



Final Seminar Report

Good Practice Exchange seminar on good practices and initiatives in public policies on combating discrimination and fostering diversity in education

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Hosted by Norway

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Introduction

A good practice exchange seminar on public policies on combating discrimination and fostering diversity in education was hosted by the Norwegian Government in Brussels on the 26th and 27th March 2012.

Government representatives and members of the non-discrimination Governmental Expert Group (GEG) from Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden attended alongside members of the Network of Socio-economic Experts in the Non-discrimination Field. Representatives from the European Commission's DG Justice, Unit for Non-discrimination policies and Roma coordination and Unit for Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and DG Education and Culture, Unit for Equity in Education and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education attended.

The European Commission had circulated a request to the members of the GEG in November 2011 seeking good practice examples in relation to public policies on combating discrimination and fostering diversity in education in relation to:

1. Discrimination in accessing education due to socio-economic factors including ethnic origin, religion or others.
2. Discrimination in education/schools suffered by teachers and/or students.
3. Ensuring respect for diversity and fighting stereotypes in educational content, curricula and teaching and the key role of the education system and curriculum in combating discrimination.

The seminar was opened by Atle Leikvoll, Norwegian Ambassador to the EU and Andreas Stein, Head of Unit for Equal Treatment Legislation in DG Justice.

Atle Leikvoll highlighted the moral and economic arguments for investing in equality and diversity. This investment is not only about who we are as a society, it is also about the productivity and competitiveness of our economies. He noted the progress made and the challenges faced by Norway in the field of equality and diversity and emphasised the value in the relationship with the EU.

Andreas Stein noted the clear benchmarks in measuring discrimination in education such as low enrolment rates, high dropout rates, limited progression and poor levels of attainment for particular groups. He pointed to the importance of the Race Directive (Council Directive 2000/43/EC) in reflecting the legal basis for the EU to proscribe that there was no place for discrimination in education. He noted the work being done to extend this to the grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief, age and disability through the Directive (COM(2008) 426 final) proposed by the European Commission and now under consideration by the Council.

Successful public strategies in overcoming challenges in fighting discrimination in education

The *GEG good practice contributions* suggested three strategic starting points for work in this area. These are the need to:

1. Address the full range of roles of educational establishments as service providers, as employers and as transmitters for a societal value base.
2. Create inclusive schools where discrimination is combated, diversity is valued and accommodated, and all pupils have positive experiences and achieve educational credentials.
3. Focus on all six of the Article 19 grounds.
4. Further develop the case that diversity in education benefits all pupils.

Equal treatment legislation covering education on all six Article 19 grounds alongside action in this field by equality bodies were identified as enabling strategies for equality in education. Positive action was seen as important and in some instances equal treatment legislation requires a proactive approach to equality by schools and public authorities responsible for education policy and provision. Effective links between those responsible for policy making and for policy implementation and between the different levels of governance involved was also deemed to be important for strategies for equality in education.

Petter Sorlien, Counsellor for Equality and Non-Discrimination in the Norwegian Mission to the European Union presented an overview of Norwegian anti-discrimination policies. He noted the important role of Government in advancing equality and non-discrimination for a sustainable and prosperous society. He pointed to the value of legislative provisions that establish a focus on equality and protection from discrimination in education.

In Norway positive duties in legislation make a valuable contribution by requiring public and private bodies involved in education to take steps to promote equality and to make annual reports on the progress made. He emphasized the contribution of national action plans for equality for particular groups in paving the way for change in society and in enabling the implementation of this legislation.

Ellen Lange from the Ministry of Education in Norway described their experience in promoting diversity in education. She highlighted four categories of intervention:

1. Social pedagogical arrangements including needs based priority entrance to upper secondary school, follow up services for dropouts, and national competence centres providing specialist support to individuals and institutions.
2. Professional arrangements including second chance initiatives for early school leavers, formal involvement of parents and homework support activities.
3. Financial arrangements including loans and grants, arrangements for families in poverty, and tax relief to companies investing in staff education.
4. Technical arrangements including provision of technical equipment, free transport and physical adaptations for people with disabilities.

Review reports in Norway stressed the importance of building teacher capacity and capacity in the education system itself. This should enable greater acknowledgement of diversity, mainstreaming of language supports, stronger management of regional variations, provision of long-term second language education, more interventions at an early age, and a stronger response to the challenge of implementing policy.

Katriina Nousiainen from the Ministry of the Interior in Finland presented the partnership approach to promote diversity in education at national and regional level. She noted that equality is widely accepted in Finland as a moral imperative and teachers are very incentivised in this regard. However there can be dangers if people hide behind the idea that the education system is equal. The programme of the current Government underlines equality and emphasizes the importance of equality outcomes.

Partnership between all stakeholders is a feature of policy making. It is valuable in creating the common ground among stakeholders that supports policy implementation.

The Finnish Development Plan for Child and Youth Policy involved all key stakeholders. It has three main messages – participation, equality and life-control. Life-control emphasises that children and young people should be able to decide about the things that affect them. PROGRESS funding is now being used to develop guidelines for a general equality plan in schools as part of the work being done to support quality planning in educational institutions.

The subsequent debates among participants included a particular focus on the issue of segregation. Segregation occurred due to the composition of the school catchment area, parental choices, and policies/practices of referral to special needs education. The manner in which catchment areas were drawn up or the location of schools is important. The need to monitor referral systems is evident.

The issue of giving a voice to young people was discussed. Student boards in schools and the identification and organisation of young people as stakeholders enabled this voice. The pressure on schools and education systems to reach high performance levels was queried. This can result in a fast pace in the school that not everyone can manage and can impact negatively on the well being and participation of students.

Discrimination of marginalised groups in accessing education

The GEG good practice contributions suggested that access should be viewed in terms of presence in the school, participation in all areas of school life, and achieving progression and educational credentials for all groups.

The issues identified included low enrolment levels, high levels of dropout, limited progression and poor outcomes for particular groups. The initiatives described emphasised early engagement with potential pupils from disadvantaged groups, investment in progression for these groups, opening up the full range of choices for all groups and taking steps to alleviate costs.

Erik Scheller from the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research described their study support system of loans and grants to all parents. These aim to ensure that financial situation does not determine access to education. This has a large impact on recruitment into higher levels of education but a low impact on the composition of this recruitment. Low income households were less inclined to take on debt. The key barriers are to be found in secondary school rather than in university enrolment.

Erika Rustja from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport in Slovenia presented on their strategies for the education of Roma. Early inclusion in education, removing prejudice and learning about Roma culture in schools, raising the quality of education and establishing supports for learning are prioritised. The strategy's success was based on a wider programme of measures to improve the situation of Roma, on collaboration with a Roma NGO, and on a no segregation policy. Teachers had not been happy to have Roma children in the classroom as they did not know how to cope with them. A teacher's manual, publications on the Roma, school networking and the employment of Roma assistants were an effective response to this.

Javier Fernandez Gonzalez of the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality and Angel Perez Barandiaran of the Fundacion Secretariado Gitano (FSG) described an awareness campaign targeting Roma parents and children. This involved a partnership between public authorities and civil society. The success factors for this campaign were its creativity, the involvement of FSG staff and volunteers, the motivation of the Roma, the support of public authorities and media coverage.

The subsequent debates among participants included a particular focus on Roma assistants. Roma assistants provide a bridge between the Roma community and the school. They act as role models, raise awareness in the school about Roma culture, and assist Roma pupils. Roma assistants need access to training and qualifications.

The challenge to overcome the fear of institutions among the Roma was highlighted. A balance needs to be secured between ensuring schools are places they like and feel a belonging to, and places that equip them for life. Schools also need to focus on the majority and to inform their attitudes and behaviours.

The afternoon session was opened by Cor Meijer, Director of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. He emphasised the importance of the inclusive teacher and noted the work of the Agency in developing a competency profile of the inclusive teacher. He identified the centrality of classroom practice and the need for peer tutoring (children learning from one another), heterogeneous classrooms (not all children in the classroom doing the same thing), and team teaching (teachers cannot do this on their own).

Ensuring respect of diversity and fighting stereotypes. The key role of the educational system and curriculum in fighting discrimination

The GEG good practice contributions suggested that the focus on education systems requires specific equality/diversity/non-discrimination policies, procedures and practices within institutions responsible for education policy and within schools.

Issues of teacher capacity, stereotyping in the curriculum and school cultures hostile to diversity are identified. The initiatives described suggest the importance of teacher training to teach in diverse settings and to manage issues of discrimination and harassment, and the need for school materials that enable pupils to be self-conscious about their identity, that equip pupils and staff to combat discrimination and that establish a value base of diversity and equality.

Antonia Spyropolou of the Pedagogical Institute in Cyprus presented their in-service training that provides tools for teacher competence to deal with diversity and combat discrimination. The training is provided to new and existing teachers, heads and deputy heads and has contributed to greater efficacy. The experience to date suggests a framework of challenges:

- Teacher stress, prejudice, overload and resistance at the individual level.
- Inflexible rules, unsuitable premises and materials, and lack of time for training at the organisational level.
- Tendency to work in isolation and lack of tradition of peer learning at the interpersonal level.
- Lack of tradition of cooperation between schools, community and NGOs, teacher strikes and immigration flows at national level.
- The economic crisis and globalisation at the international level.

Wivian Van der Steen of the Department of Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Flemish province of Brabant and Nathalie De Bleeckere of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training presented the 'Gender in the Blender' project. An education pack was distributed to all schools and a support website was developed for this project. These materials aimed to stimulate self-

reflection on the individual's mix of sexual identity – biological sex, gender identity, gender roles and sexual orientation. Factors in the success of the project included the integration of different aspects of gender in one concept, the role of the public authority as neutral coordinator of different stakeholders, and the long-term perspective taken.

The subsequent debates among participants included a particular focus on strategies by policy makers to secure influence on school practice. Setting attainment targets and standards, school inspections, legal requirements with sanctions on schools, and responding to teachers' needs where they feel ill-equipped were discussed.

Links between the policy fields of anti-discrimination and education were explored. Links via single ministries responsible for both fields, equality/non-discrimination mainstreaming processes and coordination committee structures were discussed.

Resistance from teachers, trade unions, parents and faith organisations were highlighted. Time has to be spent creating the conditions for stakeholder involvement. Financial barriers were also identified. The valuable contribution of EU funding to a diverse range of initiatives in this area was noted.

Discrimination experienced by students and teachers in education

The GEG good practice contributions suggested the importance of institutionalising discrete initiatives into education systems. Moving from projects to processes requires data gathering and analysis to provide an evidence base, planning at national/regional levels and within educational establishments, and monitoring outcomes.

Issues of bullying and harassment on the Article 19 grounds, physical barriers for pupils with disabilities, cultural barriers for minority ethnic pupils, communication issues and responding to language diversity, and inadequate or inappropriate teaching materials were identified. Initiatives described included guidance and requirements on school safety, supports for pupils experiencing inequality, action to make the physical environment and study situation accessible, and engagement by schools with parents and the communities that the pupils come from.

Michael Hoppe of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science described the work done on school safety in the Netherlands. He identified five learning points:

1. This type of work takes time.
2. This work cannot be done by one entity alone.

3. Don't set up a programme uniquely aimed at one small group. Take it along general lines such as a programme to increase safety.
4. Media and political attention is vital.
5. The need to know what is going on and the centrality of data for this.

Ellen Lange of the Norwegian Ministry of Education gave a presentation on their policy in relation to pupils with a disability. This work first started with a small group at primary level (hearing impaired pupils) with movement over time to a broader approach and to higher levels. The current focus is on identifying pupils in need of assistance and following them up, capacity building with support teams and classroom assistants, and cooperation and coordination between services. The pedagogical, social and personal capacity of teachers is the most critical factor.

Initial results showed the issue was on the agenda and that there was a general consciousness but that simple measures were not always in place. Improvements since then have meant that the disabled student group got bigger and more diverse. Boundary questions arise with each new group that seeks adaptations.

Immaculada Placencia, Deputy Head of Unit for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in DG Justice of the European Commission presented the European Disability Strategy and the work of the Unit in relation to the education targets of Europe 2020. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities is now shaping EU policy in this area. The Disability Strategy includes a commitment to provide guidance on reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities for employers and service providers.

When it comes to people with disabilities only two Member States have reached the target for reducing early school leaving and none have reached the target of those aged 30 to 34 completing tertiary level education. Funding for people with disabilities is being reduced across the EU and the impact of this has yet to be assessed.

The subsequent debates among participants included a particular focus on developing the competence of teachers. In-service training was not enough. Capacity needs to be built around the teacher. Specialised competence centres can make a valuable contribution in advising municipalities, schools and individual teachers. There was a focus on the feedback given to Member States about education and people with disabilities in the general feedback given on National Reform Programmes. The High Level Disability Group provides evidence and gives information to Member States.

The morning session of day two was opened by Angelos Agalianos of the Unit Equity in Education of DG Education and Culture in the European Commission. He noted that all education systems are marked by inequalities that reflect a wider socio-economic inequality. Education systems can make things worse and effective measures still need to be put in place. Economic recovery is overshadowing equity. The issue is not lack of money but lack of political commitment. A Staff Working Document is being prepared by the European Commission to give concrete examples of policies and practices that are effective in addressing these inequalities.

Research to be launched on the cost of non-inclusive education will show the significant costs incurred due to inequality in education.

Intercultural education, including ethnic and religious minorities

The GEG good practice contributions pointed to intercultural education involving:

- Respecting, recognising and celebrating the normality of diversity.
- Promoting equality and human rights and challenging discrimination.

Issues of segregation, the need to meet a diversity of cultural needs, mono-cultural texts and responding to language diversity were identified. Initiatives described included the integration of ethnic and religious diversity in schools, and responses to cultural and language diversity that involve activities to support capacity in mother tongue and in the language predominantly in use, and to provide knowledge on minority and majority histories, identities and values.

Caitriona O'Brien of the Irish Department of Education and Science described the Community National Schools, a new model of state school at primary level that caters for religious diversity. The schools aim to serve all in the local community and the schools are a focus for interaction between the groups that exist in the community. Key outcomes achieved were increased choice for parents and children, the creation of an alternative to the reliance on private school patrons, a religious education module to meet the needs of all groups, and the involvement of the entire school community. Ongoing challenges include the need to expand the model, to further develop the religious education modules, to maintain a consistent approach, and to support parental involvement.

Olita Arkle of the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science presented on the Government's programme on integration of third country nationals. There are majority and minority schools with Latvian language used in majority schools and multi-lingual approaches in minority schools. Students can opt in to subjects in minority languages. Equality related subjects are integrated into school subjects. Teaching aids are developed for bilingual education. Teacher training is provided in diversity methods.

The subsequent debates among participants included a particular focus on models of integration and how these might best address issues of culture, language and identity. The challenge of integration is also a challenge of responding effectively and appropriately to diversity in culture, language and identity. The issue was posed in terms of what integration models work best for pupil performance.

Conclusions – Key Learning

Key dimensions of good practice were identified as including:

- An integrated and coherent focus on all six Article 19 grounds and the intersections between them.
- A focus on equality in school access, pedagogical process and educational outcomes for the full diversity of pupils and staff.
- The case for non-discrimination, diversity and equality is clear as a moral imperative for groups experiencing inequality and a benefit for all pupils. The educational, social and economic case needs to be further affirmed.

Concepts that inform good practice were identified as including:

- Inclusive education, the inclusive school and inclusive teachers – definitions/standards are important in relation to these.
- Schools as Bridges – to groups experiencing inequality, to majority communities and between these different groups.
- Life control – empowering young people to decide about things that affect them. Structures/processes are required to ensure this.
- Addressing resistance from parents, teachers, schools, vested interests, and faith institutions.
- School safety and the need for policies, procedures and practices to prevent harassment and bullying.

Challenges in achieving good practice were seen to include:

- Achieving policy implementation through:
 - Partnership of stakeholders in policy making and implementation.
 - Capacity building among policy makers, policy implementers, and educational establishments.
 - Addressing regional differences and variations.
 - Inspection of educational establishments and sanctions where standards are not met.
- Ensuring inclusion through:
 - Combating segregation by responding to parental choices, performance pressures, referral policy and practice, geography and catchment areas.

- Responding to different identities, experiences and needs and making reasonable accommodations to address difference on all grounds.
- Models of integration that work in responding to language, identity, culture, educational performance, and integration needs.
- Securing financing through:
 - Political leadership.
 - Commitment to invest in change.
 - Prioritisation of educational inequality in times of crisis.
 - EU stimulus.
- Developing interwoven interventions that encompass:
 - Social pedagogical arrangements.
 - Professional arrangements.
 - Financial arrangement.
 - Technical arrangements.

Member States can enable good practice by:

- Further supporting new classroom practice through:
 - Training principals and teachers.
 - Supporting methodologies for equality including teamwork, networking schools, heterogeneous classrooms, and peer learning.
 - Equipping teachers with tools and materials for non-discrimination.
 - Achieving flexibility within educational establishments in response to diversity.
- Further developing the school curriculum to:
 - Eliminate stereotyping and ensure visibility and accurate representation in the curriculum and textbooks of groups that experience inequality.
 - Include teaching of knowledge, skills and values for non-discrimination in curriculum.
 - Affirm diverse identities and enable exploration of identities in teaching practice and curriculum content.
- Further investing in early start education, school safety and learning supports.
- Evolving links between the policy fields of non- discrimination and education by:
 - Linking policy makers in the two policy fields.

- Linking institutions working in the two policy fields, both statutory and civil society organisations.
- Investing in competence centres that support good practice in equality and education.
- Evolving equal treatment legislation to
 - Cover all Article 19 grounds in relation to the field of education provision;
 - Address under-reporting of discrimination;
 - Include positive duties on educational establishments to be proactive in promoting equality and combating discrimination.

The European Commission can enable good practice by:

- Continuing funding that enables change for equality, diversity, and non-discrimination in Member State education systems.
- Continuing the focus on non-discrimination in reaching the education targets being pursued through the National Reform Programmes under Europe 2020.
- Considering ways of sustaining a focus on education and non-discrimination through the Non-discrimination GEG.