Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Thematic Report: Socioeconomic Disadvantage

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Socioeconomic disadvantage in education

This report examines the ways in which socioeconomic (SE) factors affect educational disadvantage. As a starting-point SE could be understood as a set of structural factors that influence education and could cause disadvantages for groups of children, youths and adults.

Since socioeconomic disadvantage (SED) is a very complex concept, we will present a more extensive working definition. Official perceptions of SED as well as research perspectives will be discussed. SED has intersectional dimensions and these are explored here and in the other thematic reports[1].

There are several different factors used to measure socioeconomic conditions. Common ways of assessing SED can include parents' educational level, social background, living conditions and social heritage. In Eurostat, parents' educational level, living conditions, and income are measured together with other variables such as gender and ethnic group, in a multi-dimensional structure, in order to compile a comprehensive definition of SE. Although socioeconomic circumstances have an important effect on young people's school careers, the concept of SE is not formally and uniformly defined in relation to education in EU reports and statistics.

One way of thinking about socioeconomic disadvantage is using the concept poverty. *Risk of poverty,* in EU statistics means, that households have an equivalised disposable income below 60 percent of the country median. Sometimes official documents also stress the multi-dimensional character of SED. Poverty can be reproduced between generations and is correlated with low educational attainment. An important aspect of social reproduction is the length of time people with lower levels of educational attainment remain in poverty. For the 15 "old" EU countries as a whole, it has been shown that the risk for a member of a high-level educated household (ie at least one member had completed tertiary education) of living *persistently* in a low-income household was only three percent, while the corresponding risk was twelve percent for a member of a low-level educated household (ie all members had completed at most lower-secondary education) (European Commission 2003).

Hartsmar (2001), in a thesis on historical consciousness, reports on how Swedish pupils in seven classes in years 2, 5 and 9 living in socially diverse residential areas view their future. Pupils from areas labelled as segregated and with low social status, associate their future with a family and children of their own, but also with "no job" and "no money." In contrast, those living in areas with high social status, (as segregated as the former but seldom labelled that way) are confident about further education, getting good jobs, buying a house and travelling to interesting places with their future family. SE differences therefore affect young people's aspirations and expectations of the future. According to the Swedish National School board (Skolverket 2000; 2004) and Elmeroth (1997) SE is the best predictor of school results, school success and careers for Swedish pupils with both parents born in another country. The Swedish National School board uses parents' level of education as the main proxy of SE status. If the parents, especially the mother, have higher education, it is more likely the child will get high grades.

The countries included in this study[2] differ in the ways in which socioeconomic factors are viewed in relation to educational disadvantage in official documents. For instance in Ireland and France educational disadvantage has been mainly constructed in socioeconomic terms. In Denmark, the concept of social heritage is still often used as in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s to explain familial

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[1] Other thematic reports concern disability, ethnic minorities, gender, indigenous minorities, linguistic minorities, and religious minorities.

[2] Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and United Kingdom.

social reproduction in economic living conditions and social problems. Originally the concept was used in opposition to a biological view of moral, biological and genetic explanation models of social problems. However, the concept has later been criticised by, for instance, Ejrnaes (1999) in Denmark and Vinnerljung (1998) in Sweden, for not paying enough attention to structural factors (see also Cederberg and Lingärde 2008:12 and Gordon *et al*. 1999).

Social class is well known to be reproduced in and by education. This is particularly the case in educational systems founded on early streaming and fee paying educational institutions. Social class, as a structural factor defined by labour market positions, linked to power and influence, is a traditional concept to understand educational inequality, more commonly used in Britain and Ireland than for instance in Sweden and Denmark (Leathwood *et al*. 2008; Moreau *et al*. 2008; Tallberg Broman 2002, Weiner and Berge 2001).

Class and gender

Like social class, gender can be understood as a separate factor, but these factors can also be interrelated. In some spaces gender as structural factor has the strongest impact but as class has an ethnic dimension so gender can have an ethnic dimension (Jackson and Scott 2002, Spivak 1999). Girls perform better in most subjects and on all levels compared to boys across socioeconomic strata, for instance PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment; Skolverket 2004), a trend in most EU countries. However, it has also been argued that issues faced by girls and women in schools have been given less attention than issues faced by boys and men (Moreau *et al*. 2007). In terms of social class however it has been argued that education is not meaningful for working class boys as they do not see education as an important way into labour market. It is however important to make comparisons between boys and girls within the same strata for example upper class boys often do better than working class girls. Results from PISA show that in general pupils growing up in socioeconomically disadvantaged environments are achieve less well in tests (Cederberg 2004). PISA tests measure 15 year old pupils' understanding of text, mathematics, science, and problem solving. Differences in achievement between pupils could – for instance, according to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2003; 2006) – be explained by gender, socioeconomic background and ethnicity. Girls achieve better than boys in corresponding socioeconomic levels, and the more advantaged the socioeconomic background the higher achievement.

Class and ethnic minorities

In general, pupils with different ethnic backgrounds than the majority have disadvantages in school. A complicated but interesting statistic finding is that in general in Sweden and in the UK girls from ethnic minority backgrounds do better than boys from majority backgrounds in elementary school. This is a fact that needs to be more examined and be related to class as well as gender and ethnic minority background.

Ethnic background, however, does not form a specific homogeneous category (Andersson *et al*. 2008, Cederberg 2006). Behtoui (2006) found that ethnic background was emphasised when social background and living conditions in the new country were what actually mattered. Social class then has acquired an ethnic face. An example of this is shown by Moldenhawer (2001), who gives examples of intersectionality among minority school pupils in Denmark.

When examining ethnicity, it is important to take into account how long the pupil has lived in the new country. In general, the shorter time the lower the attainment. Newcomers live in poor areas under difficult socioeconomic circumstances. Migrant children in general do not achieve as well as non-migrant children but differences between and within ethnic groups are huge (Cederberg 2006).

Their family background, such as parents' education and class, is of importance. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation refers to Behtoui (2006) and argues that ethnicity often conceals the work of class. The social background of the parents should be checked when comparing the educational results. When this is done, the research demonstrates that children (in Sweden) with parents born abroad in general have similar educational outcomes as children with native parents with the same kind of social background. Native parents are often in a more favourable class position and have knowledge about the education system, choose the best possible school for their children and are more able to help them with their homework.

In many countries (eg Spain, Sweden, Denmark), immigrants are overrepresented among individuals or families suffering from poverty. For instance, in Sweden, immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa have an unemployment rate that is four times higher than for those born in Sweden, and only 30 percent in this immigrant group were economically self-sufficient in 2002. Structural factors could create unemployment. In Spain for instance children from immigrant families who come through family reunification programmes are allowed education but not given permission to work afterwards, which creates high youth unemployment. In Spain, 16 percent of all children, but 32 percent of children of foreign parents not proceeding from the EU, live in high poverty (with incomes less than 40 percent of the national average) (Fundación Caixa Catalunya 2008). More examples of the connection between immigrant status and poverty could be mentioned from many EU countries.

Other factors like discrimination or even racism also affect unemployment. A successful school career and high level qualifications do not guarantee success in the job market for young migrants or young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Unemployment, discrimination and other factors linked to labour market, are factors outside school and school systems. Segregation and discrimination in labour market and in housing areas create concentrations of SE conditions with newly immigrated poor families marginalised in labour market and living.

Measuring inequality in educational outcome

As mentioned above, there are clear SE, gender, and ethnicity patterns in educational results, as measured for instance in the PISA studies. It should also be noted that there is extensive criticism of the methodology used in PISA studies. Among other things, it has been pointed out that since PISA tests have a standardised design for all countries; their contents are context-less with respect to the diversity of national educational cultures and curricula. Also, the context of the test situation varies strongly between countries, for instance, as to whether or not pupils get individual feedback on the tests (Wester 2007). Thus, while there may be inequalities in educational outcome between groups, there is also a need to develop alternative methods for measuring these inequalities.

A working definition

From the discussion above**,** it can be concluded that SED is not unidimensional. In order to understand its multi-dimensional character, the following aspects must be looked at:
- Poverty
- Social class
- Social marginalisation
- Social (negative) segregation
- Institutional discrimination

In the analysis and discussion below, these five main categories shall be used. However, due to their complex interaction with particularly ethnicity and gender the factors shall not be strictly separated from each other.

The extent of socioeconomic disadvantage

The question of how socioeconomically disadvantaged children and youths perform in education can be approached in different ways. Firstly, poverty and social marginalisation may be emphasised as powerful factors interacting with educational disadvantage. Secondly, class position should also be taken into consideration. It may be argued that while children and youths from a working-class background are not necessarily poor they still may be disadvantaged in the educational system, for instance by upper and middle class hegemony in educational institutions and by being subjected to a system that reproduces class segregation. Hence, social segregation and institutional discrimination can affect these children and youths as well as those experiencing poverty and marginalisation.

Living in poverty

On average 19 percent of children within EU are defined as poor. Despite progress within the labour market 10 percent of the children live in households with no one working and out of these children 60 percent live within the danger zone of poverty.

According to Eurostat, patterns of child poverty differ widely between countries (see figure)**.** In Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, and Spain, the rate of income poverty risk is high while the share of children living in jobless households is low, ie, many children have working poor parents.[3] The share of children living in jobless households is highest in the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Ireland, and in the United Kingdom, the poverty risk figure is also very high. Interestingly, both poverty indicators show relatively low values for Cyprus. The two poorest countries in the group - Slovakia and the Czech Republic - have moderate figures for poverty risk as well as the share of children living in jobless households. The lowest poverty risk figure is to be found in Denmark. In Sweden it has recently risen markedly (according to the Eurostat time series[4]). The same is true for Greece but not for any other country in the group.

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[3] It should be remembered, however, that the poverty risk limit is calculated in relation to the median income (after social transfers) for each country, and this median is much higher for Luxembourg than for all the other countries. Hence, relating all household income figures to the same reference figure (eg, the median income for the EU 27) would give a somewhat different cross-section pattern for poverty risk, with a more favourable rank position for Luxembourg and less favourable positions for (in particular) Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Cyprus. Such poverty measures are not, however, generally used in the EU.

[4] The Eurostat time series for Sweden actually shows a marked fall in child poverty risk from 2004 to 2005 and an even more marked rise between 2005 and 2006. These figures may be disputable, since a thorough Swedish investigation of child poverty (although with somewhat different measures) does not show the fall for 2005 and does not yet have definite figures for 2006 (Salonen 2008).
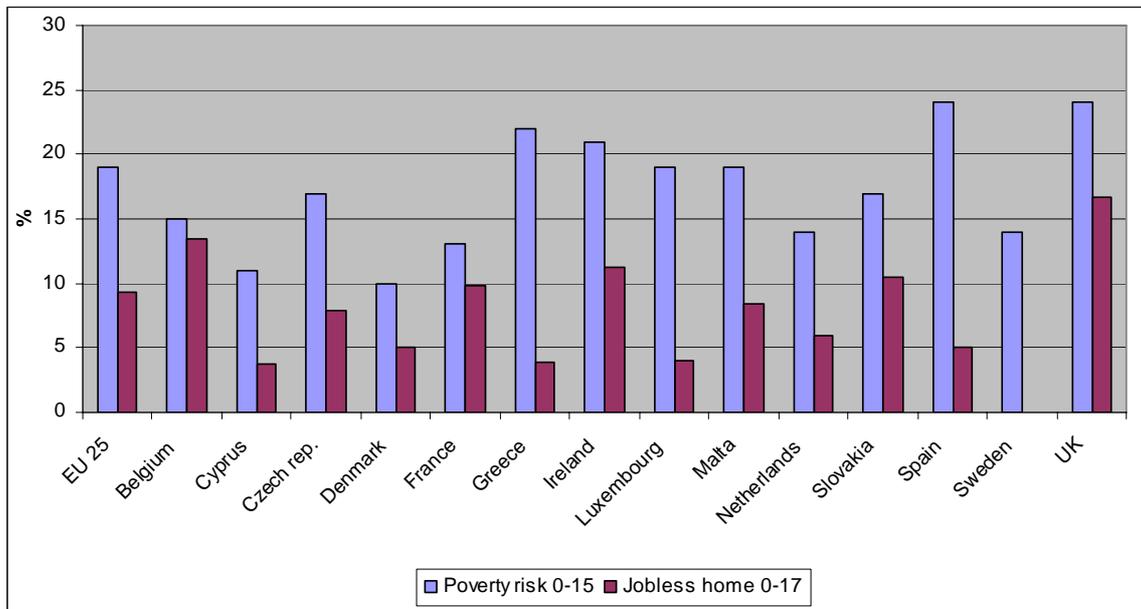
Child poverty in the studied countries. Poverty risk 0-15: Percentage of 0-15-year-olds who live in households with an equivalised disposable income below 60 percent of the country median (2006). *Jobless home 0-17:* Percentage of 0-17-year-olds who live in households where no one works (2007). No data available for Sweden. EU 25 refers to the average (estimated by Eurostat) for all EU countries except Bulgaria and Romania. *Source:* Adapted from Eurostat.

The impact of poverty and social marginalisation on educational disadvantage depends on the character of the educational system. Firstly, costs such as school fees, costs for books and computers, school meals, school uniforms (where used), transportation etc. may exclude poor pupils altogether from participating in education, particularly non-compulsory education. Secondly, systems with several different principals and organisers of education (public, private, etc.), as well as systems with elite schools, may result in segregation if high-quality schools are more expensive than other schools. In addition, poverty also tends to be correlated with health problems, inadequate nourishment etc., as well as leisure activities, which could affect educational outcomes (Ridge 2006).

There are some clearly intersectional patterns concerning poverty. Roma are an ethnic group many countries identify as suffering from educational disadvantage and marginalisation. The Travellers are a large indigenous group in Ireland and in the UK and has the worst school attendance profile among minority ethnic groups in the UK. Both Roma and Travellers are marginalised groups with weak connections to the labour market and in some countries, Roma also live under poor housing conditions. Roma and Travellers suffer under huge socioeconomic disadvantages in society that construct disadvantages in education. Their situation provides examples of complex combinations of SED and disadvantages based on ethnic status and discrimination.

Working class

As mentioned before social class, as an analytic concept, is relatively seldom in official use nowadays to understand disadvantage in education. The concept itself has been viewed as politically undesirable in some contexts. In Ireland, for instance, when class is mentioned in education it tends to be looked upon as an individual set of attributes and not as structural relationships of power generating inequalities (Moreau *et al*. 2008). However, it is well documented in research studies, that social class positions affect school career. Social class can thus be reproduced in the educational system. This reproduction is a result of complex sociologic and pedagogic interaction between school and pupils. The concept of social class was used more

frequently in the 1960s and the 1970s with, for instance, famous studies as Jackson (1968) and Willis (1977), although there are also some later well-known studies such as Skeggs (1997). More recently, issues concerning social class in school have been considered in research in some countries, for instance, the United Kingdom (Leathwood *et al*. 2008).

Different policy approaches to socioeconomic disadvantage

It can be argued that, since socioeconomic disadvantage in education has its origins both within and beyond the educational system, policy responses always involve explicit and implicit considerations of the origins of disadvantage. Such considerations, as well as assumptions about why certain measures are preferred, should be made explicit.

An example that may shed light on the need to make assumptions explicit is the Parents as Teachers Programmes (PAT), in use in the USA and now discussed in Europe by the German welfare organisation AWO to see if it can be used in the European context. PAT is a home visiting programme aimed for 0-3-year old children from families of various socioeconomic backgrounds and communities. It is reported to be of special value for low-income and minority families. When parent educators and parents meet they may eg discuss child development. The programme gives information on the bringing-up of children and offers health screenings for children. Schofield (2006:100) stresses, when referring to programmes like PAT, that the ethnic-cultural factor is of importance in assessing to what extent migrant children benefit or not. In relation to this, the question what is meant by ethnic-cultural factors and how such factors are assumed to be related to socioeconomic factors must be asked.

In educational *practice*, assumptions (made, eg, by school leaders and teachers) may, or may not, be similar to those of official policies. *Pupils' and parents' own experiences* of disadvantages, discrimination or difficulties may or may not correspond with the assumptions made in educational policies or practice. Aside from these perspectives of the actors directly involved in education or education planning, the question of socioeconomic disadvantage and its origins should also be posed from a *social and pedagogical science* perspective. However, examining all these perspectives in depth will not be possible in the present study, which rather shall concentrate on policy perspectives in the light of findings in social and pedagogical science.

One possible assumption may be that certain pupils, or groups of pupils, are socioeconomically disadvantaged by structures or institutions in the society at large. In this case, a policy conclusion might be that the educational system might actually mirror and reproduce these disadvantages, and should be (re-)designed in order to compensate for them.

Another, alternative assumption may be that disadvantages might (perhaps implicitly) be thought of as deficiencies at individual, family, or group level, rather than structural or institutional problems. In this case, one policy conclusion might be that the school might actually reproduce the deficiencies but should preferably compensate for them or eradicate them altogether. Another possible policy conclusion might be that the education system should serve a process of uncovering pupils' inherent skills and competences (eg, to future employers), or a process of filtering or sorting pupils according to their competences. There may also be conflicts between different assumptions. For instance, in a neo-liberal discourse, the full responsibility to be self-supporting is on the individual (Fraser 1997). Assumptions about the individual as a self-responsible subject, could be in dominance but not explicitly outspoken and also in conflict with other assumptions, eg, that the school system should compensate for structural and individual disadvantages.

A third possible assumption would be that the educational system itself actively creates

disadvantage for certain pupils, eg, through school fees or discriminatory practice (although it may also occur in contexts of universal and free education). For instance, more or less formal extra fees in certain schools (nominally with free access) can exclude pupils from low-income families, who are subsequently segregated to schools without such fees. Those schools may be of a lower quality and have a social stigma. Schools which make financial demands on for some school activities form part of a structural exclusion of poor children, according to Ridge (2006). Indeed another issue is that the way that pedagogic discourse is structured may favour particular groups (eg the use of pedagogies which are biased against working-class experiences and communication styles) (see Bernstein 1993, Willis 1977 and Skeggs 1997).

The theoretical assumption that schools or the school system creates disadvantage is not one found in official documents on educational policies and projects. This may be in part because politicians and officials in charge are invested in a view of the educational system itself as constructive rather than destructive for its pupils. Therefore it should not be surprising that official documents often view the origins of socioeconomic disadvantage as outside the school system.

Aside from questions about the origin of disadvantage, there is a question about *which* pupils are seen as (socioeconomically) disadvantaged. This probably varies between different contexts and does so in comparison between different countries. Is a pupil disadvantaged first and foremost by his or her individual situation, or can disadvantage be identified collectively for certain groups of pupils? In the latter case, are those groups small or large? That is, does the discourse on disadvantage focus on very poor, marginalised or excluded groups or on large groups such as the entire working class or, as in some countries, the rural population?

In addition, there is an *identification* issue: how are disadvantaged pupils identified in practice? Are they identified collectively (eg, by entire schools, living areas or communities being labelled disadvantaged and/or segregated), at household level (eg, by household type, parents' occupation, household income, or recognised family problems), or individually (eg by school behaviour, school results, or recognised individual problems)? Such methodological issues may also have a bearing on which pupils are actually seen as disadvantaged. In this sense, practises for identifying (groups of) disadvantaged pupils may be seen as one important component of the actual or potential policy measures to eliminate or mitigate disadvantage.

In Denmark, socioeconomic disadvantage among school pupils is often perceived and labelled as "negative social heritage" in official discourse. As such educational disadvantage is most often discussed with reference to pupils' conditions at home and their ethnic background, ie, at household and group level. The focus in this discourse appears to be on households' 'lack' of knowledge and understanding of education rather than, for instance, on low household incomes (Cederberg and Lingärde 2008). Hence, education policies to counteract the reproduction of such disadvantages focus on strengthening information and guidance to pupils and parents, for instance, through study counsellors and mentors.

This is part of a broader issue about the way groups of children and young people defined as educationally disadvantaged are talked about as being or becoming a problem rather than their potential (Cederberg 2006). Although in many cases this may be part of an attempt to secure better resources for disadvantaged groups it is still reasonable to see this kind of negative discourse as one of the part of a broader structure of institutional discrimination.

Strategies to counteract SED

The Lisbon strategy from 2000 includes the goal to eliminate poverty in EU by 2010. In order to achieve this goal, six main priorities were specified, including the elimination of child poverty as well as the prevention of early school leaving (European Commission 2004).

As part of the strategy the Ministries of foreign affairs in 2001 agreed to modernise education systems in the EU countries and to develop equal access to education, equal education and equal value of education in order to reduce educational inequality. Improved access to education, and more resources to pupils who have difficulties meeting educational milestones.

In the Lisbon Summit in March 2000, education's role in European progress and economic grown. The summit discussed the risk of increased social exclusion, unemployment and social marginalisation of low levels of education amongst a significant segment of the workforce. 32 percent of the EU workforce has an insufficient education level and these people, risk exclusion from the labour market as only 15 percent of new available jobs are expected to be available to them 2010. It is stressed that pre-school education is powerful in preventing early school leaving and that this, in turn, is of particular importance to disadvantaged social groups (European Parliament 2007).

Investing more and better in human capital is at the heart of the Lisbon strategy in order to create jobs and growth for all people. The European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Multilingualism, Jan Figél points out that:

> Research evidence shows that participation in high-quality and free pre-primary education as in Belgium, Spain, France, Italy and Hungary has long-lasting benefits in terms of achievement and socialisation during individuals' schooling and careers because it facilitates later learning. Repeatedly, studies have shown that early intervention programmes, especially those targeted at disadvantaged children, can produce large positive socioeconomic returns which persist well into adulthood. (- - -)

> Research shows that early selection into different tracks is wasteful and inequitable. Early tracking, ie at ages ten to twelve, is common in several European school systems as in Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Austria and Liechtenstein but has an especially negative effect on children from families with low socioeconomic status. It leads to segregation where (socioeconomically) disadvantaged learners are led towards the more vocational tracks early in life. This prevents them from building up the more general key competences required in a knowledge-based economy. Therefore, postponing tracking to a later stage in the educational process can act as a policy to increase equity of opportunity at the school level (European Commission 2006).

The *Joint Report on Social Protection and Inclusion 2008* stresses that strategies to combat child poverty that not only takes economic poverty into consideration but also material poverty, social exclusion and high risk behaviour. The report focuses priorities and progress made in the areas of child poverty.

A green paper (IP/08/1092) adopted by the European Commission[5] was intended to debate educational disadvantages suffered by migrant children and families in a vulnerable socioeconomic situation. Whether migrant students' educational achievement correlates with socioeconomic origin or not depends much on the specific national education system and context. Schütz and Wößmann's (2005) study shows that "the achievement variation between pupils with well-educated parents and children from less-educated social classes is not as large in countries with a highly developed system of pre-school education and where the age of school streaming is delayed" (15-21).

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[5] (http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1092&guiLanguage=de, 2008-07-03)

National strategies

This study finds that policy responses to SED, are often based on discrete initiatives rather than longer-term or permanent and comprehensive programmes. However, some policies in this area could be considered to benefit all children: public schools are free in all the studied countries and *in theory*, each pupil has the right to enrol in the school of his/her (parents') choice. However, for instance in the UK, although parents have the right to state their preferences of school, in reality where a school is popular it is the school selects its pupils. Although some Traveller and Roma children do not attend school, all the countries have national laws stipulating that all children should go to school rather than work, and all countries have a compulsory education age.

It is often difficult to classify projects as national, local, or voluntary. This is in part due to each country's different constitutional and institutional framework. The actual functions of the bodies involved may be for instance
  * goal-setting,
  * strategic planning,
  * evaluation and monitoring,
  * executive bodies
  * financing, or
  * institutions 'outside' the educational system as such; eg, NGOs.

It is also often difficult to classify projects as targeted at a particular group or targeted universally. This difficulty is related to the multi-dimensional character of SED. In many cases the individual cannot be unambiguously defined as belonging, or not belonging, to a socioeconomically vulnerable group.

One common way of defining a policy's target group is by school or living area, so that all pupils in a certain place or geographical area characterised by poverty are potentially included. This principle is exemplified by projects targeted at an entire poor region or rural centres (see project summary ES222: Extremadura's educational policy on ICT), or metropolitan areas with low economic standards (see project summaries ES221: Attended study, MT229: Youth outreach programme, NL73: Weekend school, SE128: Metropolitan policy). Similar examples may thus be found in many parts of Europe. In Ireland, several projects are targeted at a number of schools officially recognised as disadvantaged (IE25: Giving children an even break, IE26: School completion project, IE36: Home-school-community liaison). In Cyprus, projects in the nationally defined "education priority zones" have a similar, geographical allocation criterion (CY86: ZEP of Saint Antoniou, CY87: ZEP of Panagia Theoskepasti, CY88: ZEP of Faneromenis).

Target groups may be defined in terms of social class. In the United Kingdom, projects may be directed (primarily) at pupils whose parents have manual jobs or, alternatively, pupils from social groups observed to be underrepresented in higher education (UK47: AimHigher, UK48: Fair enough?, UK49: Health E-mentoring project). There are also examples from other countries, where the target group definition seems to be explicitly or implicitly class related. For instance, in France, the recognition that there is a need for a broader recruitment to higher education has inspired an information project directed to all secondary school pupils of a certain age (FR159: Education for orientation).

In other countries, certain projects focus on smaller, extremely vulnerable groups such as children from orphanages (ES211: Learning to produce intercultural goods with mass media), socially marginalised or excluded youths (GR115: Support of youths) or the "most vulnerable families" (BE22: Wonderwel). In the last example these socioeconomically vulnerable groups may partly coincide with other minorities such as ethnic minorities, which is also the case in many other

countries.

In some cases, projects' target groups are defined on strictly individual basis by underachievement in school, early school leaving (IE39: YouthReach, CY91: Literacy programme in secondary education), or being "prone to social pathology" (CZ171: Low-threshold centre "Klídek"). There are also examples where individually defined educational difficulties may be deemed a "disability" rather than SED (FR261: The PRNE).

It is also interesting to note that in some cases, collective and individual criteria (or indicators) of disadvantage are combined in various ways. Some Belgian projects are targeted at pupils who are in danger of school failure *or* have underprivileged backgrounds, since a connection between these factors is noted (BE2: The Hinge, BE16: KOOS, BE19: STOP). A Spanish project is directed at Roma pupils and officially motivated by high absenteeism among pupils in this group (ES211: Learning to produce intercultural goods with mass media). There are also projects focusing on pupils "lacking proper resources [for studying] at home" (ES221: Attended study) and pupils who need help with their homework (DK146: Kerteminde Municipality's interventions for children in families with drug abuse, LX283: The Kannernascht). In some cases there may also be a focus on support for parents (MT246: My ability).

On a somewhat more abstract level, assumptions about target groups might be implicit in the official rationale of projects. In addition, such a rationale statement might mirror mainstream goals in the education policies or, alternatively, needs thought to be poorly addressed by mainstream policies. Furthermore the rationale may be reactively or proactively formulated, ie, expressed either in terms of emergent needs or in terms of strategic visions and problem prevention. It is not certain what such subtle differences of approach actually mean in relation to socioeconomic disadvantage. However, some negative and some positive themes can be observed, which are clearly stated in the rationale of one or several projects. Thus, some projects are motivated by a wish to fight "marginalisation" or "segregation" and achieve "integration" between ethnic groups and/or between different townships and living areas (DK142: Magnet House, SE128: Metropolitan policy). In these projects, socioeconomic themes are rather naturally, sometimes only implicitly connected with other themes such as disadvantages faced by ethnic minority groups. A positively formulated project rationale can be, for instance, a wish to grant real access to welfare, protection and power for all young people (SE137: Prevention and promotion), make younger people employable (MT229: Youth outreach programme), and eradicate class barriers for access to higher education (UK48: Fair enough?). Some projects are designed to promote active citizenship (ES211: Learning to produce intercultural goods with mass media, SK185: All different-all equal). Other projects mention the need to strengthen families' resources and their connections with the schools (IE36: Home-school-community liaison) in order to face the "increasing complexity of the learning processes" (ES223: Catalonia's National Pact for Education).

Projects can also be directed towards teachers as in the Swedish national programme "Lärarlyftet"/ "The Teacher lift" (SE127).

If projects are to function as guidance for national and EU policies on a permanent basis, they need to be evaluated in relation to their goals and aims. A general remark on the projects studied here is that it appears that where evaluations are made (which is not always the case), they are sometimes only published internally. Also, it appears that longitudinal, quantitative and qualitative evaluations are needed to assess the long-term impact on socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils and groups.

Conclusions

- On an individual and group level, socioeconomic background is an important factor in school attainment. Factors such as income, parents' education, social class, marginalisation and negative segregation have a marked impact.

- It is also of great importance how the school system is structured, for instance, as regards tracking systems, selection as well as school fees and other costs related to schooling.

- The understanding of intersectionality is of importance when analysing SED. To understand and fight injustice, both material redistribution and cultural recognition are of importance (Fraser 1997).

- Education is officially emphasised as a key to compensation of socioeconomic disadvantage and children's chances for prosperous development. Strategies like mentoring and support with homework are reported as efficient for counteracting SED.

- It seems that SED is frequently addressed in one off projects but not in long-term national policies.

- EU educational policies' aim to close the gap in educational outcomes by challenging the factors which cause educational disadvantage. Official documents and reports emphasise education's role as a key driver of European Union competitiveness. However there is a lack of debate about how education could become beneficial for all in a complex and diverse society.

- Britain, Australia and Canada have created programmes for School Effectiveness in order to close the gap. This has been proposed as an effective model for EU education policy (Hjort 2006).

- Socioeconomic disadvantage should be discussed in relation to diversity, institutional discrimination, and the complex interplay between the educational system, individuals, groups, and the surrounding society. In official discourses, it seems that there are often ambiguous attitudes to diversity, which is at the same time expressed as a resource and a problem. Preliminary findings show that more research should go deeper into definitions of socioeconomic disadvantage and problematise them further.

Recommendations

Although there are big and complex constitutional differences between the countries studied, the following general recommendations should be relevant for all of the countries. An overall finding is that in order to challenge inequality the system and society should be addressed. Key challenges relate to democracy, citizenship, participation, and the fight against poverty as well as its effects.

EU policy makers:

- General goals (eg, economic growth and improvements in educational attainment) should be more clearly problematised in relation to group-related goals (eg, alleviation of poverty and support to disadvantaged groups or categories in education). The strategies needed for success in these dimensions may, *but need not always*, coincide.
- Increased economic resources should be allocated to the educational system.
- Good examples should be promoted alongside critical translational work taking varying national and local contexts into account.

Education policy makers (national, regional and local):

- Find balances between compensatory measures, anti-discriminatory measures, and integrated social and pedagogic frameworks, since these strategies may not always coincide.
- Debate the balance between overall educational outcomes, and support for disadvantaged groups. To the extent that these strategies do not (always) coincide, there is a need for outspoken and financially supported protection of the rights of disadvantaged groups in all of the countries studied.
- Always budget for an evaluation when projects are planned.
- Good examples should be promoted taking varying local, school or class contexts into account.
- Involve representatives of target group and/or related communities in the design, management and/or delivery of the project.

Research:

- More research is needed on the impact of the various dimensions of this theme, ie, socioeconomic disadvantage in relation to education. This includes but is not limited to studies of how poverty among school-children affects their school life and how the schools as institutions meet the needs of children. International comparisons should be made in combination with careful considerations of different contexts and methodological issues.

Teachers and other involved professional persons:

- Should be encouraged to engage in research activity focusing on development eg, action research.
- Educational priorities should be determined at school level and agreed between heads and teachers.

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