



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES IN EUROPE (GOETE)

Project findings and policy recommendations

May 2013

INTRODUCTION

European societies refer to themselves as Knowledge Societies. This implies that education has an ever more important role in social integration. While in the past two decades the focus laid on Lifelong Learning, school education continues to be the formal backbone of lifelong learning careers. However, the *adequacy of school education for social integration* is being questioned:

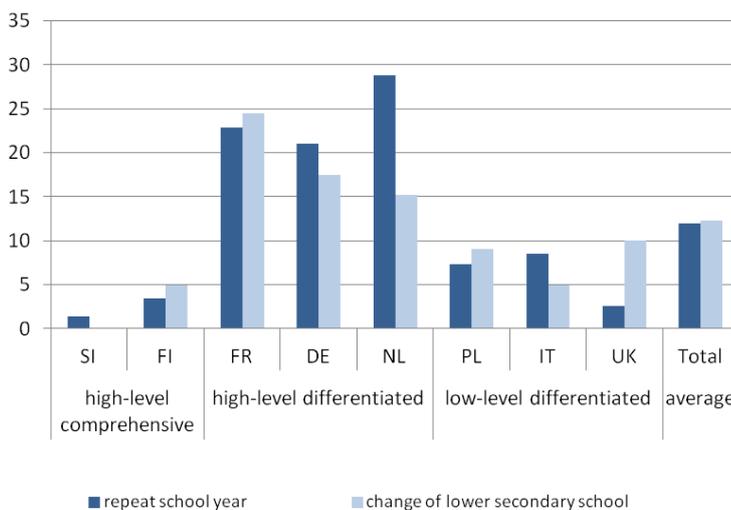
- Constant high rates of *early school leaving (ESL)* and variations in students' competencies raise questions regarding the *effectiveness of school education*.
- Increasing enrolment into *private education* as well as increasing expenditure for *support teaching* are expressions of parents' lack of satisfaction with existing public education.
- Employers refer to the *mismatch* between school qualifications, lacking basic skills or *key competencies* and labour market demands as reasons for not employing or training school leavers.
- *Teachers* feel overburdened by societal challenges perceived as 'invading' school from 'outside' such as poverty, violence and bullying, bad health and risky life styles of students.
- Pupils' and students' *well-being* is affected by stress, uncertainty, competition or alienation.

The contribution of education to social integration is no longer self-evident in the sense of providing individuals with meaningful and secure life chances, the economy with a well-prepared workforce, and society with responsible and active citizens. In this situation, more and more actors at different levels get involved in policy making, in professionalisation of teaching and in individual educational trajectories. Mainstream educational research has been concentrating on measuring and analysing educational outcomes. However, there is a considerable lack of knowledge on *how* educational trajectories evolve and are regulated interactively. The objectives and findings of the GOETE project stand in a direct relation to recent developments in educational policies (as reflected for example in the European Commission's Communication from 2012 "Rethinking Education").

Differences in school systems’ role in reproducing social disadvantage: In some countries young people from disadvantaged families have better educational chances than in others due to the institutional and organisational arrangements of the education system. Drawing from different typologies of education systems and of transition regimes GOETE distinguished among three different types of education systems that provide varying levels of access (and accessibility) and display differing degrees of selectivity:

- *high-level comprehensive systems* (e.g., *Finland, Slovenia*) where organisational differentiation and degree of selectivity is low and no transitions in compulsory education exist;
- *low-level differentiated systems* (e.g., *Italy, Poland, United Kingdom*), where there is a medium degree of organisational differentiation, a low degree of selectivity and the existing transitions are ‘smoother’ than those in;
- *high-level differentiated systems* (e.g., *France, Germany, the Netherlands*), where there is a substantial organisational differentiation, a medium to high degree of selectivity and transitions exist which represent a medium to high threshold from one education level to the next.

Ruptures in educational trajectories (school change and repetition of school year) in %



High-level differentiated systems create more ruptures in educational trajectories: Ruptures during educational trajectories are potential risks. Education systems differ in the degree to which they expose students to such risks. In France, Germany, and the Netherlands students change more often school than in other countries (15-25%) or have to repeat a school year in their school career (21-29% compared to 1-3% in Finland or Slovenia). 31% of students from high-level differentiated systems would have preferred another lower secondary school than the one they attended (compared to 18% in Finland and Slovenia).

Most students wish to continue with education after fulltime education: 71% of interviewed students want to continue with school-based full-time education after lower secondary education. This applies also in differentiated school systems in which such possibilities are limited. Young people are especially interested in keeping options for future choices open. They reject early adaptation to “realistic” educational and occupational goals such as being channelled into low-status vocational routes (‘cooling out’-process).

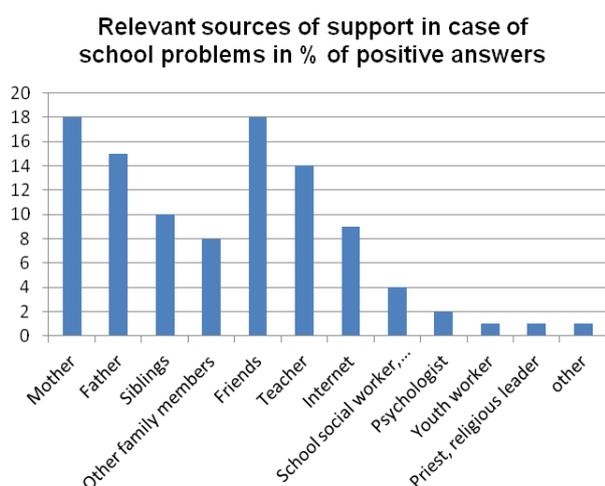
„They should ask us, what we want to do, simply encouraging us.“ (female student, Germany)

„It is still myself who is studying, and I have to get to study what I want“. (female student, Finland)

Decision-making in young people’s educational trajectories involves multiple actors: Educational decisions are neither made by students and their parents alone nor are automatically determined by the education system. They are the result of complex negotiation processes involving not only teachers, counsellors and social workers but also politics, administration, the economy and the media. Qualitative analysis among students classified as ‘disadvantaged’ has identified a diversity of constellations of decision-making:

- “*family convoy*”: the family plays a protective and directive role preventing dropping out but channelling young people’s choices according to their own possibilities and social capital;
- “*step-by-step*”: young people with ambitious plans but disadvantaged starting positions only cautiously climb up the educational ladder without losing their ambitions out of sight;
- “*fighting for dreams*”: maintenance of dreams despite unfavourable conditions and sometimes also against external pressure aimed at lowering subjective aspirations in order to adapt to existing education and training options (‘cooling out’);
- “*too weak to resist*”: resignation and lowering of one’s own (sometimes vague) aspirations in front of institutional pressure and ‘cooling out’ mechanisms.

Rather than individual (rational) choice, decision-making in individual educational trajectories results from intermediating processes between social structure and individual agency.



Students have little trust in formal support

Four times more young people refer primarily to family and friends than to teachers and other professionals for school related support. For them support has to include recognition of their subjective wishes and plans and not only learning assistance and factual information on future options. They are sceptical with regard to support offered by teachers, counsellors or social workers, both regarding its intention and effectiveness:

“If I wouldn't have any friends I wouldn't be able to cope.” (male student, Finland)

The training of teachers is incomplete regarding the guidance and counselling of students:

Teachers have little knowledge about social conditions of children’s and young people’s growing up and are not trained enough skills for guidance, counselling and individual teaching in heterogeneous classes. The training does not provide future teachers with sound knowledge about knowledge societies and their implications for schooling. Complains made by teachers such as

“we are doing more social work than teaching” (teacher, Germany) or “we, as teachers are not trained to work with such students” (teacher, Poland)

are an evidence for the inadequacy of teacher training. At the same time it points to the lack of staff in many schools and to the persisting lower status of school social workers.

“The number of kids who need the support, there’s not enough contact time available – it’s very limited, so you’re only able to select a small number to help.” (school principal, UK)

Stereotypes and generalising ascriptions towards students and families: School actors such as principals, teachers but also social workers and counsellors tend to refer to generalising stereotypes with regard to working class or migrant families. Mechanisms of ‘othering’ create problem groups that are different from mainstream society and ‘normal’ behaviour that need to be adapted and assimilated:

“That are the kids in the families where unemployment is inherited from generations and they are brought up by social welfare system.” (external expert, Poland)

“Blaming game” between school and family: Parents – especially families with a migration background – do not feel taken seriously from school representatives and often disrespected in their efforts related to the upbringing of their children.

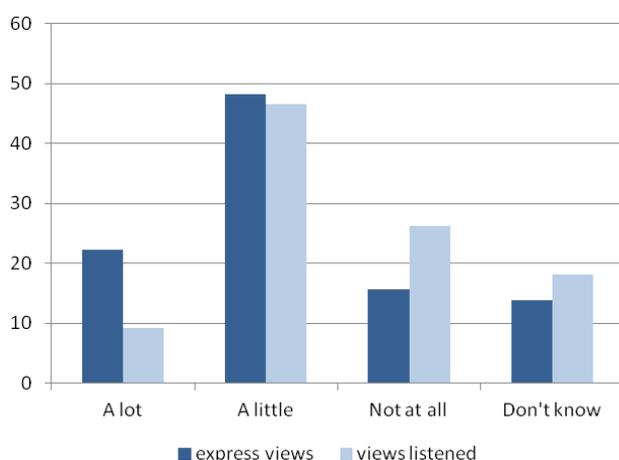
“Why are all these children put into the same waste bag and beaten? This is unfair. (...) My son is accused to be not educated. And this I don't allow school to tell me. On the contrary, my education is failing at school, and not the other way around” (mother, Germany).

There is evidence of a continuing “blaming-game” and misunderstanding between families and school professionals that undermines potentials of existing support measures:

“Parents should sometimes be more present, sometimes less.”(school principal, Italy)

The **governance of education** refers to how educational policy-making is shaped and how education systems and educational trajectories are regulated. These occur more and more through a complex interaction of multiple actors and increasingly less through top-down state educational policy. For employers „employability“ is the prime goal of education, international organisations promote competition among national school systems by rankings of achievement levels, municipalities are made responsible for the well-functioning of education within and outside schools without receiving additional financial resources, and youth welfare agencies suffer financial cuts and compete for funding for extracurricular activities.

Students' perceptions of possibilities to express views and being listened in school in %



Parents and students have limited possibilities of participation in decision-making at school

Education systems in GOETE countries claim to increasingly give more voice to parents and students. However, their influence remains limited to marginal issues. Students criticise a discrepancy between being allowed to raise issues and actually being listened. Apart from this, also the relationship between school and parents is asymmetric. Parents are expected to get more involved in supporting their children while they feel their concerns and suggestions are rarely listened or taken serious.

Educational governance is influenced by transnational discourses – such as the Knowledge-based Economy, Lifelong Learning, New Public Management, Education as Competence Development or Human Capital Building, Disadvantage, Employability, Autonomy of Schools or Activation of Citizens. These discourses set the limits to what policies can aim at. They represent powerful opportunity structures that operate on a basis of exclusion rather than inclusion, for example by ruling out policies that do not conform to the Lifelong Learning discourse.

Alongside such global developments, **(cross-) national particularities and differences** prevail. Policy trends and transnational discourses are interpreted and implemented in different contexts to which they have to relate. This applies to the rescaling of responsibilities for education in different countries focussing more on multi-professional or sectoral cooperation in Finland and France, re-balancing the role of levels in Italy, Poland and Slovenia, steering mechanisms in Germany and Netherlands, and the relation between private and public in the United Kingdom.

Also, the way in which students with a **migration** background are addressed by policies reflects different ways of nation states in dealing with integration: more universalistic in Finland, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands focussing on participation rights, more assimilatory focussing on deficits resulting from difference in Germany, Italy, Poland or Italy.

The findings of the GOETE project can be seen as a contribution and response to recent developments in educational policies at local and national but also at EU level (especially with regard to the European Commission's Communication "Rethinking Education" from 2012):

- **Education must not be reduced to productivity, competitiveness and employability** (as suggested by "Rethinking Education"). Experiences beyond formal learning need to be facilitated and recognised to a greater extent.
- **Structures of schooling make a difference:** the less transitions and differentiation foreseen by education and training systems, the weaker the effects of social and ethnic origin on educational achievement. Differentiated systems need to reduce and postpone transitions.
- **Increase access:** access to education and training needs to be addressed primarily on a structural level by increasing places and opportunities and by re-structuring school zones. At the same time subjective perceptions of accessibility need to be taken into consideration.
- **Monitoring and research** need to take more comprehensive perspectives. Apart from outcomes and achievements, well-being, satisfaction as well as overcoming of social disadvantage and exclusion need to be included.
- **Educational disadvantage and school failure are social problems** and should not be addressed exclusively by deficit-oriented, compensatory pedagogical measures. This includes avoiding differentiation between 'normal' students and 'others' (in terms of risk groups).
- **Students' choices need to be recognised** even if involving postponement of decision-making and rejection of adaptation to apparently more "realistic" options.
- **Provide more and better support for students** not only with regard to learning but also better and more comprehensive counselling and guidance as well as support addressing the subjective well-being of students. Support needs to be organised in a low-threshold way, non-stigmatising and with open-ended outcomes. Biographical reflexivity of students is more important than channelling them into specific routes.
- **Increase and diversify school staff:** both teaching and non-teaching pedagogical staff needs to be increased in schools in order to guarantee individualised support for all students. Multi-professional teams are needed and collaboration with out-of-school actors encouraged.
- **Recognise and value informal support:** Support involves emotional aspects which are stronger in informal networks. These need to be recognised as relevant and integrated with formal support.
- **Improve teacher training:** Teacher training needs to be reformed and include knowledge on the social aspects of young people's lives, perspectives towards and competencies of dealing with diversity, guidance and counselling skills as well as collaboration with other actors.
- **Increase funding:** Accessible and supportive education requires adequate funding. Public expenditures for education need to be increased to a minimum of 6% of GDP.
- **Cooperation and active participation:** findings show the importance of individual choice and informal support for students. Possibilities and rights of active participation in decision-making with regard to the own educational trajectory as well as at school level need to be guaranteed.
- **Deconstruct ideological discourses:** Lifelong Learning, Knowledge Societies, Disadvantage, Activation, Employability etc. are ideological discourses which are referred to in policy making. They function as door openers for policy reforms while the interests of powerful actors and the consequences for students are concealed.
- **Empower dialogical policy making at local level:** Education and training are implemented and experienced locally. Consequently, responsibilities and power need to be shifted to the local level. Here, policy making needs to be organised in a dialogic and participatory way.

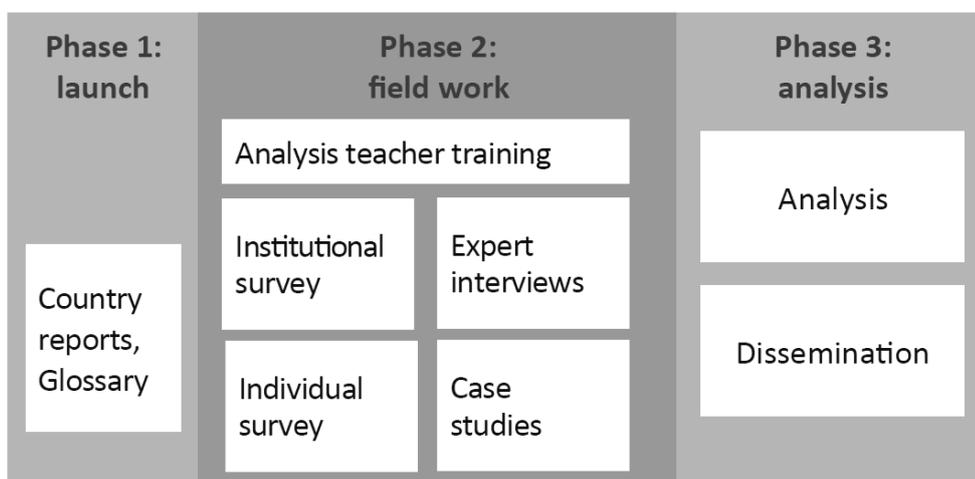
The GOETE project aims at re-conceptualising education in relation to social integration in the context of European knowledge societies. It combines a **life course** perspective with a **governance** perspective to understand how regulation of education connects to individual educational trajectories. This perspective has been operationalised along three key dimensions:

- Is education **accessible** throughout the life course? The category of *access* points to social inequalities in educational trajectories according to class, gender and ethnicity.
- Can education be **coped** with (is it manageable for all)? How do students from deprived social backgrounds cope with educational demands and what (formal and informal) support can they mobilise inside and outside school?
- Is education **relevant** subjectively for the individuals as well as systemically for societal functioning? What skills and competencies are held relevant from the perspectives of economy, policy, civil society, school, and students and parents?

GOETE covers the period from transition into lower secondary education to transition into upper secondary education/vocational education and training (between 10 and 16 years of age).

Comparative analysis relies on a country sample representing different types of education systems with different structures of stratification and standardisation as well as different **transition regimes** in which transitions of young people into adulthood are shaped differently: Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, and United Kingdom.

GOETE is a **mixed-method** study. Quantitative methods are used to assess general structures of educational trajectories while qualitative methods provide in-depth insight into how these structures evolve in interactions between students, their parents and representatives of the education system. The research programme consisted of three main phases (see figure below):



- 1) **Preparatory phase:** collecting context knowledge and developing instruments for field work.
- 2) **Empirical field work:** in three different regions per country five sub-studies were carried out:
 - **comparative analysis of teacher training** through document analysis of teacher training curricula (N=118) and expert interviews (N = 65) in selected higher education institutions;
 - **individual survey** with **students** in their last year of lower secondary education (N=6390) and their **parents** (N=3290) on experiences with school and future expectations;
 - **institutional survey** with principals on key challenges, problems and available support, curricula and standards, links with other actors (N=984);

- **qualitative local case studies** on ‘local school spaces’ in socially deprived areas (N=24) including views of students (N=195), parents (N=109), professionals and experts (N=208) on interactions at the transition from lower to upper secondary education and training;
 - **expert interviews** with high-level policy makers and stakeholders (N=95) and **critical discourse analysis** at national level on current policy reforms and discourses.
- 3) **Analysis and dissemination phase:** Across qualitative and quantitative data and across countries *thematic analyses* have been carried out (life course, access, coping, relevance and governance). Parallel *dissemination* started in local case study contexts by discussing findings with practitioners and policy makers and contributing to local policy planning and further training of professionals (in total 37 sessions). Apart from this a video “Me, my education and I” and a book with student essays have been produced. Findings have been presented during a European Policy Seminar in March 2013.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe. Access, coping and relevance of education of young people in European knowledge societies in comparative perspective (GOETE)
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WEBSITE	www.goete.eu
FURTHER READING	Julkunen, Ilse & Walther, Andreas (2014): Social Work and Schooling, in: Kessl, F.; Lorenz, W.; Otto, H.-U. & White, S. (eds.): European Compendium of Social Work. Opladen & Farmington Hills: Budrich Publishing (forthcoming). Ule, Mirjana (ed.) (2011) : Exploring educational trajectories of young people in Slovenia. . Special issue, Teorija in praksa 48 (5). Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Parreira do Amaral & Walther, Andreas (2013): Key Current Education Policy Issues in Germany – Supporting Pupils in All-Day Schools. NESET Expert Briefing. Online: www.nesetweb.eu . Walther, Andreas (2012): Access, coping and relevance of education in youth transitions, in: Billett, S.; Johnson, G.; Thomson, S.; Sim, C.; Hay, S & Ryan, J. (eds.): Experience of School Transitions: Policies, Practice and Participants. Dordrecht: Springer.