Inclusion and education in European countries

Final report
1. Summary / Sommaire / Zusammenfassung

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1 The meta-assessment of inclusion and education

1.1 Assignment

The meta-assessment of inclusion and education was made on assignment of the Commission's DG for Education and Culture. It was carried out by the INTMEAS-consortium in ten EU Member States. Leading partner of the consortium was the independent Dutch research unit DOCA Bureaus and its research director George Muskens.

The aim was to come to comparative conclusions and to recommendations on inclusion and education, based upon national reports of ten European countries, expert advice and further sources as available. The scope of the assessment was on pupils in mainstream primary and secondary education and schools. The first focus was on *good practices and measures* that were keeping the pupils apparently aboard in their mainstream classes and schools, at least up to their 'labour market qualification'. The second focus was on *early school leavers and pupils at (high) risk* of exclusion from their classes and schools.

The ten countries were a reasonable sample of the EU member States in terms of seize, educational systems and inclusion index. The ten countries were: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The inclusion index of these countries ranged from 2 to 6 on seven indices for educational inclusiveness. These indices were comprehensiveness of lower secondary education, participation rate in pre-school education, length of compulsory education, rate of early school leaving, disadvantaged priority groups, rate of outplacement, and rate of special education outside mainstream education.

Hard comparative assessment was not feasible. We were unable to set out initial research on good practices and measures based upon a comparative design. We had to rely on secondary sources that were often only indirectly referring to our research issues and aims. Besides, the body of knowledge on good practices and measures was consisting mostly of (qualitative) case study reports that allowed for only very tentative comparative conclusions, if any. The result was an interesting comparative patchwork of studies that the author has assessed as good and fair as possible.

1.2 Key issues and concerns

Since June 2008, interim-reports were available on the ten countries. These showed the national priority issues (policies, strategies), as well as the available national knowledge base – source, case studies, reports, statistics, etc. Through the preliminary analysis of national priorities and sources, *five key issues* were identified with regard to inclusion and education. These were:

1. Measures to reduce early school leaving,
2. Priority education measures in relation to disadvantaged pupils and groups,
3. Inclusive education measures in relation to pupils with special needs,
4. Safe education measures in relation on the reduction of bullying and harassment,
5. Teacher support measures.

The comparative analysis was further focussed on these key issues. In chapter 2 the comparative conclusions with regard to these five key issues will be summarised.

The comparative conclusions were discussed in the frame of European policies to support the schools and teachers. Europe is giving support via the responsible national educational authorities. Since the Lisbon Strategy (2000) it has applied the *open method of co-ordination and mid-term programs* for funding interesting pilots and innovations. The author recommended a number of possible improvements that will be summarised in chapter 3. In addition, the author has discussed the possibly statutory responsibility of the EU on *two key concerns* of European legislation and action, being the 'halving' of *early school leaving* as agreed in the frame of the Lisbon Strategy, and the *forced out-*

placement of Roma children or other specific economic, social and cultural minorities from mainstream schools and classes.

2 Comparative conclusions

2.1 Reduction of early school leaving

All reports referred to national measures to reduce early school leaving. The major target groups regarded pupils at (high) risk in relation to disadvantages, inequities, special needs, bullying, harassment, etc. In that sense, the policies, measures and practices are rather similar to the ones to be discussed in the paragraphs below.

In relation of the European policy objective of halving early school leaving in the ten years between 2000 and 2010, the policies and measures have not been effective. The general pace of reduction was too low between 2000 and 2007 and the skewed distribution between countries and regions did not change sufficiently. High rates beyond 20% were still registered in four Mediterranean countries.

Recent assessment of national trends, data and types of early school leavers appear to reveal other factors. Early school leaving appeared to be closely related to the end-age of compulsory education, to insufficient absence registration, to the complex structure of vocational education and training and to (almost) adult early school leavers, who have lost their motivation or prefer an immediate step towards the labour market without the necessary qualifications. These factors may be more decisive than the risks mentioned above. It would mean that other policies and measures might be needed.

2.2 Priority education measures

All countries have set out priority schemes and measures for target groups of disadvantaged pupils. All countries have targeted these at a different set of target groups, with rather wide attention for inequities related to migration history and/or socioeconomic status in the countries of North-West and Southern Europe, and to that of Roma or travelling pupils in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and else-where. In one way or another, these target groups regard the socioeconomic and cultural 'minorities' in the countries concerned.

The measures were set out in two different directions, with considerable overlap of dual-use measures, i.e. measures that seemed to fit with both directions. The first direction was that of enhancing and reinforcing the individual chances and potentials of disadvantaged pupils, by learning them the appropriate languages of instruction, extending their learning time, guiding them individually and giving them a personal mentor, etc. The other one was that of intercultural education. It regarded anti-discrimination measures, measures to enhance mixed schools, intercultural curricula and activities, etc. Here, both the minority children and the majority children were the target groups of the policies and measures. They should share a common culture, while having respect for each other's cultural identity.

Many interesting case studies were reported, including national or regional meta-assessments. The results were promising, while they revealed individual 'education gain' for disadvantaged pupils and sincere intercultural participation of mixed school communities. They revealed also setbacks and hindrances. General comparative conclusions on inclusion and education in Europe were insufficiently supported by the case studies and the national reports.

2.3 Inclusive education measures

The national reports on Italy, Spain and Scotland revealed that the ideal of inclusive education is feasible for (almost) all pupils with special needs, disabilities and physical or mental handicaps. This general conclusion was supported by international research documentation that showed good educational results 'for all'. However needed special education may appear to be in the national context of the other countries, 'inclusive

education' appears to be the better choice. So, the danger of stigmatisation, discrimination and eventually 'trashing' of the pupils concerned is avoided, although all educationalists in special education will do what they can to avoid the occurrence of these mechanisms.

It is clear that 'inclusive education' is a demanding commitment at the grass-root level of school, class and pupils. It needs at least a place there for personal assistants, tools as needed, adapted buildings, etc. Schools, teachers and pupils should get the facilities they need. Further, some functional grouping of pupils is apparently often needed, in relation to classroom management.

2.4 Safe education measures

All reports revealed that schools were faced increasingly with unsafe conditions, crime, bullying and harassment, in many ways. In the meantime, it appeared to be a rather usual thing in the life of the (adolescent) pupils. Schools felt an urgent need for preventive and repressive action and measures. The conditions have been worsened with the rise of the Internet and multi-task phones that have made cyber-bullying extremely easy to do.

The national reports and further documentation has delivered a number of interesting local case studies and national policy assessments on what school and staff can do against it, to protect the victims and the co-victims, and to react on bullies and 'supportive witnesses' by prevention, school rules, repression and/or re-socialisation. A comparative conclusion on what the best measures are would not be possible. The 'patchwork' is rather diffuse and at points contradictory or circumstantial. The author dares to say that schools and staff can do something useful and that they therefore should do it, finding their solutions for their bullying and harassment under their circumstances, while learning from success and failure at other schools.

2.5 Teacher support measures

Among the measures for the aims mentioned above were a number that referred to the teachers. In that sense the teachers were part of the case studies and the policy assessments in the national reports. The teachers should be capable and willing to keeping their pupils at (high) risk aboard, and they should be encouraged and supported to doing so. Important for them is their training: initial training as a teacher, on the job training and re-training in the course of their professional life and career. There they should get the habitus, skills and capacities needed for their difficult and enduring task of keeping pupils at (high) risk aboard. All national reports referred to the need of such training and the offer of training facilities that should be available at the national and regional level of universities and high schools. Some national reports underlined the necessity of allocating the best teachers for the pupils at highest risk. It meant extra salary and other facilities.

The other set of measures that were revealed in the national reports regarded specialised teachers and support staff for specific needs and purposes: Roma assistant, designated teachers, remedial teachers, mentors, counsellors, general class assistants, administrative staff, professional managers. These functions were said to be functional as long as they would not turn into their disadvantage of increasing the burden for the teachers, and as long as they do not replace the teachers' functions in education of learning the pupils to learn, learning them knowledge, competences and skills as appropriate, etc.

3 Discussion and recommendations

3.1 Supporting schools and teachers

Further to the last comparative conclusions above, the general recommendation is justified that all actors, who are supporting schools and teachers, must reinforce and

strengthen the commitment, efforts and focus of schools and teachers to keeping the pupils at (high) risk aboard.

However general, this recommendation applies to e.g. external consultants, producers of educational 'software' (electronic, print, multimedia, etc.), external partners of the schools, the authorities, European partners, etc. These and other relevant actors should pay serious attention to the commitment, efforts and focus of schools and teachers for their pupils at (high) risk and what support the schools and teachers really need.

In practice, several dysfunctional mechanisms may hinder the support and may divert the commitment of schools and teachers away from keeping the pupils at (high) risk aboard. It may regard mechanisms such as top-down communication, 'ex cathedra' communication or jargon on behalf of certain external professional actors that schools and teachers would misunderstand. Further diverting factors could be:

- The high or too high workload of the schools and the teachers,
- The easy outplacement option with regard to troublesome pupils,
- The own responsibility of the pupils and their parents for failing educational achievements.

Support actions for schools and teachers should take these factors into consideration.

3.2 The authorities

National, regional, local and/or educational authorities are responsible for the legislation, finances, facilities, quality assessment, rules and arrangements of education. The responsibility regards mainstream primary and secondary education, compulsory education, lower and upper vocational education and training, special education, etc. So, the authorities are responsible for the frames of the inclusion of pupils at (high) risk in mainstream education. They are making the rules and arrangements, enforce certain measures or encourage schools and teachers to take appropriate action. They may ascertain that the schools are receiving all relevant information and documentation for taking further or new measures and actions, and they may help with facilities and co-funding for pilot projects and innovations, e.g. in the frame of European programs. A most active role of the authorities is recommended in this respect. For the dissemination of relevant information and documentation it would be useful to establish and to support national and regional knowledge centres for inclusion and education. These were to be linked to the European knowledge centre recommended below and to its network of national and regional centres.

3.3 EU support

Since the start of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the Commission's DG for Education and Culture is applying the Open Method of Co-ordination. Purpose is the support of the Member States, e.g. with regard to the inclusion of pupils at (high) risk in education and the reduction of early school leaving. For these purposes, the exchange of interesting cases, good practices and measures among representatives through Peer Learning Activities is most important. The Commission and representatives of the Member States are further working on joint indicators such as those applied by EUROSTAT for early school leaving.

Apart from the Open Method of Co-ordination, the EU is running a number of mid-term programs for the co-funding of pilot projects and innovations. Aims concerning inclusion and education were apparently covered by a number of programs, such as Lifelong Learning, the RESEARCH Framework Program, ESF, PROGRESS, the Regional Development Fund, DAPHNE, CULTURE and YOUTH.

Last point to be discussed with regard to EU responsibilities regards possible statutory roles of the EU. As said above, the EU may have statutory responsibilities with regard to the reduction of early school leaving and the inclusion of Roma pupils in mainstream education.

3.3.1 The open method of co-ordination

'Peer learning' appeared to be an interesting learning mechanism with regard to good practices and measures. In that sense, the author has recommended that the peer learning activities were to be continued and intensified in terms of participation and dissemination. Participation of the regions in countries with a decentralised system would improve the process and would help the functional dissemination of good practices and measures.

In addition to peer learning, the author has recommended to reinforce the knowledge base concerning inclusion and education in Europe. All relevant actors should have easy access to comparative indicators, interesting case studies, revealing national and regional assessments, further 'evidence-based' materials and publications, feasible tools and protocols as applied, etc. The materials should be disseminated and be available in appropriate formats. Herewith, the author has recommended that the Commission will establish a knowledge centre concerning inclusion and education, in co-operation with national and regional knowledge centres.

3.3.2 EU Programs

With two exceptions, the EU-programs are referring to priorities concerning inclusion and education. The one exception is RESEARCH that is covering the issue by the more general issue of civic society. European research on inclusion and education has received mid-term funding. The other exception is LEONARDO DA VINCI, being the branch for vocational education and training of the Lifelong Learning program. In relation to the apparent concentration of early school leavers there, the author recommended that pilots and innovative projects aiming at the reduction of early school leaving should be prioritised for the program and that schools etc. should be encouraged to respond to the priority.

Further recommendation was to use the available EU-funds as good as possible. The lists of funded applications might point at a low level of applications and accepted projects in the field of inclusion and education. That would be at odds with the stated priorities.

3.3.3 Statutory EU tasks?

It is rather obvious after seven years that, with exceptions, the Member States' policies and measures to halving early school leaving remained rather ineffective between 2000 and 2010, compared to the Lisbon Strategy agreement of 2000. The author has recommended that the EU and the Member States may reconsider the agreement, giving the EU a statutory role in this respect. The statutory role should give the EU and the Commission the authority to propose and to negotiate reduction targets, to monitor of the reduction measures, processes and effects, and to adjust inappropriate plans and measures.

At another point a new statutory role appeared to follow upon a landmark judgment of the European Court of Human Rights of 13 November 2007. The Court ruled against special Roma schools. In no European country this practice can be accepted further on. The Commission staff is working out the implications of this landmark judgement. The author has recommended that the EU should take up its apparent responsibility in this respect, and should take up statutory responsibility for the discriminatory special Roma schools and eventually also for such schools for children from other social and cultural minorities.