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

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Discussion Paper

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Content

1.   Introduction

In November 2011 the European Commission circulated a request to the members of the non-discrimination Governmental Expert Group (GEG) seeking contributions in relation to public policies on combating discrimination and fostering diversity in education. The European Commission requested good practice examples in:

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.

Seventeen contributions were received from the GEG members. These provide the material for this discussion paper. The GEG contributions do not aim to be comprehensive with choice exercised in relation to the initiatives presented. However, when read together the GEG contributions do offer a comprehensive perspective.

2.   European union policy context

Article 10 of the Lisbon Treaty requires the European Union to 'aim to combat discrimination' on the grounds of gender, disability, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and age 'in defining and implementing its policies and activities'. This places the principle of non-discrimination at the heart of all European Union policy making.

Education is a key dimension to the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (COM2010 2020). The strategy includes headline targets that the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree.

The 'Youth on the Move' flagship initiative has as one aim, to 'raise the overall levels of education and training in the EU'. Member States are requested to ensure efficient investment in education and training systems and to improve educational outcomes.

The 'European Platform against Poverty' flagship initiative commits the European Commission to 'design and implement programmes to promote social innovation for the most vulnerable, in particular by providing innovative education, training and employment opportunities for deprived communities'.

The Race Directive (Council Directive 2000/43/EC), which prohibits discrimination on the ground of racial or ethnic origin, is the only European Union equal treatment Directive to prohibit discrimination in the field of education. The European Commission has proposed a further Directive (COM(2008) 426 final) on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief, age and disability that would cover the field of education among other fields.

In 2008 the Flash Eurobarometer 232 reported that:

- 35% of EU citizens believed that discrimination in education on the ground of religion or belief was 'very' or 'fairly' widespread.

- 34% of EU citizens believed that discrimination in education on the ground of disability was 'very' or 'fairly' widespread.

- 26% of EU citizens believed that discrimination in education on the ground of sexual orientation was 'very' or 'fairly' widespread.

- 17% of EU citizens believed that discrimination in education on the ground of age was 'very' or 'fairly' widespread.

3.   Strategic considerations

Six overarching messages are evident in the GEG contributions that are relevant for access to, participation in and systems for education provision. These six messages are the foundation stones for establishing and operating inclusive schools – schools where discrimination and harassment are eliminated, where adjustments are made to take account of the diversity of staff and students, and where equality is achieved in the presence, participation and achievements of a diversity of staff and students.

First: Legislation can make an important contribution to non-discrimination in education.

Anti-discrimination law in many Member States goes beyond the equal treatment Directives in prohibiting discrimination on all Article 19 grounds in the provision of education.

The institutions established under equal treatment legislation play valuable roles in non-discrimination in education. In Malta, the equality body conducted a review of the education curriculum to consider how the education system and specific syllabi addressed equality. In the Netherlands, students can turn to the equality body for mediation or legal advice if they have problems in enrolling or if, as students with disabilities, they are dissatisfied with the support measures agreed on.

Anti-discrimination law can stimulate planned and systematic approaches to equality in education. In Sweden, the Discrimination Act obliges education providers to take active measures to promote equal rights and opportunities for students, to take measures to prevent students from being subjected to harassment, and to draw up a annual equal treatment plan. In Finland, local authorities organize basic education and are obliged to prepare Municipal Equality Plans that cover education. These proactive approaches are valuable in a context where, as noted in the Finnish contribution, discrimination in education is rarely reported to the responsible authorities.

Second: It is necessary to link the different levels of intervention by public policy.

Public policy intervenes in the education system at three different levels. There is the primary level of legislation, the level of education policy making and the level of school practice. A coherent commitment to equality, diversity and non-discrimination is required across all three levels if the education system is to be non-discriminatory.

One aim of the 'Education for Intercultural Dialogue and Active Citizenship' project coordinated by the Slovenian Academy of Science is 'to link the three levels: legislation, educational policy and school practice and to overcome inadequate transmission of educational policies into school practice in the field of intercultural dialogue and active citizenship'.

Third: All Article 19 grounds need to be a focus for intervention.

The grounds of gender and racial or ethnic origin predominate as a focus in the GEG contributions. Disability, religion and sexual orientation appear to a much lesser extent. The ground of age does not appear to be a focus of intervention. The inclusive school is based on a focus on all six grounds. The intersecting ground of socio-economic status also needs consideration given the significant impact of socio-economic disadvantage on educational outcomes.

In Malta a qualitative study commissioned by the equality body on discrimination experienced by young people found few instances of discrimination reported by young people. However, the most common among those reported were those based on either the ground of age or of gender.

The Hessen Ministry in Germany of Culture project on Preventing Violence and Learning Democracy includes a focus on respect for Children's rights. This initiative suggests some concern for an empowerment of young people in the education system.

The importance of the ground of socio-economic status emerges in a number of the GEG contributions. Anti-discrimination law in most Member States does not cover this ground but it is a focus for policy making. Socio-economic status is also a dimension to the inequalities experienced on all other grounds.

The Bavarian Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs, Family and Women in Germany has a number of regional aid programmes that address the needs of socially disadvantaged young people and combat discrimination in access to education on socio-economic factors.

The Dutch government enables schools in deprived areas to offer quality education by providing pre-school and early school education, extra financial resources to primary schools and investment in additional education at weekends/summer schools. The 2011 Development Plan in Finland includes measures to decrease the differences in learning results between pupils with different socio-economic backgrounds.

Fourth: A focus on all dimensions to non-discrimination is necessary.

Non-discrimination in education involves eliminating discrimination, adjusting and providing for diversity and a proactively advancing equality. The contribution from the Hessen Ministry of Culture in Germany notes that measures to promote diversity and reinforce inter-cultural skills indirectly support the objective of non-discrimination. These three dimensions to non-discrimination are inter-linked.
The dominant focus for the initiatives in the GEG contributions is diversity and providing for the practical implications of diversity. Beyond the issue of bullying/harassment, the elimination of discrimination is largely ignored as a matter for legal enforcement. A proactive approach to equality, or the use of positive action to address a legacy of discrimination, is rarely referred to.

The inclusive school has to be concerned with eliminating discrimination, adjusting for diversity and achieving equality for staff and students. This concern is evident in achieving a presence of diversity among staff and students, as well as achieving a participation by this diversity in all aspects of school life and of educational credentials by this diversity of students and of position by this diversity of staff.

Fifth: The full range of roles played by educational establishment need to be a focus for public policy.

Educational establishments play three different roles:

1. Service provider. This focuses attention on who benefits from education provision.

2. Transmitter of the value base in society. This focuses attention on the curriculum and what value base is communicated.

3. Employer. This focuses attention on the staff and who is employed and at what levels in educational establishments.

The first two roles are well covered in the GEG contributions. The role of employer is rarely mentioned. Inclusive schools implement equality policies, training and action plans to advance equality in relation to each of these three roles.

In Norway teacher education courses are not popular with Norwegian born people with two foreign-born parents. The recruitment of more male teachers and teachers with a minority background into Norwegian schools is being addressed as part of a five year national effort to increase the status and quality of teachers. A strategy has also been prepared for recruiting students to train as Sami teachers.

Sixth: The moral case for non-discrimination in education needs to be accompanied by a 'business' type case.

The case for investing in non-discrimination in education is not a focus in the GEG contributions. There is an assumption that the moral case holds sway and it does have particular traction in the education sector due to its child-centred value base. However, this case alone might not be sufficient.

The Greek contribution notes that many Greek parents express fear and anxiety that the heterogeneous classroom is detrimental to the educational advancement of their children. The GEG contributions do not report any research to demonstrate the gains for all from diversity in the classroom.

4. Access to education

There was a limited focus on initiatives in relation to access to education in the GEG contributions. The initiatives described principally addressed the ground of racial or ethnic origin. The target groups for these initiatives included pupils, communities experiencing inequality, schools and policy makers.

Access was largely addressed in terms of securing a presence for a diversity of students in educational institutions. Access however needs to be examined in terms of presence in educational establishments, progression between educational establishments and access to educational qualifications. It is of note that the Hessen Ministry of Culture in Germany states that the aim of all educational measures is 'to lead pupils from migrant backgrounds to the same educational qualifications relative to their ability and potential as their fellow students'.

The access issues identified in the GEG contributions included: low levels of enrolment, high levels of drop out, limited progression and lack of educational qualifications for particular groups across the six grounds.

Four different types of intervention emerged from the GEG contributions. These are initiatives to:

(a) Engage potential pupils from communities experiencing inequality and their communities.

In Spain, awareness raising campaigns that target the Roma are deemed essential. The NGO 'Fundacion Secretariado Gitano' ran these activities. The main target group is Roma families with children aged between 7 and 10 in order to get them to enroll in and complete secondary education.

The 'Strategy of Education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia' proposes an early integration of Roma children into the education and training system with increased enrolment in pre-school at least two years before starting elementary school. Activities under the ESF financed project 'Increase in Social and Cultural Capital in Areas with a Roma Population' include the establishment of Roma Education Incubators providing social activities and workshops for preschool and school children and their parents.

A 'Contact Forum' was established in 2003 in Norway to improve dialogue between national minorities and the authorities. This has supported efforts to develop a coherent and inclusive policy for national minority groups.

The Ministry for Work, Equality and Social Affairs of Western Pomerania in Germany has a regional plan to promote the integration of migrants in Mecklenburg – Western Pomerania. This includes measures to facilitate children's access to the education system from the start regardless of their cultural and social background.

In Austria the SIM office provides school information for migrants in Vienna. This office provides advice and guidance to parents and schoolchildren, support for schools and assistance on intercultural issues for school partners.

(b) Achieve progression to higher levels of education.

There is a limited focus on action to secure progression although this is a key access issue. In Sweden, many higher education institutions have action plans for broadened recruitment and cooperate with upper secondary schools. This cooperation involves student ambassadors visiting schools and informing pupils about university studies, joint sessions in university laboratories and short internships for school pupils.

(c) Open up choices to specific groups of pupils.

The issue of choices made by pupils receives some focus in the GEG contributions in relation to the gender ground and to a lesser extent the ground of sexual orientation. This is an issue that might need further exploration for all grounds.

The Danish Ministry for Gender Equality has a website www.fremtidenerdin.dk aimed at girls and boys about choices in education. Targeted internships are provided to encourage girls to choose science careers. In Norway, the action plan for gender equality includes a focus on gender choices in education. In Austria projects such as 'Girls' day' and 'Taste for Technology' in Salzburg combat gender stereotypes.

In Finland, a study on discrimination experiences of young LGBT people in education found that part of the professional choices made by LGBT students were based on the 'gay friendliness' of particular sectors and negative attitudes within other sectors.

(d) Alleviate the cost of education.

The study support system to cover a student's living costs in Sweden is designed to, among other objectives, reduce the impact of financial background on participation in education. It includes specific types of study support for disabled students.

In Norway, a number of schemes have been introduced to ensure that different groups have the opportunity to choose to pursue higher education. These include a study support system and a variety of welfare benefits such as low cost housing. There are no tuition fees for attending higher public education.

5.   Participation in education

There was a significant focus in the GEG contributions on discrimination in education. Experiences on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion and disability were addressed. The target groups for initiatives included all pupils, teachers and parents. NGOs were identified as actors in many initiatives.

A core challenge in addressing discrimination in education is to move beyond project-based interventions to more systemic processes. Planning at a local or regional level and within educational establishment enables a more systemic approach. Monitoring and data gathering and analysis are important in enabling systemic approaches and there is good practice in this area outlined in the GEG contributions.
In Norway, a national pupil survey is carried out annually. This has included a focus on bullying. In the Netherlands, a study is carried out every two years on social safety in schools to examine the quality of the school safety policy, feeling of safety within schools and the number of safety incidents in schools.

In Finland, the 2010 annual report of the National Working Group of Monitoring on Discrimination focused on discrimination in education and free time activities. Studies in Finland have stimulated and informed initiatives supporting Roma children, young people of immigrant background and young LGBT persons.

The participation issues identified in the GEG contributions included: bullying and harassment, physical and cultural barriers, communication and language issues, and the content of teaching materials.

Four different types of intervention emerged from the GEG contributions. These are initiatives to:

(a)   Secure school safety and combat bullying.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in the Netherlands funds the Centre for School Safety. This consists of four knowledge/information portals on school safety, anti-bullying and mobbing, 'gay and school', and prevention of sexual intimidation. Every two years a comprehensive study is done on social safety in schools and a Bill has been drafted to oblige schools to register all incidents. An e-learning programme 'Hard of Hart' has been developed to enable students and staff to improve how they deal with aggression and violence.

In Norway, the National Pupil Survey shows that about 5% of pupils experience bullying. The government has launched several measures to combat bullying in collaboration with other stakeholders through an 'Anti Bullying Manifesto'. The manifesto is a binding partnership for good, inclusive childhood and learning environments from kindergarten through upper secondary school.

KiVa (Against Bullying) is a research based anti-bullying programme developed by the University of Turku in Finland. 90% of all comprehensive schools are implementing the programme. Actions target all pupils to influence group norms, build capacity to behave in

constructive ways and to take responsibility for discouraging bullying, and support victims. Specific actions aim to prevent bullying and to tackle cases that arise.

(b) Provide supports for pupils experiencing inequality.

Poland, Latvia, Slovenia and Finland employ Roma assistants in schools. In Latvia, a programme 'Teachers' Assistants of Roma Background' was developed to prepare Roma teaching assistants and to facilitate their inclusion into mainstream schools and pre-schools attended by Roma and non-Roma children. In Slovenia, Roma assistants help children overcome emotional and linguistic barriers and act as a bridge between pre-schools and elementary schools and the Roma community.

In Norway individual education plans must be agreed between schools and students and a special action plan is required for students with disabilities. Educational institutions must establish learning environment committees that include students.

(c) Secure physical access to educational establishments.

The Norwegian Act relating to Universities and University Colleges and students with disabilities establishes that, as far as possible and reasonable, the physical working environment must be designed in accordance with the principles of universal design and the study situation must be adapted for students with disabilities.

In Latvia, an ESF funded project 'The educational accessibility for disadvantaged young people and the development of inclusive education' and an ERDF funded project 'Special education and general improvement of education facilities for students with disabilities' provide additional supports for pupils with disabilities and ensure accessible premises for educational establishments.

The Dutch website www.studerenmeteenbeperking.nl provides guidelines for secondary vocational education schools to enable students with disabilities to study and graduate. A national centre of expertise is funded by the Government to support universities and colleges with their policies on studying with a disability.

(d) Engage with parents and communities.

The 132nd Elementary School of Athens developed a programme of work to respond to parent needs. This included training courses to strengthen parental roles and establish a bond with the school, frequent contact by the school with student's families to identify problems and provide support for children experiencing difficulties, voluntary Greek language courses for immigrant parents and multi-lingual translations of school communications.

In Finland, school supportive fieldwork among the Roma community assisted good results in Roma education. This included study clubs run by Roma field workers. In Latvia, the programme

of integration of the Roma community included social work with parents. This is provided to communicate the importance of education.

6. Education systems

The focus on education systems in the GEG contributions was largely on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender, religion and racial or ethnic origin. The grounds of religion and racial or ethnic origin are addressed under the theme of intercultural education in the next section. The target groups for these initiatives were principals, teachers, pupils, publishers, and the school.

The issues for education systems identified in the GEG contributions included: stereotyping of minority groups, mono-cultural approaches within textbooks, language diversity, teacher capacity and hostile school cultures.

Three key types of intervention emerge from the GEG contributions. These are initiatives to:

(a) Train Teachers.

In Greece the 132nd Elementary School of Athens provides in-service training for teachers to respond to their needs. Regular meetings of the teachers' Association ensure their creative and personal involvement in school affairs. Experience-based learning and collaborative forms of teaching have also been developed.

The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute provides teacher-training activities that aim to empower teachers to combat discrimination. Teacher training on the New Curricula focuses on the promotion of a democratic school that also respects and enhances diversity. Optional seminars address topics such as education for democratic citizenship and human rights, intercultural education and education against discrimination, ethnic diversity in a democratic school, gender equality, preventing and dealing with bullying and family violence. Induction courses for new teachers include a focus on multi-cultural educational settings. Courses for newly appointed deputy heads of secondary schools include a focus on intercultural education.

In Sweden, a Degree Ordinance (1993:100) requires that students studying towards a degree in education must show that they have the ability to communicate the school's value system, including human rights and basic democratic values. They must also demonstrate that they have the ability to prevent and counteract discrimination and other forms of harassment against children and school pupils.

A Summer Academy 'Democracy at School' devoted to intercultural education, education about human rights, and civic education takes place in Poland every year. Three member teams participate – the Principal and a teacher from the same school and a representative of an NGO that cooperates with that school. This is a transnational project.

(b) Respond to different identities.

In Belgium, the Flemish government has a 'Gender in the blender' project at secondary level. The basis for this project is the unique identity of the individual where each individual is a combination of different gender aspects: sex, cultural influences, sexual orientation and psychological perception. A website, www.genderindeblender.be, provides Principals with tips for a gender neutral and lesbian, gay and bisexual friendly school and for a good diversity policy. An education pack supports teachers to encourage respectful and self-conscious attitudes in class.

The Flemish Equal Opportunities policy and Cavaria (umbrella organization for LGBT organizations) developed a project to educate publishers of educational tools about gender stereotypes and heteronormative imaging for children and young people. The project screened syllabi, textbooks and teaching materials.

(c) Respond to potentially hostile school cultures and support diversity friendly school cultures.

In Finland many schools have designed their own small-scale projects or events to promote the acceptance of diversity and to prevent discrimination. Funding for this work can be secured from the Ministry of Education and Culture and from Municipal Councils. In 2012 a PROGRESS funded project will include a component to promote non-discrimination in education. Activities include the production of online teaching material on how to mainstream non-discrimination into the curriculum.

The new Education Act (2011) in Sweden puts emphasis on human rights as one of the fundamental values on which the school system is founded. As a consequence human rights education forms part of the purpose, goal and core content of the 'Civics' subject. Newly employed Principals must undergo special initial training at university level and as part of this Principals should acquire knowledge on international agreements and conventions of importance for the education sector.

The core curriculum developed for teaching in Hessen's schools in Germany tackles aspects of anti-discrimination and pupils are encouraged to develop social perceptions through which they can learn to treat each other with respect and solidarity and to resolve conflicts in an appropriate manner.

The Latvian project 'Creative Conference – Roma Ethnic Identity and its Preservation in Sabile's Culture Context' was organized by a NGO. The project promoted the cultural tradition and language of Roma and the preservation of these elements of cultural identity and developed intercultural dialogue between Roma and Latvian pupils.

7.   Intercultural education

Cultural and religious diversity in educational establishments was a particular focus in many of the GEG contributions. This is addressed under the banner of intercultural education. Intercultural education involves integrating a diversity of cultures in the school, combating all forms of racism, taking steps to respond to and adjust for the diversity of cultures, languages and religions in the school community and advancing equality for all ethnic and religious groups in the school.

In Latvia a broad range of educational materials and programmes on issues of diversity management and intercultural competence were implemented within 'The Program of the European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals 2007-2013'. These included developing teacher competence in intercultural education, preparing educational materials and educational programmes on 'intercultural communication and its role in education' and on 'school teachers in the intercultural environment'. Many of these projects were implemented by NGOs.

The GEG contributions demonstrate a particular concern with multi-ethnic integration and the elimination of segregation, and with identity and responding to the specific needs of different ethnic identities, in particular language needs.

(a)   Integrate the diversity of pupils.

The 'Strategy of Education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia' is based on a no segregation policy with Roma class units ruled out. An ESF funded project 'Successful integration of Roma children into education' was run by the Roma Union of Slovenia between 2008 and 2011. This project enhanced the efficiency of the on-going integration process through educating and training Roma assistants, schoolteachers and staff, and Roma parents.

In Finland, some population groups (immigrants, Roma and people with disabilities) were found to be over-represented in special needs education classes. A study focused on the background reasons for the transfers from regular comprehensive school classes. The pupils interviewed had no idea why the transfer had been made and had no positive experiences of interaction with pupils in regular classes. None of the pupils had been advised to apply for college studies at the end of basic education.

In Ireland a pilot project was developed in response to international recommendations to increase the provision of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools. A Community National School model is being tested in five primary schools. These seek to cater for diversity within a single school setting, accommodate children with a variety of belief systems and provide a multi-belief programme, 'Goodness Me! Goodness You!', that recognizes and celebrates cultural and religious diversity.

(b) Respond to different ethnic identities and in particular, different languages.

The concern with identity goes beyond a focus on language needs to include a focus on enabling access to minority ethnic cultures, histories and identities. The focus on language needs encompasses mother tongue and language used by the majority.

The Ministry of Culture in Hessen in Germany have developed heritage language classes to promote the linguistic and cultural abilities that pupils with a heritage language have as a result of their origins. These classes cover the acquisition and development of language skills and include content that relates to the pupil's current situation and the culture, history, and geography of their countries of origin.

In Greece the 132nd Elementary School of Athens organizes seminars on their mother tongue for bilingual students after school hours. There is also usage of mother tongue languages and multicultural elements in the mainstream curriculum.

The GEG contribution from Finland identifies a structural discrimination faced by Sami people in relation to limitations in the teaching of their native language and culture. A significant share of school age Sami children live outside the Homeland Area and almost half are not provided with teaching in the Sami languages.

One goal of the 'Strategy of Education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia' is the exercise of the right to maintain and respect Roma language and culture in the education and training system. It includes actions to adjust the content of educational programmes with a focus on Roma culture, history and identity.
In Poland the right to organise teaching of the language or in the language of a minority and to teach the history and culture of minorities in the education system is guaranteed by Article 13 of the Act of 7th September 1991 on the Education System.

The 'Strategy of the Inclusion of Migrant Children, Pupils and Students into the Education System in the Republic of Slovenia' includes measures for supplementary lessons of mother tongue and additional expert help in learning Slovenian.

Norwegian language is considered a pre-requisite for the integration of minority language pupils. 7.2% of all pupils received special instruction in Norwegian in 2010/11.

8. Questions for debate

For strategy the focus is on initiatives that have an overarching focus on driving good practice in non-discrimination in education. The questions that could be explored are:

1. What are the 'drivers' for effective non-discrimination in education?

2. What are the barriers to developing or implementing these 'drivers'?

3. What impact have these 'drivers' had?

4. How could these 'drivers' be improved?

5. What has been learnt from developing and implementing these 'drivers'?

For good practice the focus is on initiatives addressing the issues of access, participation, and education systems. The questions that could be explored are:

1. What was the purpose of the good practice initiative?

2. What made it possible?

3. What did it involve?

4. What impact did it have?

5. What was learnt from its implementation?