



# **POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION**

**Evidence and policy guidance from European research projects funded under FP6 and FP7**



**Erasmus +**



**Sixth Framework Programme**



**Seventh Framework Programme**

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**NESET II** is an advisory network of experts working on the social dimension of education and training. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture initiated the establishment of the network as the successor to NESSE (2007-2010) and NESET (2011-2014). The Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) is responsible for the administration of the NESET II network.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education policy needs to cater for diversity and enable all citizens to succeed in education and to develop their full potential according to their specific needs and irrespective of their backgrounds. However, in reality, educational inequalities are a key challenge to education systems across the EU, often linked to socioeconomic disadvantage, low participation rates in early childhood education, low parental educational level and family support, ethnic or migrant background amongst others.

This report highlights concrete policies and practices that work to disrupt or prevent educational disadvantage<sup>1</sup>. The Key Findings are based on a review of 20 research projects funded under the Sixth and Seventh EU Framework Programmes for Research and Development (FP6 and FP7)<sup>2</sup>. The review was commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) and carried out by the Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET II).

The **Key Findings and Lessons for Policy and Practice** described below will help to support Member States in their efforts to deliver on the objectives set out in the Paris Declaration 'Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education' as well as the 2015 Joint Report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework.

This summary presents **Key Messages** stemming from the review of 20 research projects, followed by an overview of more specific **Challenges and Lessons for Policy and Practice** according to the following four themes:

1. Lifelong learning, skills and employability;
2. Inclusive education for disadvantaged children;
3. Equity and efficiency of education and training systems;
4. Empowering educators and the teaching staff.

### Key Messages

- Educational disadvantage is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and social exclusion;
- A learner's socioeconomic background remains the strongest determinant of educational success in all Member States and all levels of education;
- Equity in education is compatible with strong learning outcomes and high performance;
- Investing in the quality of early childhood education and care is crucial, as it establishes the foundation for further learning and helps break the cycle of disadvantage;
- Education and training systems that uphold high standards of quality for all, foster personalised, inclusive approaches, support early intervention, and target disadvantaged learners, can be powerful drivers of social inclusion;
- Education and training systems which allocate pupils to different types of education/institution at an early age exacerbate the effect that socioeconomic background may have on educational attainment and do not raise efficiency in the long run;

<sup>1</sup> This review does not cover higher education level taking into account the scope of 20 projects reviewed.

<sup>2</sup> CARE, CITISPYCE, COPE, EDUMIGROM, EQUALSOC, EUMARGINS, GINI, GOETE, IMPROVE, INCLUD-ED, INEQ, KATARSIS, LLIGHTinEurope, LLL2010, NEUJOBS, PROFIT, RESL.eu, SI-DRIVE, WORKABLE, YIPPEE (see Annexes 1, 3-5).

- Efficiency and equity can be increased by improving recruitment procedures and quality of teacher force in disadvantaged areas, and by designing autonomy and accountability systems which avoid inequity;
- Schools alone cannot disrupt intergenerational cycles of deprivation. Cross-policy synergies are needed for more effective intervention against educational disadvantage;
- Monitoring frameworks, complemented by specific targets for under-represented groups, are essential for improving equity. Yet, few Member States have systems that collect data on all phases of education and training that can track progress over time in terms of participation and attainment of disadvantaged groups;
- Rigorous evaluation of the impact of reforms and interventions aiming to improve equity in education and training is critical, yet is not widespread in EU Member States.

## I. Lifelong learning, skills and employability

### Key Findings

- Lifelong learning does not sufficiently attract or reach out to adults with lower skills or coming from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Income can be a significant barrier to participating in vocational and tertiary education, especially for lower-paid people;
- Vocational qualifications and prior learning are often unrecognised by employers and educational institutions;
- Employers invest too little in lower skills training and when they do provide it, tend to rely heavily on government assistance;
- Language learning courses often fail to meet the needs of adult migrants.

### Lessons for Policy and Practice

#### *Promoting and supporting lifelong learning*

- Continuing to encourage higher levels of educational attainment among those who are disadvantaged, including through subsidising learning for adults with low incomes;
- Providing incentives to employed adults to take up training which will lead to higher skill levels;
- Offering meaningful and attractive second chance learning opportunities to improve employment outlooks for those who left education and training prematurely;
- Using community-based lifelong learning initiatives in local and decentralised centres to reach disadvantaged and marginalised learners, especially amongst the low skilled, migrants and women;
- Delivering learning at flexible times, providing preparation for admission and offering modular courses;
- Funding and incentivising SMEs to provide and support training;
- Providing organisational support and assistance including financial incentives to train lower skilled workers and to improve their skills and attitudes towards learning;
- Customising learning to correspond to the needs of the employer as well as the employee;
- Providing flexible work-based training to reduce any disruption to work time and work needs;

- Eliminating 'dead-ends' in upper-secondary level and providing more flexible, permeable and diversified learning pathways and access routes into post-compulsory and further learning.

### *Supporting access to lifelong learning to adult migrants*

- Supporting introductory programmes, including language courses, cultural skills and assistance in entering the labour market;
- Providing language learning courses that are designed for adults in terms of content, are offered at a time that is compatible with work and family commitments, and are offered at easily accessible locations;
- Prioritising the delivery of language courses to those who are least fluent in the host country's language, which will expedite their ability to communicate with schools, health services, and employers;
- Promoting the participation of the whole family in the learning process;
- Working in partnership with community groups to design and develop services so that they reflect the real needs of communities.

## II. Inclusive education for disadvantaged children

### Key Findings

While the socioeconomic situation of ethnic minorities and migrants has a considerable effect on their children's educational attainment, it is clear that:

- The children of recent migrants and migrants from outside Europe have lower attainment levels than children in the same socioeconomic groups in some Member States at all stages of education; some of this can be attributed to transitory work and unsettled education;
- Some ethnic minority groups' children have persistently lower educational attainment at all stages of education;
- Parents from disadvantaged background are less able to support their children in school;
- Most often, teaching and learning does not challenge negative perceptions of migrants, minorities nor are teachers prepared to challenge parents about the support they give to their children's education;
- Migrant and refugee children are disproportionately in lower attainment streams and lower educational/institutional routes because of admissions policies; compounding the problem, their parents are not able to challenge the system and express their preferred choices;
- A curriculum that is too rigid, centralised, and fails to reflect the diversity of the implicated learners, can have a negative impact on the learning process, particularly for socially disadvantaged children.

## Lessons for Policy and Practice

### *Ensuring inclusive education and providing support for migrant and ethnic minority children*

- Quickly integrating new migrant children into mainstream classes that reflect their cognitive skills/age, by means of bilingual classes, multi-cultural curricula, and by training and employing teachers from the same backgrounds;
- Providing to migrant and refugee children who lack language skills the necessary resources to hasten their proficiency and to integrate them into an appropriate stage of schooling quicker;
- Ensuring migrant, refugee and Roma children are not excluded from mainstream education;
- Giving migrants the same choices for their children's education as any other parents have, and ensuring that children have access to and take up additional support before and after school;
- Eliminating both 'allocation to different types of educational institution' and 'streaming', particularly before the age of 13;
- Implementing diversity-conscious policies with culturally sensitive curricula to help enhance equal opportunities for all students, foster good relationships, and boost positive self-image of children from disadvantaged social backgrounds;
- Promoting a holistic approach to learner development that encompasses personal, social, cultural and academic aspects, accompanied by targeted support;
- Implementing effective innovative pedagogies and practices such as web-based, cooperative or learner-centred approaches, which help unite learners and facilitate cooperation;
- Providing effective targeted support to students, including all-day and open schools, linguistic support, individualised support, tutoring programmes, socioemotional and behavioural support.

### *Promoting and supporting the involvement of families and local communities*

- Reaching out to migrant parents to ensure they take up child care, play and learning opportunities for their children;
- Explaining to migrant parents what support they may need to give to their children's learning and how they can be involved in schooling;
- Involving mentors and mediators from the local community in the school workforce to inform and engage migrant parents and to supplement the school's careers advice and guidance;
- Improving parents' literacy and numeracy so they may better assist their children in primary schooling, by involving them in school learning, and by providing them with opportunities to teach their children (for instance, through games and learning activities);
- Encouraging parents' aspirations for their children, and improving parents' knowledge and understanding of tertiary education.

### III. Equity and efficiency of education and training system

#### Key Findings

##### *Governance*

- Fragmentation of education systems has led to unclear divisions of responsibilities and ineffective implementation of national strategies. This is especially true in areas that are cross-sectoral, such as the education of children in care, formal and non-formal adult education, and VET;
- Ineffective governance can create additional barriers for stakeholders at various levels, such as coordination problems, under-recognition of qualifications, unclear division of responsibilities and ineffective public-funding strategies;
- At present, very few EU Member States have mature monitoring systems that collect data on disadvantaged groups' educational participation and attainment at all phases of education and training, and that can link the data in order to track progress over time.

##### *Funding*

- The amount of resources devoted to schooling is not a primary factor in determining student performance and the quality of educational provision;
- The way funding is allocated can either enable or hinder equality and inclusion;
- Most of the funding in education and training goes towards financing teachers' salaries, and there are very few resources allocated for substantive improvements of the learning environment and for developing more successful pedagogical strategies;
- Financial barriers often cause a bottleneck to accessing non-compulsory education, whether it is early childhood education and care, or higher and adult education. This is especially true for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

##### *Admission and transitions*

- School segregation leads more ethnic minority and socially disadvantaged children to be distributed in poorer quality and lower performing schools, which can further exaggerate social exclusion and inequality;
- Admission policies based on free school choice or catchment area requirement, if uncontrolled, can increase school segregation and inequality;
- Streaming is often used alongside a performance-driven, competitive approach to teaching and learning, which is particularly detrimental for disadvantaged learners;
- Differentiation of post-secondary education generally increases access to education via a range of pathways and courses, however, it also tends to increase inequality in access to higher quality or higher status academic pathways;
- Fewer flexible and good quality lifelong learning opportunities leads to lower participation in formal and non-formal adult education.



## Lessons for Policy and Practice

### *Promoting good governance and monitoring*

- Ensuring adequate levels of school autonomy to enable municipalities and schools to be innovative and flexible in addressing the specific needs of learners;
- Linking the introduction of greater autonomy to comprehensive systems of accountability and quality assurance;
- Promoting participatory governance by enabling multi-stakeholder collaboration between key educational stakeholders;
- Putting in place monitoring systems that can track disadvantages and inform effective responses;
- Introducing early warning systems of children's problems or potential drop-outs, alongside comprehensive monitoring.

### *Ensuring sustainable investment and funding*

- Ensuring that a relatively high proportion of GDP is allocated to education and training, with teacher salaries roughly equivalent to the average of other graduate occupations;
- Providing targeted financing to disadvantaged schools and individuals to increase participation in higher or further education;
- Providing additional funding for schools to enable them to respond to needs of learners from disadvantaged background, including language learning and guidance, additional activities and targeted support to learners;

### *Ensuring equitable access to and continuity of education and training*

- Extending compulsory education and ensuring that educational experiences are uninterrupted and of good quality;
- Practicing sensitive admission policies to reduce school segregation, which take into account the ethnic and social composition of school districts, via the system of 'controlled choice' or varying catchment area requirements;
- Promoting ethnically, socially or mixed-ability schools and classes to promote interaction and acceptance of difference;
- Postponing the age of allocation to particular educational routes, increasing opportunities to change tracks and providing high curricular standards for students in all schools;
- Engaging relevant stakeholders - parents, the community, civil society, public and private sector organisations – in the learning process to improve pupils' learning experience and overall well-being.

## IV. Empowering the educators and the teaching staff

### Key Findings

- Teachers and school principals are often not equipped to work with growing diversity in the classroom;
- Teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting is one of the priority areas where teachers report the highest need for professional development in many European countries;

- Although most initial teacher education programmes include some form of diversity training, it is often in the form of a single module or elective, which is unlikely to have a major lasting impact throughout a teacher's career;
- Even though most competence frameworks for teachers include awareness of diversity issues, the concepts are seldom operationalised and implementation guidelines are rarely provided.

## Lessons for Policy and Practice

### *Improving the competences of the teaching workforce*

- Explicitly defining compulsory teacher competences in teaching disadvantaged groups;
- Reinforcing the sociological, socio-psychological and socio-educational units of teacher training programmes to raise teacher awareness of the specific difficulties facing disadvantaged learners and their needs;
- Identifying the teaching methods that most effectively increase the motivation and improve educational attainment of disadvantaged learners;
- Ensuring that initial teacher education and continuous professional development include the subjects of diversity, intercultural education, multilingual teaching and innovative pedagogies.

### *Ensuring diversity in the teaching workforce*

- Educating and employing cultural mediators, such as teaching assistants or family liaison officers with migrant or ethnic minority background, to help build links between parents and schools and engage parents in their children's learning;
- Ensuring that schools' workforce, including teachers and teaching assistants, is representative of the diversity of schools' communities, recruitment to initial teacher education should be appropriately targeted, and the qualifications of immigrant teachers should be recognized.

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