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Against Poverty and Social Exclusion **Contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale** **Gegen Armut und soziale Ausgrenzung**

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 #poverty2020  Social Europe

European Commission – Commission européenne – Europese Commissie – Europäische Kommission

WORKSHOP 5

“Policy solutions for youth experiencing disadvantage”

Reducing inequalities in education: an avenue for social mobility?

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Social inequalities in education

- **Why should we care about social inequalities in education?**
 - Education shapes individuals' future life prospects via opportunities in the labour market
 - Education and position in the labour market affect social position, status, civic participation, attitudes, fertility patterns etc.
 - The lower academic achievement of disadvantaged young people is detrimental to their acquisition of economic, social and labour market rewards
- **Individuals' opportunities for educational achievement should not depend upon their social background**

Reducing inequalities in education: an avenue for social mobility?

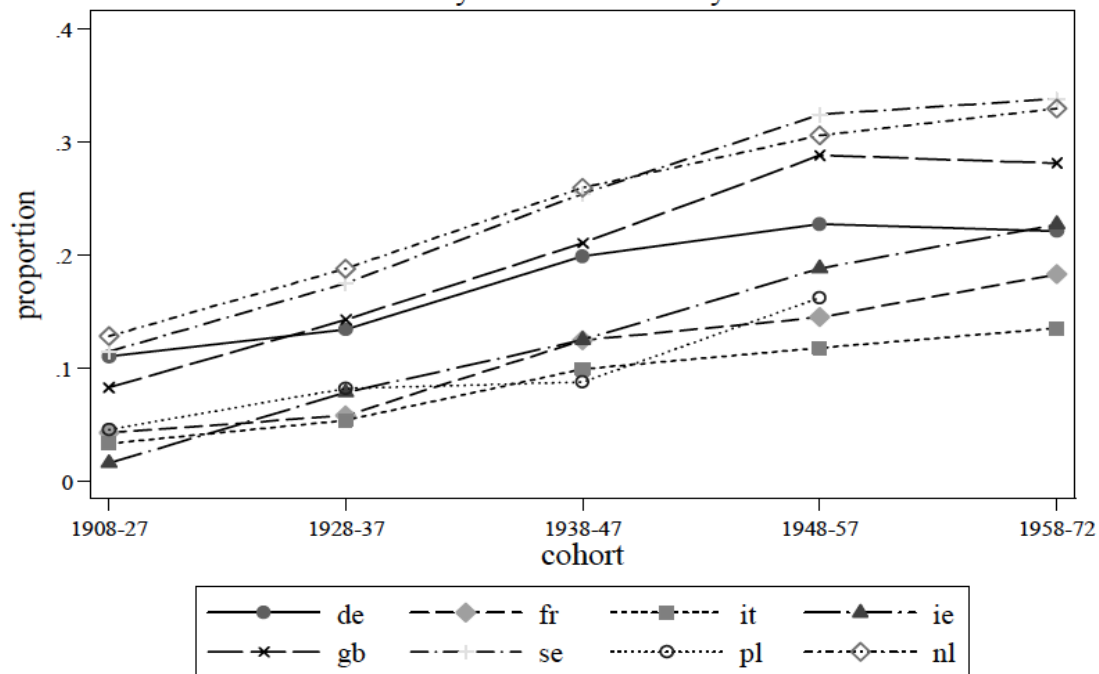
Outline

- Educational expansion and social inequalities
- The role of education in social mobility
- Education policies and social mobility
- Why are education policies not enough?

Data on educational expansion (1)

In most European countries: massive expansion of education

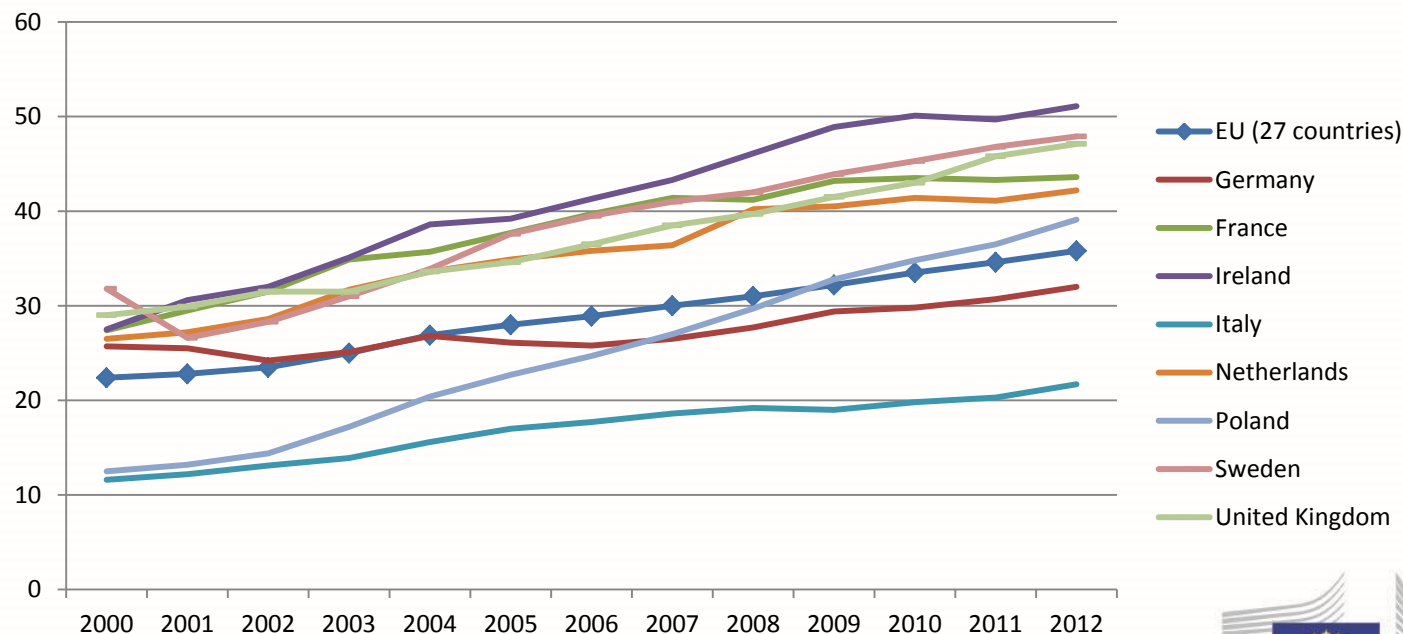
Figure 2: Proportion of men reaching tertiary education by cohort and country



Source: Breen et al. 2009

Data on educational expansion (2)

- About 80% of young people in Europe aged 20-24 have an upper secondary education or above (Eurostat, 2012)
- The percentage of young people in Europe holding a tertiary qualification continues to grow in most countries



Source: Eurostat 2012 – data refer to the age group 30-34

Educational expansion and social inequality

- What does educational expansion imply for inequality?
 - **Inclusion:** more opportunities for disadvantaged young people
 - **Diversion:** differentiation of institutions and curricula may stratify opportunities

Trends in social inequality in education

- Overall striking durability of social inequalities, especially when compared to gender and ethnic inequalities (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993; Breen et al 2009), and resistant to policy interventions
- Two processes in action:
 - saturation and postponement of selection point (Raftery and Hout, 1993)
 - horizontal differentiation (Lucas, 2001)

Inequalities in tertiary education

- What are the barriers that disadvantaged young people face in accessing tertiary education?
 - Poor academic achievement in secondary school
 - High perceived costs (fear of debt)
 - Low aspirations
 - 'Not for people like them'
 - Lack of confidence
- Universities in the UK have adopted a series of widening access initiatives (e.g., reduced entry requirements, bursaries, outreach activities, summer schools, access courses, peer mentoring)
- Evaluation of these initiatives is limited, often difficult, and requires a long-term perspective

From vertical to horizontal inequalities

Qualitative differences within the education system:

- Curriculum differentiation
 - safety net or diversion? (Shavit and Müller, 2000; Iannelli, 2013)
- Institutional differences (private/public; more or less prestigious higher education institutions)
 - increasing the social and economic gap? (e.g. in the UK see Green, Machin, Murphy and Zu, 2010; Iannelli, Gamoran and Paterson, 2011)

The role of education in social mobility

- Educational expansion has played an important role in promoting upward mobility in the last half century
 - Coupled with the expansion of professional jobs and the contraction of manual jobs, educational expansion has enabled a larger number of more disadvantaged young people to enter professional and managerial occupations
 - in some countries (e.g. USA, France and Scotland) the influence of social origin on people's occupational destinations has been found to be weaker at higher levels of education (Iannelli and Paterson, 2007)

The role of education in social mobility

- However, in many countries the gap between social classes in the chances of entering the top-level occupations has not substantially reduced (Breen, 2004). This is because:
 - the highest social classes continue to maintain an advantage in the acquisition of the highest educational credentials
 - only part of the social class advantage is passed on through education (other social and economic resources play a role too)

Education policy and social mobility

- Little evidence that education policies have promoted social mobility
- Their main effect has been opening up the higher levels of education to those people who were previously excluded
- Research on Scotland show that reforms, such as comprehensive schooling, can have positive effects on reducing social inequalities in educational attainment (McPherson and Willms, 1987) but cannot overturn the effect of other societal forces (Iannelli and Paterson, 2007)

Why are education policies not enough?

- Education policies cannot on their own tackle entrenched problems of economic, social and cultural disadvantage
 - Attainment gap starts at an early age and widens as children progress from primary school through secondary school and beyond
 - Multiple nature of disadvantage (economic, social and cultural factors)
- Wider social reforms are needed (e.g. redistributive policies) and a more integrated approach to tackling disadvantage (e.g. integrated child and family welfare policy with education policy)

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