclusive approach since these schools are seen as a liability and problem to be solved, while mainstream schools remain insensitive towards diversity and are untargeted by integration policies.

The main recommendation that emerged from the discussion was **the need for an overall shift of education policies to acknowledge diversity as an asset and a resource**, which should be extended to all schools. The participants called for more research on what makes certain policies effective in different contexts, and on the conditions that contribute to their successful implementation, to ensure that **education stakeholders have better information not only about what works, but also how it can be effectively implemented and mainstreamed**.

Relevant sources

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SESSION 2

INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Moderated by **Dr Jana Huttova**, Scientific Coordinator of NESET II

School segregation and the performance of immigrant and native pupils

Prof Giorgio Brunello, Department of Economics and Management, "Marco Fanno" – University of Padova and member of EENEE

The share of immigrants has increased in most European schools. Since immigrants usually concentrate in less affluent neighbourhoods, and natives tend to flight from schools with many immigrants, school segregation emerges. The existing evidence shows that both natives and immigrants have lower test scores in schools with higher percentages of immigrants. The effect on immigrants is larger. De-segregating policies reduce inequality but are not necessarily efficient. Policies to contrast segregation include lotteries, bussing, additional resources to schools with many immigrants and ceilings to the share of immigrants. Policy evaluation and costs/benefits analysis are required to understand which policy works best.

Integration of migrants and refugees through education

Dr **Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger**, Head of Migration and Education at the Institute for Education and Psychology at Johannes Kepler University, and member of NESET II

With the insights from language acquisition in multilingual environments, and from research on stereotype threat, identity-building and belonging, there is a rather clear framework for what is needed for schools to be successful in a globalized Europe: anti-bias training of all school partners; knowledge about migration and migration history at the local and global level; language-sensitive subject teaching; and linguistically and culturally responsive school-culture. Models, instruments and trainings to develop teachers' competences are available. These elements have to become part of the professional identity of teachers and to this end need to be mainstreamed in teacher education and training. At the same time, there is a need for committed leadership at the school-level and beyond to put the knowledge into practice.

Highlights from the Discussion

The discussion started around the **effects of school segregation**. School segregation can have a negative effect on children's outcomes; therefore it is particularly important to ensure that teachers in these schools receive sufficient support. Avoiding segregation helps to improve children's outcomes because children learn faster when they are immersed in an environment that stimulates desired learning (e.g., in terms of language; examples and role models of native peers).

It was noted that **inter-cultural openness of schools** relates to: awareness-raising and self-reflection concerning biases and stereotypes; intercultural whole-school development; effective change management. Examples of good practices and projects aimed at supporting the integration of migrants and refugees mentioned during this session included: **parental involvement and support** measures (e.g., Family Literacy Project in Switzerland); child-centred mentoring (e.g., summer camp or the Nightingale Mentoring project in which children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are mentored by older students that are often from similar backgrounds); **culturally responsive curriculum**.

Another important aspect touched on during the discussion was the influence of **adult learning** (and lifelong learning) **opportunities** for immigrant parents on the learning outcomes of their children. It has long been known that academic success and levels of educational attainment of children are often related to the level of educational attainment of parents. Providing learning opportunities for immigrant parents is important not only for their own inclusion, but also for the inclusion of their children: first, parents set the role of learning in home environments (the value attached to learning by the parents is very important for children's motivation to learn); second, participation in adult learning may have a positive effect on income. The **second chance education** is just as important to immigrant populations as it is to native populations and is particularly relevant in countries that have high levels of school drop-outs (e.g., Southern European countries).

The participants of the session also mentioned the importance of capacity building for comprehensive **integration, including a sense of belonging to the host society**.

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SESSION 3

INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

Moderated by Prof Christian Christup Kjeldsen, Aarhus University, member of NESET II

Supporting young people with SEN in attaining higher qualifications is critical to the overall **economic** and **social** objectives of the EU. This session was devoted to increasing awareness about learners with special educational needs and discussing their inclusion.

Higher Education and disability: premise, promise, and practice

Prof Arthur Limbach-Reich, University of Luxembourg and member of the Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED)

International comparative studies and reports on disability and higher education indicate that there is a movement towards diversity and inclusion in higher education. Beyond these positive developments, however, there lurks a risk that the rhetoric of inclusion masks a disturbing reality. Universities persist in being perceived as elitist institutions that are accessible only to highly-educated and highly-skilled persons. Governments and universities promise that graduates will likely be successful in labour-market competitions, and thereby provide returns on the investment in higher education. However, this rationale implicitly excludes disabled individuals. The need for debate is urgent: are inclusion endeavours genuinely motivated by inclusion and increasing the capabilities of individuals with disabilities, or are they more about national economic growth and international competitiveness? Some students with disabilities will adapt to the existing, barrier-filled systems of higher education, especially as reasonable accommodations and universal design principles diffuse. There will remain, however, other students still effectively barred from campuses. Potential students that are discordant with existing employment opportunities are, and may continue to be, excluded from higher education. The rhetoric of ‘university for all’, then, carries with it significant risk and must be reconsidered.

Early School Leaving (ESL) of learners with disabilities

Dr Harald Weber, Project Manager, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Unfortunately, much of the research literature on the outcomes of inclusion ignores the large body of research on early school leaving (ESL). In general, there is a lack of longitudinal studies that distinguish between the type of education setting (inclusive vs. segregated), the special educational needs of the cohort, and the frequency that individual learners use the different provisions that may prevent ESL. It is yet unknown if and to what extent learners with disabilities and/or SEN are more likely to be early school leavers with respect to inclusive and non-inclusive educational settings.

Comparing European inclusive education policies: a conceptual and a methodological framework

Prof Serge Ebersold, Head of chair on accessibility at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM) and project adviser at the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The country policy review analysis project (CPRA) focuses on assessing the ability of systems, designed for inclusive education and developed by various countries, to meet the policy goal of inclusive education. It consists in developing, with participating countries, a comparative framework to analyse how countries’ education systems provide all learners of any age with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers. In order to elaborate on this comparative framework, criteria must permit us to identify regimes of inclusive education among European countries.

A broader approach to inclusion

Dr Alan Dyson, Professor of Education and co-director of the Centre for Equity in Education, University of Manchester (retired)

Inclusive education is usually understood as being narrowly focused on ensuring that disabled students are accepted in regular schools. However, a broader approach sees inclusion as being about all learners who are disadvantaged in unequal school systems and who go on to be disadvantaged in unequal societies. Promoting inclusion in this sense is not just about making minor adjustments to school practices and organisation. It is about tackling the roots of social and educational disadvantage, and rethinking the role of schools in promoting more equal outcomes and acting as agents of social change.

Highlights from the Discussion

The session brought together European and national stakeholders in the field of integration and education to discuss how **children** and **young adults with SEN** can be best supported in **accessing** and **remaining** in the education system. The discussion began with a broad debate on what **inclusive education** and **special needs** mean. It was agreed that the term 'inclusion' has different meanings across different countries, and even within countries, policy makers, practitioners and academics often use this term differently. There is also a broad understanding of what **special needs** and even **disabilities** are, varying among countries.

The discussion then turned to the **responsibilities of education systems** in terms of inclusion and how to keep expectations ambitious but realistic. Educational institutions should not be solely relied on to address the growing importance of inclusion. Although all speakers agreed that schools have a **broader mission** than just academic education, it is also important that they are supported by other public services. Barriers between schools and social care, healthcare and employment have to be overcome, and all public policies should be harmonised with educational policies. One of the participants from the audience shared the old maxim that 'it takes a whole village to educate a child', which nicely captured this part of the discussion and left an open question of what brings the village together, and who is coordinating the 'villagers'?

Also discussed was the subject of current education systems being optimized for students to **perform well in assessments**. It was suggested that tests are only indicators of what young people are learning and shouldn't be used as ends to themselves. Instead other relevant dimensions, such as respect for difference and diversity, social cohesion, participation in society etc. should be the end of the means. Putting too strong an emphasis on testing leads to a situation where only high performing students advance and proceed to higher education, and narrows the access of young adults with disabilities to tertiary education. While some students overcome these barriers, others remain cut off from higher education.

Relevant sources

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SESSION 4

EDUCATION STAFF QUALITY AND EQUITY

Moderated by **Prof Torberg Falch**, Department of Economics, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, member of EENEE

This session was devoted to education staff quality and equity. It focused on issues such as the quality of initial education and continuous professional development; professionalisation opportunities for those among the teaching workforce with low or no qualifications; teacher recruitment, retention and promotion strategies; and various extrinsic monetary and intrinsic incentives.

Incentives to raise quality of instruction

Prof Daniel Münich, Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education, Economics Institute (CERGE-EI) and member of EENEE

Good quality teachers are the key factor in securing high quality learning outcomes. It requires attracting talented youth for initial teacher education (ITE) and the teaching profession, keeping good teachers, and involving them in good quality continuing professional development (CPD). Properly set incentives (including monetary, working environment, and intrinsic ones) and professional school principals are other important elements. Empirical evidence on what works and what does not should be taken into account when designing policies. However, since most research findings are location and time specific, policy agendas should be complemented by the culture of regular policy impact evaluations, evidence-based policy making and, if possible, pilot-testing of intended policies.

Professionalisation of Childcare Assistants in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): pathways towards qualification

Dr Jan Peeters, Director of Centre for Innovation in the Early Years (VBJK), Ghent University and member of NESET II

In many European countries part of the workforce is represented by low or non-qualified ECEC assistants. They are usually not taken into account in policy documents, and they have fewer possibilities of qualification and of CPD. Research findings indicate that investment in the professionalization of assistants represents a key element for ECEC quality improvement, since in a number of countries the share of assistants is growing. The investment in the professionalization of assistants is of major importance for the integration of care and education in ECEC. Therefore, one of the recommendations is to develop adapted pathways to qualifications for assistants. This can contribute to making the workforce in ECEC more diverse, since many of the assistants are from ethnic minority background and the case studies show that they play an important role in connecting with parents from ethnic minority background. In some countries such as Denmark, adapted pathways to qualifications is also an important tool to have a more equal gender balance among ECEC practitioners.

Highlights from the Discussion

The discussion started around the **role of school principals**. The participants agreed that it is hard to find education service of good quality without inspiring school principals, and they acknowledged that there is significant heterogeneity between Member States' definitions of the role of principals and the way principals are educated and appointed. It was identified as a potential topic for further research.

Another important aspect highlighted during the discussions was related to **the continuous professional development (CPD)** of ECEC and school workforce. Research findings suggest that **paid non-contact hours** are very important and the opportunity to discuss and reflect on teaching practices with colleagues results in improved teaching quality. It was noted that CPD is more effective when **teachers are actively involved** in CPD courses; for example, using **video recordings** to reflect on teaching practices have been observed to have positive effects within a 3-4 months period, while other training programmes may require at least 2 years to see similar effects.

The discussion on the effectiveness of ITE and CPD raised two additional questions. First, **how to assess the impact of CPD** on teachers' skills. Second, how to **ensure sufficient resources** to cover competence development costs in the context of budgetary cuts (e.g., in Spain) or to make changes in financing without reducing the quality of ITE and CPD. It was agreed that we should make a distinction between research aiming to assess the effects of a particular CPD programme, and regular monitoring to enhance schools' governance. While trying to find an answer to the second question, the participants of this session pointed out that, given the costs of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, including costs of time, it is particularly important to ensure the sufficient **balance between theory and practice**, and start **teaching practice** early. Increased time of initial teacher education and revised ITE in Portugal was mentioned as a good example by the audience.

A lot of emphasis is put on **attracting the best candidates** to teaching profession and **retaining** them. But the understanding of what competences and skills are needed for ECEC staff and teachers working in schools differs. The importance of social and creative competences should be acknowledged, especially when it comes to ECEC staff. Furthermore, there is a need to **increase the diversity of the teaching workforce** (most of ECEC and school staff is mainly recruited from white middle class women), to increase the quality of instruction in **socioeconomically disadvantaged areas** (which often have lower quality or less prepared teachers and principals), and to ensure **smooth transitions** between ECEC and schools.

There is a **need for more research** on the incentives to raise the quality of instruction in general, and the quality of instruction in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas in the European context. A great deal of the existing knowledge currently comes from US research and developing countries (since the evaluation of interventions funded by international organisations is often mandatory). It was also acknowledged that a **better link between policy and research** is needed: academics focus on a number of interesting issues but they are often not linked well with policy agendas, while policy makers rarely initiate rigorous policy evaluations to discover whether their education policies work.

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CLOSING PLENARY

New areas for evidence and research

Prof John P. Portelli, Department of Social Justice Education, Co-director of the Centre for Leadership and Diversity, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto; Senior Policy Advisor at the Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta

Dr Dragana Avramov, Director of Population and Social Policy Consultants (PSPC) and member of NESET II

Mr Paolo Battaglia, Policy Officer, Unit 'Europe 2020, Investment Plan, Education and Training 2020', European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture

Moderated by **Mr Jan Pakulski**, Head of Unit 'Studies, impact assessments, analysis and statistics', European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture

The closing plenary session addressed the question of how to better connect research to policy and practice in order to foster socially inclusive education, and highlighted new areas for evidence and research.

All the speakers of the closing plenary session agreed that **inclusion and equity should remain priority topics** in the EU policy agenda. The upcoming **Maltese presidency** of the Council of the EU will focus on **'inclusion in diversity'** to emphasize the reality of diversity and importance of inclusion in education, youth, culture and sport policies at all levels of education and training and through different routes. The participants of this session also emphasized the need to give up the 'one size fits all' mentality and focus instead on equity to ensure **different, but equal ways** of achieving the same educational goals and ensure **adequate support**. It was recognised that inclusion and recognition of the benefits of diversity are at the top of the policy agendas of many Member States, however, there is still a need to ensure that these policies and strategies are **translated into practice**.

To enhance inclusion, the Member States need to foster innovation through **digital agenda** and **innovative teaching methods**. Increased evidence shows that **equality boosts growth** because of the importance of equality of opportunity: it is essential to promote non-elitist education and training in order to create the opportunity for all to reveal their potential and make the best use of their talents.

There is a **challenge** in education and training policy to identify the **right evidence and good processes** to make it useful for policy making and to have a positive and strong impact. How can existing knowledge be translated into problem solving? The speakers of this session emphasized that more research should **focus on the implementation process**: the social and political processes that mediate the implementation of change in education systems based on research evidence.

When considering how to translate research into policy making, one should keep in mind that choices are often ethical, not practical. There is a need to be more open to ethical debate and stop taking value neutrality as given. To be able to do that, we also need to place on the agenda **a number of alternatives based on responsible research**.

The need for new and updated evidence comes without saying. However, we should also take into account that educational research competes with other research areas and other priorities. Education research should be **better integrated** and become **more interdisciplinary**. Some of the participants argued that there is a need to have more **longitudinal data**, suggesting that this also requires clear agreement on **what to measure** to be able to fund research within limited budgets.

In terms of **topics for future** research and policy making, the participants of the concluding session mentioned the **costs of exclusion in education**, the importance of **good governance** in education, and the challenges related to **multiculturalism**, in addition to the topics flagged by the participants of the parallel group sessions.

