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The governance of equity funding schemes for disadvantaged schools: lessons from national case studies

Analytical report



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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020

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PDF ISBN 978-92-76-13068-0 doi: 10.2766/989607 NC-04-19-725-EN-N

The governance of equity funding schemes for disadvantaged schools: lessons from national case studies

edited by:

Sukriti Verelst, Hanne Bakelants, Lief Vandevoot, Ides Nicaise

Please cite this publication as:

Verelst, S., Bakelants, H., Vandevoot, L., Nicaise, I. (2020), 'The governance of equity funding schemes for disadvantaged schools: lessons from national case studies', *NESET report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. doi: 10.2766/989607.

ABOUT NESET

NESET is an advisory network of experts working on the social dimension of education and training.

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture initiated the establishment of the network as the successor to NESSE (2007-2010), NESET (2011-2014) and NESET II (2015-2018).

PPMI is responsible for the administration of the NESET network. For any inquiries please contact us at: info-neset@ppmi.lt.

CONTRACTOR

PPMi

Gedimino ave. 50, LT - 01110
Vilnius, Lithuania
Phone: +370 5 2620338
Fax: +370 5 2625410
www.ppmi.lt
Director: Rimantas Dumčius

AUTHORS:

- › **Sukriti VERELST**, researcher, KU Leuven
- › **Hanne BAKELANTS**, researcher, KU Leuven
- › **Lief VANDEVOORT**, researcher, KU Leuven
- › **Ides NICAISE**, project leader, HIVA (Research Institute for Work and Society) and Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, KU Leuven

PEER REVIEWERS:

- › **Dragana AVRAMOV**, NESET Scientific coordinator
- › **David GREGER**, Institute for Research and Development of Education at the Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague

LANGUAGE EDITOR:

- › **James NIXON**, freelance editor

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Directorate A – Policy Strategy and Evaluation
Unit A.4 – Evidence-Based Policy and Evaluation
E-mail: eac-unite-a4@ec.europa.eu

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

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List of Abbreviations

CSL	Centre for school leadership
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
ERC	Educational Research Centre
ERRC	European Roma Rights Centre
FINEEC	the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre
GAM	General Allocation Model
GOK	Gelijke onderwijskansen (Equal opportunities in education)
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison scheme
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Services
OAB	Onderwijsachterstandenbeleid (Education deficit policy)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Positive discrimination
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PPC	Psychological-pedagogical centres
REP	Réseaux d'Éducation Prioritaire
SCP	School Completion Programme
SDE	Socially disadvantaged environment
SEN	Special educational needs

Executive summary

Equity funding refers to additional funding (per student) provided to schools with an above-average representation of students from disadvantaged (mainly low-SES and immigrant) backgrounds. More than half of EU countries currently provide some type of equity funding to schools that serve target groups such as children with a migration background, low-SES children or children in vulnerable family situations. However, some doubt exists as to the effectiveness of such policies, due to mixed evidence on the effectiveness of such schemes. This report examines to what extent the improved governance of equity funding schemes could contribute to better results. It is based on case studies of equity funding in seven selected member states (or regions) of the EU: Ireland, Finland, Slovakia, Flanders, the Netherlands, England and France.

Lessons from the case studies

Some of the case studies express vague *objectives* and *target group definitions*. This leaves too much room for interpretation and misunderstanding at the local level of implementation. By contrast, countries in which the objectives behind policy making are clear and well-defined (such as Finland, Ireland, England and France) tend to provide clearer and more effective guidelines to help practitioners implement funding efficiently.

Careful design of the *funding criteria* is essential, not just in order to adequately cover the target group, but also to avoid adverse effects such as funds bypassing disadvantaged pupils and instead benefiting groups that are not disadvantaged. When, as in France, additional funding is targeted at schools within particular geographical areas, the schemes suffer from limited coverage of the target groups and from strong(er) stigma effects that tend to reinforce segregation. Schools containing high percentages of socially disadvantaged pupils also become less attractive for teachers and, consequently, often have staff that are less experienced or qualified (as in Slovakia). Schemes that are based on student profiles rather than on location appear to produce fewer adverse effects. The Dutch and Irish schemes employ mixed formulas under which the weights assigned to pupil criteria are enhanced in schools or areas in which disadvantage is concentrated. This choice is consistent with research findings that show additional problems in schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils, over and above the sum of the individual disadvantages, as a consequence of segregation.

The most efficient systems appear in countries with a *balance between earmarked and free allocation* systems. While it is important to earmark funding for certain aspects (in particular, the professionalisation of teaching staff and school management), schools should retain sufficient autonomy to tackle local needs. Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and England allow some degree of freedom at local level. The degree of autonomy left to schools should be proportional to the *management capacity* of local actors.

Autonomy of implementation should also go hand-in-hand with *monitoring and evaluation*: the greater the autonomy granted, the more SMART¹ the monitoring

¹ SMART = specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound.

systems should be. Countries such as Finland set a good example by inculcating professional accountability and trust in teachers and principals whose job it is to not only monitor themselves, but also to evaluate and make changes. However, the Finnish model of accountability cannot be transposed to other countries overnight.

The *impact assessments* carried out so far are relatively critical with regard to the range of impacts achieved by equity funding: while it should be seen as a necessary condition to increase equality of educational opportunities, equity funding is not sufficient on its own. What matters more is a pervasive climate of equity within education systems. This translates into accessible, high-quality provision in early childhood, the avoidance of segregation and grade repetition, tracking pupils at later stages of education, etc. At best, equity funding plays an auxiliary role in improving the social and pedagogical approaches at school level.

Recommendations: contextual issues

- Invest in teacher initial and in-service training: in most cases, it was found that teachers in schools that cater to students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be either less qualified (Ireland, Belgium, and France) and/or out-of-field (Slovakia). It is therefore necessary not only to provide solid initial teacher training programmes that address the teaching skills required to ensure equitable education, but also to provide professional development training opportunities for all teachers. In addition, intercultural training could help to combat any negative bias that may be held by some teachers. With the appropriate training aimed at inclusion, such negative attitudes can be changed. In addition, teachers require strong, scientifically grounded insights into 'what works' to effectively overcome social disadvantage, including insights into the systemic aspects of exclusion and inclusion.
- Reform inequitable education systems: if the overall architecture of an education system remains inequitable, equity funding resembles a plaster on a wooden leg. Research has extensively demonstrated that systems characterised by strong 'academic segregation' (placing children on different trajectories for a long period, e.g. through segregated special education; selective admission to schools; early tracking; grade repetition; ability grouping) inevitably result in social segregation and increase inequality of outcomes. Minimising academic segregation can therefore be expected to have a stronger impact on equity than equity funding.

Recommendations: governance issues

- Set clear goal-oriented policy objectives and targets: France and England are examples of countries in which objectives are SMART (specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound).
- Target carefully: a combination of pupil-based and school-based targeting criteria (such as in The Netherlands) appears to be more effective than other options. The most recent Dutch formula, in which the weight of each risk factor in funding is proportional to its impact on outcomes, could be used as an inspiration by other countries.

- Earmark if necessary, but encourage autonomy: countries and regions such as Flanders, The Netherlands, Finland and England provide a great deal of local autonomy, but this yields good results only when local teams are very professional and/or when autonomy is accompanied by appropriate monitoring systems.
- Monitor to see what works and what does not: Ireland implements local action plans under which schools are obliged to report on the implementation of the funds/scheme.

Recommendations: strategic issues

- Distinguish clearly between social disadvantage and disability: in countries such as Slovakia where there is an over-emphasis on special educational needs, it is important to put in place testing or identification mechanisms that can differentiate between low achievement due to obstacles in social background and low achievement due to a disability (either physical or mental), to ensure that children are not mis-labelled.
- Avoid stereotypical labels: Flanders has deliberately merged its equity funding (provisionally only in basic education) into the mainstream funding system, on the basis that 'every school should be an equal opportunity school'.
- Act local, think global: it is important that school teams think beyond individual pupils, and are aware of the potential impact of collective or structural strategies (investing in language policy, anti-discrimination policy, inter-agency collaboration, parental participation, measures to reduce school-related costs, etc.) Expert guidance and professional learning communities concerning school-based policies are powerful levers to promote equity at meso-level.

Résumé analytique

Le financement de l'équité désigne le financement supplémentaire (par élève) accordé aux écoles dans lesquelles la représentation des élèves issus de milieux défavorisés (principalement élèves de faible SSE et immigrants) est supérieure à la moyenne. Plus de la moitié des pays de l'UE accordent actuellement un certain type de financement de l'équité aux écoles qui s'adressent à des groupes cibles tels que les enfants issus de l'immigration, les enfants de faible SSE ou les enfants en situation familiale vulnérable. Toutefois, des doutes subsistent quant à l'efficacité de ces politiques, en raison des preuves mitigées de l'efficacité de ces programmes. Le présent rapport examine dans quelle mesure l'amélioration de la gouvernance des programmes de financement de l'équité pourrait contribuer à de meilleurs résultats. Il est basé sur des études de cas de financement de l'équité dans sept États membres (ou régions) sélectionnés de l'UE : la Flandre, les Pays-Bas, la France, l'Angleterre, l'Irlande, la Finlande et la Slovaquie.

Leçons tirées des études de cas

Certaines des études de cas expriment *des objectifs et des définitions de groupes cibles* vagues, qui laissent trop de place à l'interprétation et aux malentendus au niveau local de la mise en œuvre. En revanche, les pays dans lesquels les objectifs qui sous-tendent l'élaboration des politiques sont clairs et bien définis (comme la Finlande, l'Irlande, l'Angleterre et la France) tendent à fournir des lignes directrices plus claires et plus efficaces pour permettre aux professionnels de mettre en œuvre efficacement les financements.

Une conception minutieuse des *critères de financement* est essentielle, non seulement pour couvrir de manière adéquate les groupes cibles, mais aussi pour éviter des effets négatifs tels que des financements qui contournent les élèves défavorisés et profitent plutôt à des groupes qui ne sont pas défavorisés. Lorsque, comme en France, le financement supplémentaire est ciblé sur les écoles situées dans des zones géographiques particulières, les programmes souffrent d'une couverture limitée des groupes cibles et de forts effets de stigmatisation qui tendent à renforcer la ségrégation. Les écoles qui comptent un pourcentage élevé d'élèves socialement défavorisés deviennent également moins attrayantes pour les enseignants et, par conséquent, disposent souvent d'un personnel moins expérimenté ou moins qualifié (comme en Slovaquie). Les programmes basés sur le profil des élèves plutôt que sur le lieu d'enseignement semblent produire moins d'effets négatifs. Les régimes néerlandais et irlandais utilisent des formules mixtes dans lesquelles les pondérations attribuées aux critères des élèves sont renforcées dans les écoles ou les zones où se concentrent les désavantages. Ce choix est conforme aux résultats de recherche qui révèlent des problèmes supplémentaires dans les écoles présentant une proportion plus élevée d'élèves défavorisés, au-delà de la somme des désavantages individuels, en raison de la ségrégation.

Les systèmes les plus efficaces apparaissent dans les pays où il existe *un équilibre entre les systèmes d'affectation de fonds et d'attribution gratuite*. S'il est important de réserver des financements pour certains aspects (notamment la professionnalisation du personnel enseignant et des directeurs d'établissement), les écoles devraient conserver une autonomie suffisante pour répondre aux besoins locaux. La Belgique, les Pays-Bas,

la Finlande et l'Angleterre accordent un certain degré de liberté au niveau local. Le degré d'autonomie laissé aux écoles devrait être proportionnel à la *capacité de gestion* des acteurs locaux.

L'autonomie de mise en œuvre devrait également aller de pair avec *le suivi et l'évaluation* : plus l'autonomie accordée est grande, plus les systèmes de suivi devraient être SMART². Des pays comme la Finlande donnent le bon exemple en inculquant la responsabilité professionnelle et la confiance aux enseignants et aux directeurs d'établissement, dont le travail consiste non seulement à se contrôler eux-mêmes, mais aussi à évaluer et à apporter des changements. Toutefois, le modèle finlandais de responsabilité ne peut être transposé à d'autres pays du jour au lendemain.

Les *évaluations d'impact* réalisées jusqu'à présent sont relativement critiques en ce qui concerne l'éventail des effets obtenus par le financement de l'équité : s'il doit être considéré comme une condition nécessaire pour accroître l'égalité des chances en matière d'éducation, le financement de l'équité n'est pas suffisant en soi. Ce qui importe davantage, c'est un climat d'équité omniprésent au sein des systèmes éducatifs. Cela se traduit par une offre accessible et de qualité dans la petite enfance, par l'évitement de la ségrégation et du redoublement, par le suivi des élèves aux stades ultérieurs de l'éducation, etc. Au mieux, le financement de l'équité joue un rôle auxiliaire dans l'amélioration des approches sociales et pédagogiques au niveau des écoles.

Recommandations : questions contextuelles

- Investir dans la formation initiale et continue des enseignants : dans la plupart des cas, il a été constaté que les enseignants des écoles qui accueillent des élèves issus de milieux socialement défavorisés ont tendance à être soit moins qualifiés (Irlande, Belgique et France) et/ou hors champ (Slovaquie). Il est donc nécessaire non seulement de mettre en place des programmes solides de formation initiale des enseignants, qui portent sur les compétences pédagogiques requises pour assurer une éducation équitable, mais aussi d'offrir des possibilités de formation de développement professionnel à tous les enseignants. En outre, une formation interculturelle pourrait contribuer à combattre tout préjugé négatif que pourraient avoir certains enseignants. Avec une formation appropriée visant à l'inclusion, ces attitudes négatives peuvent être modifiées. Par ailleurs, les enseignants ont besoin de connaissances solides et scientifiquement fondées de « ce qui fonctionne » pour surmonter efficacement les désavantages sociaux, y compris des connaissances sur les aspects systémiques de l'exclusion et de l'inclusion.
- Réformer les systèmes éducatifs inéquitables : si l'architecture globale d'un système éducatif reste inéquitable, le financement de l'équité revient à poser un plâtre sur une jambe de bois. Les recherches ont largement démontré que les systèmes caractérisés par une forte « ségrégation scolaire » (qui place les enfants sur des trajectoires différentes pendant une longue période, par ex. par le biais d'un enseignement spécial séparé, d'une admission sélective dans les écoles, d'un suivi précoce, du redoublement, du regroupement des aptitudes) entraînent inévitablement une ségrégation sociale et accroissent l'inégalité des résultats. On

² SMART = spécifique, mesurable, acceptable, réaliste et limité dans le temps.

peut donc s'attendre à ce que la réduction de la ségrégation scolaire ait un impact plus important sur l'équité que le financement de l'équité.

Recommandations : questions de gouvernance

- Fixer des objectifs politiques clairs et ciblés : la France et l'Angleterre sont des exemples de pays dans lesquels les objectifs sont SMART (spécifiques, mesurables, acceptables, réalistes et limités dans le temps).
- Cibler avec soin : une combinaison de critères de ciblage basés sur les élèves et les écoles (comme aux Pays-Bas) semble plus efficace que d'autres options. La formule néerlandaise la plus récente, dans laquelle le poids de chaque facteur de risque dans le financement est proportionnel à son impact sur les résultats, pourrait être utilisée comme source d'inspiration par d'autres pays.
- Réserver des fonds si nécessaire, mais encourager l'autonomie : des pays et des régions comme la Flandre, les Pays-Bas, la Finlande et l'Angleterre offrent une grande autonomie locale, mais celle-ci ne donne de bons résultats que lorsque les équipes locales sont très professionnelles et/ou lorsque l'autonomie s'accompagne de systèmes de suivi appropriés.
- Assurer un suivi pour voir ce qui fonctionne et ce qui ne fonctionne pas : l'Irlande met en œuvre des plans d'action locaux dans le cadre desquels les écoles sont tenues de rendre compte de la mise en œuvre des fonds/du programme.

Recommandations : questions stratégiques

- Faire une distinction claire entre désavantage social et handicap : dans des pays comme la Slovaquie, où l'on accorde trop d'importance aux besoins éducatifs spéciaux, il est important de mettre en place des mécanismes de test ou d'identification permettant de différencier les mauvais résultats dus à des obstacles sociaux et les mauvais résultats dus à un handicap (physique ou mental), afin de garantir que les enfants ne soient pas mal étiquetés.
- Éviter les étiquettes stéréotypées : la Flandre a délibérément fusionné son financement de l'équité (provisoirement seulement dans l'enseignement de base) avec le système de financement général, au motif que « chaque école doit être une école de l'égalité des chances.
- Agir localement, penser globalement : il est important que les équipes scolaires pensent au-delà des élèves individuels et aient conscience de l'impact potentiel des stratégies collectives ou structurelles (investissement dans la politique linguistique, politique anti-discrimination, collaboration entre agences, participation des parents, mesures visant à réduire les coûts liés à l'école, etc.). Les conseils d'experts et les communautés d'apprentissage professionnelles en matière de politiques scolaires sont de puissants leviers pour promouvoir l'équité au niveau méso.

KURZFASSUNG

Gleichstellungsmittel sind zusätzliche Ressourcen (pro Schüler) für Schulen, bei denen überdurchschnittlich viele Schülerinnen und Schüler aus benachteiligten Gruppen kommen (vor allem niedriger sozioökonomischer Status und Migrationshintergrund). Mehr als die Hälfte der EU-Mitgliedstaaten stellen Schulen, die Kinder aus bestimmten Zielgruppen betreuen, beispielsweise Kinder mit Migrationshintergrund, aus einkommensschwachen Familien oder in einer prekären Familiensituation, eine Form von Gleichstellungsförderung bereit. Allerdings liegen widersprüchliche Daten über die Wirksamkeit derartiger Programme vor, sodass derzeit nicht zweifelsfrei geklärt ist, ob diese Maßnahmen den gewünschten Erfolg haben. In diesem Bericht wird untersucht, ob ein besseres System zur Verwaltung von Gleichstellungsmitteln deren Wirksamkeit erhöhen könnte. Grundlage für die Analyse sind Fallbeispiele für Gleichstellungsförderung aus sieben ausgewählten Mitgliedstaaten (oder Regionen) der EU: die Flämische Region, die Niederlande, Frankreich, England, Irland, Finnland und die Slowakei.

Ergebnisse der Fallstudien

In einigen der untersuchten Fallbeispiele sind die *Ziele* und die *Definition der Zielgruppen* eher vage formuliert. Dies lässt auf der lokalen Ebene, auf der das System umgesetzt wird, zu viel Interpretationsspielraum und auch Raum für Missverständnisse. Im Gegensatz dazu haben die Länder, in denen die Zielsetzung der politischen Maßnahmen klar und gut definiert ist (z. B. Finnland, England und Frankreich), der praktischen Ebene klare und effiziente Leitlinien für eine erfolgreiche Umsetzung des Finanzierungsprogramms bereitgestellt.

Besonders wichtig ist die sorgfältige Auswahl der *Förderkriterien*, und zwar nicht nur, um die Zielgruppe flächendeckend zu erreichen, sondern auch, um negative Effekte zu verhindern, zum Beispiel, dass Mittel an benachteiligten Schülerinnen und Schülern vorbei geschleust werden und stattdessen Gruppen zugutekommen, die sie nicht brauchen. Systeme, wie das in Frankreich, bei denen zusätzliche Ressourcen an Schulen in bestimmten geografischen Regionen fließen, haben die Nachteile, dass die Zielgruppen nicht vollständig erreicht werden und die Förderung die Empfänger eher stigmatisiert, was die Segregation noch verstärken kann. Schulen mit einem hohen Anteil von sozial benachteiligten Schülern werden außerdem für Lehrer weniger attraktiv, sodass ihr Lehrkörper häufig weniger Erfahrung und geringere Qualifikationen aufweist (z. B. in der Slowakei). Bei Fördersystemen, die sich nicht am Standort der Schule orientieren, sondern an Merkmalen der Schülerinnen und Schüler, scheint es weniger ungünstige Nebenwirkungen zu geben. Die Systeme in den Niederlanden und Irland nutzen eine Mischformel, bei der die schülerbezogenen Kriterien in Schulen oder Gebieten, in denen sich Benachteiligungen konzentrieren, stärker gewichtet werden. Dieser Aufbau entspricht dem Forschungsstand, nach dem in Schulen mit einem höheren Anteil benachteiligter Schülerinnen und Schüler aufgrund von Segregation zusätzliche Probleme auftreten, die über die Summe der einzelnen Benachteiligungen hinausgehen.

Besonders erfolgreich sind den Daten zufolge Länder, die bei der Schulfinanzierung ein *Gleichgewicht zwischen zweckgebundenen und frei verfügbaren Mitteln* erreichen.

Obwohl es wichtig ist, einen Teil der Mittel an bestimmte Zwecke zu binden (insbesondere die berufliche Weiterbildung von Lehrkräften und Schulleitung), sollten die Schulen trotzdem genug Autonomie besitzen, um den jeweiligen Bedürfnissen vor Ort gerecht zu werden. Belgien, die Niederlande, Finnland und England bieten der lokalen Ebene diesen Spielraum. Dabei sollte die den Schulen eingeräumte Autonomie der *Managementkapazität* der lokalen Akteure entsprechen.

Außerdem sollte Autonomie bei der Umsetzung durch *Überwachungs- und Bewertungsverfahren* ergänzt werden: je mehr Autonomie, desto mehr sollte das Kontrollsystem dem SMART-Ansatz³ folgen. Länder wie Finnland gehen mit gutem Beispiel voran, indem sie Lehrkräften und Schulleitern erlauben, sich nicht nur selbst zu kontrollieren, sondern die Ergebnisse auch selbst zu bewerten und nötige Veränderungen vorzunehmen, und ihnen so professionelle Rechenschaftspflicht und Vertrauens vermitteln. Das finnische Modell der Rechenschaftspflicht lässt sich jedoch nicht über Nacht auf andere Länder übertragen.

Die bisher durchgeführten *Auswertungen* sehen den Erfolg von Gleichstellungsmitteln relativ kritisch; diese sind zwar eine notwendige Voraussetzung, um für eine gerechtere Verteilung von Bildungschancen zu sorgen, als alleinige Maßnahmen jedoch nicht ausreichend. Entscheidender ist ein vom Klima der Chancengleichheit durchdrungenes Bildungssystem. Konkret bedeutet dies unter anderem zugängliche und hochwertige Angebote der frühkindlichen Bildung, Vermeidung von Segregation und Nichtversetzungen, die Begleitung von Schülerinnen und Schülern über alle Bildungsstufen hinweg. Gleichstellungsmittel unterstützen die Schulen bestenfalls bei den nötigen sozialen und pädagogischen Maßnahmen.

Empfehlungen: Kontext des Fördersystems

- Investitionen in die Aus- und Weiterbildung von Lehrern: wie unsere Daten zeigen, sind die Lehrkräfte an Schulen, die Schüler aus sozial benachteiligten Gruppen betreuen, in den meisten Fällen weniger qualifiziert (Irland, Belgien und Frankreich) und/oder nicht in dem Fach ausgebildet, das sie unterrichten (Slowakei). Deshalb müssen zum einen in soliden Lehramtsstudiengängen die pädagogische Verfahren vermittelt werden, die für eine auf Chancengleichheit ausgerichtete Bildung notwendig sind, und zum anderen müssen alle Lehrkräfte die Möglichkeit zur beruflichen Weiterbildung erhalten. Außerdem könnten interkulturelle Schulungen dazu beitragen, etwaige negative Vorurteile von Lehrern abzubauen. Durch eine geeignete Weiterbildung zum Thema Inklusion lassen sich negative Einstellungen überwinden. Außerdem brauchen Lehrkräfte solide und wissenschaftlich belegte Informationen darüber, was im Kampf gegen soziale Benachteiligungen „funktioniert“ und wie die systemischen Aspekte von Ausgrenzung und Inklusion aussehen.
- Reform ungerechter Bildungssysteme: wenn die Struktur eines Bildungssystems keine Chancengleichheit bietet, ist Gleichstellungsförderung wie ein Pflaster auf einem Holzbein. Unzählige Forschungsdaten beweisen, dass Systeme, die von einer

³ SMART = specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic, time-bound (engl. für spezifisch, messbar, akzeptabel, realistisch, an Fristen geknüpft).

starken „akademischen Segregation“ geprägt sind (Kinder werden schnell auf unterschiedliche Bildungswege verteilt, z. B. durch segregierte Sonderschulen; eine selektive Zulassung zu Schulen, frühe Spurführung, Nichtversetzung, Einteilung in Leistungsgruppen) unvermeidlich zu sozialer Segregation führen und Ungleichheiten beim Bildungserfolg verstärken. Aus diesem Grund wirken Maßnahmen, die akademische Segregation abbauen, stärker auf die Gleichstellung als eine Gleichstellungsförderung.

Empfehlungen: Verwaltung des Fördersystems

- Festsetzung klarer und messbarer politischer Zielvorgaben: Frankreich und England sind Beispiele für Länder mit Zielvorgaben, die dem SMART-Ansatz entsprechen (spezifisch, messbar, akzeptabel, realistisch und an Fristen geknüpft).
- Sorgfältige Auswahl der Förderkriterien: eine Kombination von auf die Schülerschaft bezogenen und auf die Schule bezogenen Förderkriterien (wie in den Niederlanden) scheint wirksamer zu sein als andere Optionen. Die aktuelle niederländische Formel, bei der die für die Förderung maßgeblichen Risikofaktoren anteilig zu ihrem Einfluss auf den Bildungserfolg gewichtet werden, könnte als Inspiration für andere Länder dienen.
- Zweckbindung wenn nötig, Autonomie wo möglich: Länder und Regionen wie die Flämische Region, die Niederlande, Finnland und England gewähren der lokalen Ebene viel Autonomie. Dies zeigt aber nur dann gute Ergebnisse, wenn die Teams vor Ort sehr professionell sind und/oder die Autonomie durch geeignete Überwachungssysteme ergänzt wird.
- Kontrollen, mit denen erfasst wird, was funktioniert und was nicht: Irland setzt dabei auf lokale Maßnahmenpläne, bei denen die Schulen über die Umsetzung des Systems und die Verwendung der Mittel Bericht erstatten müssen.

Empfehlungen: Strategie des Fördersystems

- Klare Unterscheidung zwischen sozialer Benachteiligung und Behinderung: in Ländern wie der Slowakei, in denen der sonderpädagogische Förderbedarf besonders betont wird, müssen Prüf- oder Identifizierungsmechanismen eingerichtet werden, die unterscheiden, ob unterdurchschnittliche Leistungen auf einen problematischen sozialen Hintergrund oder auf eine Behinderung (körperlich oder geistig) zurückzuführen sind. Dadurch wird verhindert, dass Kinder falsch eingestuft werden.
- Vermeidung stereotyper Etiketten: Nach dem Motto „Jede Schule sollte Chancengleichheit bieten“ hat die Flämische Region die Gleichstellungsmittel (bisher nur in der Primarstufe) in das allgemeine Finanzierungssystem integriert.
- Lokal handeln, global denken: es ist wichtig, dass das Schulteam sich nicht nur auf einzelne Schüler konzentriert, sondern auch das Potenzial kollektiver und struktureller Strategien nutzt (Investitionen in Sprachförderung, Antidiskriminierungsrichtlinien, Kooperation mit anderen Stellen, Beteiligung der Eltern, Maßnahmen zur Senkung der Schulkosten usw.). Beratung durch externe

Experten und professionelle Lerngemeinschaften im Hinblick auf die strategische Ausrichtung der Schule sind effiziente Maßnahmen, um auf Mesoebene für mehr Chancengleichheit zu sorgen.

Introduction

Equal access to quality education is one of the main objectives of EU education policy. For this purpose, the EC supports national policymakers in developing school education policies and systems, and monitors progress towards targets as part of the European Semester.

The term 'equity funding' (sometimes also labelled 'compensation funding', 'educational priority funding', or 'needs-based school funding') describes additional funding (per student) that is provided to schools with an above-average representation of students from disadvantaged (mainly low-SES and immigrant) backgrounds. In our definition, we exclude earmarked funding for students with special educational needs, because this often relates to separate types of schools. Financial support to students is also excluded.

More than half of EU Member States currently provide some kind of equity funding for schools that serve target groups such as children with a migration background, low-SES children or children in vulnerable family situations (see Eurydice, 2014, p. 36).

Until now, little work has been carried out at EU level in the field of school funding. Information about the design, implementation and effectiveness of equity funding is very scarce. For example, figures on the volume of funding involved are extremely hard to find. As regards evaluation, many studies remain 'below the surface' and are unknown in the international literature. Transnational comparative research is also very limited. The OECD published an inspiring study (see PISA in Focus 2014/10) which found that, while richer countries tend to allocate resources more equitably between schools, the quantity of resources is only weakly related to their quality. Yet it is the quality (of teachers) that matters most for the performance of disadvantaged students. Eurydice has published a thematic review of school financing methods in the EU (Eurydice, 2014), but this remains fairly descriptive, and includes no information about the relative intensity of the amounts spent on equity funding. A survey of the evaluation literature was produced for NESET by Franck and Nicaise (2017).

Due to the mixed evidence in the literature, there is some pessimism about the effectiveness of such policies, but no extensive interpretation of the potential explanations (Franck and Nicaise, 2017). In some countries, equity funding has even come under pressure with recent budget cuts. This is paradoxical in a period of growing immigration and increasing inequalities. Rather than simply cutting equity funding, it seems preferable to: (1) assess the reliability of the various evidence-based studies, and (2) where necessary, improve the effectiveness of equity funding schemes through better governance. The present paper aims to assess the governance of equity funding, based on a selection of national case studies. Peer learning between Member States in this field (and in the area of equity funding in particular) based on case studies, would be a very useful tool to enhance both the efficiency and the equity of national school systems. This is precisely what this report aims to facilitate.

The report is based on case studies of equity funding in seven selected Member States (or regions) of the EU: Flanders, the Netherlands, France, England, Ireland, Finland and Slovakia. The first four of these were examined in detail in a report for the Flemish Ministry of Education (Vandevoort et al., 2020). For the purposes of this report, three additional case studies were carried out in Finland, Ireland and Slovakia, to reflect the

diversity of national contexts. These three country cases are described more extensively in the Annex; all seven cases are summarised in Chapter 1 (p. 6-9).

This report aims to:

- Compare the context, objectives, design, governance and results of equity funding schemes in compulsory education in the seven selected countries.
- Summarise whatever national evaluation studies are available concerning the effectiveness of the schemes in these countries.
- Draw lessons from these case studies for the improvement of equity funding schemes, not just in the selected case study countries, but which can be scaled up for use in other Member States.

The methodology used in the research is a typical multiple case study approach. Based on a standard model of a policy cycle (from the formulation of policy objectives to the monitoring and evaluation of results and feedback into policy improvement), and on a prior survey of the literature, a detailed ad hoc interview guide was developed that was used to conduct expert interviews with researchers and public officers from each of the selected countries. Interviews were carried out by audio- or video-conference, phone and/or email. In all countries, the experts were contacted repeatedly for additional information. Whenever relevant national reports were identified that were not available in English or French, the national experts were asked to summarise their main findings. We are extremely grateful to all country experts who kindly assisted with the data collection.

Chapter 1 of this report begins with a brief presentation of the seven national schemes, and then provides a cross-sectional analysis of all stages of the policy cycle. The second chapter sketches out an overview of the national evaluation studies available. In the third and final chapter, we draw some lessons from our review, that are designed to help improve the effectiveness of the schemes in these and other European countries.

Chapter 1. Comparative overview of the national schemes

Conceptual framework

The analysis carried out for this report is based on a policy cycle framework in which each stage is hypothesised to influence the (potential) effectiveness of equity funding schemes. The cycle is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the comparison of the case studies.



Policy objectives (stage 1)

Bernardo and Nicaise (2000) state that there are five overarching categories under which the objectives of compensation financing may be placed, namely:

- Promoting the acquisition of basic skills that are more difficult to achieve by pupils in the target group (for example, the acquisition of local language by immigrants).
- Improving support for schools and teachers (for example, professionalisation programmes with a focus on equal educational opportunities).
- Stimulating educational activities to promote school success (for example, intercultural education).
- Promoting cooperation between local stakeholders to ensure integration with other forms of intervention (e.g. with health services at school).
- Responding to the specific educational needs of schools with a high concentration of pupils in the target group (for example, drop-out prevention programmes).

Demeuse (2012) found similar objectives during a study of various policy programmes from eight countries. In addition, the study added one more objective: encouraging provisions that focus on the early identification of pupils in the target group (for example, pre-school intervention programmes).

Design (stage 2)

The target group consists of less privileged population groups that achieve lower educational outcomes due to external circumstances (Ross, 2009). Essentially, two ways exist to define the target group; namely, on the basis of pupil characteristics, or by geographical area (Bernardo and Nicaise, 2000; Demeuse, 2012; Ross, 2009). In the case of pupil characteristics, schools receive extra resources depending on the number and characteristics of *pupils in the target group* at their school, regardless of their location (Demeuse, 2012). In the case of geographical location, schools receive extra resources when they are located in a priority education *area* that has a high concentration of poverty, unemployment and/or learning and development problems (Demeuse, 2012; Ross, 2009). The allocation of additional resources based on pupil characteristics makes it easier to reach the target group, but does not compensate for additional challenges when a school is located in an area of high concentration (Franck and Nicaise, 2017b). The focus on geographic areas, on the other hand, does respond to the additional negative effects that disadvantaged pupils suffer in a concentration area. The flip side of this approach is that it ignores part of the underprivileged student population because it only provides extra resources for those underprivileged students who go to school within a priority education zone. In addition, the labelling of areas as 'priority' can result in stigma that drives away middle-class families from these regions and increasing school segregation (Bénabou, Kramarz, and Prost, 2009). It is important to find the right balance between funding based on student characteristics and based on geographical areas (OECD, 2017b). In general, the purely geographical approach is increasingly being abandoned. And yet there is some justification in concentrating resources in schools with an accumulation of disadvantages. Therefore, an alternative approach adopts a 'two-tier' weighting, by multiplying individual student weights with a coefficient that reflects the degree of concentration of disadvantage at school level, irrespective of the location of the school.

Resource allocation (stage 3)

Two different approaches exist when it comes to granting compensation financing to schools: the inclusion of the additional funding into the general funding mechanism for schools (for example, through the use of a systematic weighting formula that allocates additional funds to certain categories of students) or a conditional or earmarked allocation, separate from the basic funding for schools (OECD, 2017b). In the former case, schools have greater freedom to determine for themselves how to use the compensation/equity funding. In the latter, the funds are earmarked for specific purposes. These extra resources are usually allocated in the form of additional teachers (such as in Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Portugal and France) or extra hours of training for the school team (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016).

When developing an allocation mechanism, it is also important to consider the extent to which horizontal and vertical justice is achieved. Horizontal justice means that resources are evenly distributed between schools and students with the same characteristics.

Vertical justice means that schools or students with different characteristics are funded differently (OECD, 2017b). At first sight, horizontal and vertical justice seem to imply a trade-off. Granting differentiated funding to meet vertical justice objectives leads to variations in funding between schools and students (OECD, 2017b). However, a clear conceptual distinction shows that it is possible to finance different subpopulations of students differently, while ensuring minimal variation in the allocation of resources (OECD, 2016b). Thus, although a funding mechanism grants additional funds to schools with a disadvantaged student population, horizontal justice can be achieved by ensuring that this additional funding is equal for groups of students with similar characteristics (Fazekas, 2012; Levacic et al., 2000)

In addition, local authorities in various countries are playing an increasing role in managing and distributing education funding – for example, municipalities in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, or autonomous communities in Spain (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016). The increasing involvement of local authorities points to increasing decentralisation. When decentralisation goes hand in hand with greater autonomy for the decentralised authorities, it is important that an adequate regulatory and institutional framework is developed to ensure that the allocation of the extra funding is carried out in an optimal and transparent way (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014). Without a transparent regulatory framework, inequalities between schools can increase due to an unequal (re)distribution of resources (Burns and Köster, 2016).

Implementation (stage 4)

In most countries, schools are subject to certain conditions governing the use of extra funding (OECD, 2017b). In a number of educational systems, however, schools are still allowed to make decisions on their own about this use. On the one hand, these schools may be better able to respond to local challenges in their particular context (OECD, 2017b). On the other hand, greater autonomy at school level can increase the risk that compensation financing may be used inefficiently. This is mainly because disadvantaged schools are more likely to have staff with less experience in the effective and adequate use of resources (Bloom, Lemos, Sadun and Van Reenen, 2015; OECD, 2017a). In addition, many educational systems have been unable to sufficiently even out the so-called ‘Matthew Effect’⁴ seen as a result of schools with many underprivileged pupils often being underprivileged in terms of economic, cultural and human resources (Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise, 2015; OECD, 2018). The context in which compensation financing is implemented is, therefore, not the same for every school (Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise, 2012). Deprived schools often also possess outdated infrastructure, and therefore use additional operating resources to cover urgent maintenance costs (OECD, 2017a).

⁴ The term ‘Matthew Effect’ refers to a verse in the St Matthew’s gospel that reads, ‘those who have shall be given more, and from those who have not, shall be taken away the little that they have’. The term was used by the sociologist Robert Merton to denote the mechanisms whereby underprivileged groups always tend to benefit less from public services. Many education systems have failed to adequately neutralise the pre-existing ‘Matthew effect’ in educational funding, meaning that schools that are attended by disadvantaged students, are themselves often disadvantaged in terms of economic, cultural, social and human resources (Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise, 2015).

Monitoring and evaluation (stage 5)

The high degree of autonomy that schools and school boards have within certain educational systems can sometimes result in a lack of transparency at local level. This makes it difficult to determine whether or not equity funding is being used for the purposes intended (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014; OECD, 2017b). It is important for an education system to set clear goals of equality and to invest in the development of indicators that can evaluate the achievement of the objectives set (OECD, 2017b). In order to adequately monitor policy, it is necessary to conduct regular, detailed analyses of the distribution and use of extra resources at different policy levels (Field et al., 2007; Schaeffer and Yilmaz, 2008). Research shows that the educational outcomes of pupils are better in educational systems where there is greater autonomy at school level (OECD, 2011). However, this is only the case where this autonomy is accompanied by adequate accountability mechanisms (Wößmann, 2007).

In the literature, a distinction is made between two forms of accountability: vertical and horizontal. Vertical accountability is top-down and is used to determine whether authorities at various levels comply with established legislation and regulations (Hooge, Burns and Wilkoszewski, 2012). This form of accountability is increasingly supplemented by accountability that is based on school performance or on the output of the learning and teaching process (Shewbridge, Fuster, and Mourning, 2019). The use of standard testing is an example of a more evaluation-centred role of government (Hudson, 2007). In addition, different educational systems focus on an additional form of accountability that involves multiple actors. This horizontal responsibility concerns the extent to which schools provide stakeholders with insights and involve them in decision-making processes, strategy implementation and policy evaluation (Hooge, 2016). Involving multiple actors in the monitoring and evaluation process not only raises awareness of equal education opportunities policy within the school team, but also facilitates efficient planning and policy adjustment (Burns and Cerna, 2016). The challenge is to develop a system that combines accountability with sufficient autonomy, so that on the one hand, schools can continue to respond to local challenges, but on the other hand, policy can be adjusted if necessary.

Brief description of the seven cases of equity funding schemes

In **Ireland**, *Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools* (DEIS) is an umbrella policy tool, launched in 2005, which identifies schools that contain a large number of students from a socially disadvantaged background and provides them with a set of funding schemes to help students combat disadvantage. The main objective of the programme is to improve literacy and numeracy in the schools identified. This is achieved by providing a set of evidence-based funding schemes that increase teacher allocation in the targeted schools, as well as improving school planning and provide support in other areas deemed to be important, such as parental involvement (McCoy, Quail and Smyth, 2014). The funding is provided by three sources: The Department of Education and Skills; the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA); and the Department of Social Protection (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). Alongside the funding, a clear system exists for monitoring and evaluation. Every DEIS school is required to prepare an action plan and specify how the funding will be used. Special guides to the process are available online.

In **Finland**, no specific equity funding scheme exists, as the education system itself stands on the pillars of equity and equality. These include free access to education and services for all students. Only 25 % of overall school funding comes from the State. The amount of this funding varies depending on the socio-demographic and the socio-economic profile of the municipality. The rest of the school's funding is provided by the municipalities themselves, financed via local taxes. Funding schemes therefore differ from region to region. Local authorities can apply their own equity funding rules on top of those of the State. For example, Helsinki developed a positive discrimination funding index, which distributes funds to schools depending on the area in which they are located. All teachers and principals in Finland are trained and expected to evaluate themselves. This form of professional accountability and trust between various stakeholders is the essence of Finland's monitoring and evaluation system. An external organisation called the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) conducts sample-based testing evaluations that can be used by schools to improve their systems, and by policy makers at national level to adjust the national core curriculum.

Slovakia's 'non-normative funding' system (introduced in 2016) is roughly equivalent to equity funding. Under the system, schools can apply for additional funding from central government. Although Slovakia does not possess a separate/exclusive scheme or a policy that targets students from socially disadvantaged environments (SDEs), the government has recently amended its School Act to accommodate the needs and combat the segregation of Roma children. School leaders are encouraged to identify students who come from socially disadvantaged environments. If the number of these students exceeds 85, they may apply for additional funding. Other schemes such as free school meals and transport are provided to students whose household income is identified as low.

In **Belgium (Flanders)**, the equity funding scheme is called the Equal Education Opportunities policy (*Gelijke Onderwijs-Kansenbeleid* or GOK)⁵. The three aims of the GOK decree are: i) to achieve optimal learning and development opportunities for all pupils; ii) to avoid exclusion, segregation and discrimination; and iii) to promote social cohesion within Flemish primary and secondary education (Franck et al., 2017; Flemish Parliament, 2002). One of the pillars of the decree is the 'integrated support policy', which provides additional funds to schools to bring disadvantaged pupils up to the same level as non-target pupils. For primary education, this policy is integrated with basic funding, while for secondary education (SES policy) it has so far remained separate⁶. Funds are allocated to school boards, which further distribute the funds among their schools. Due to the decentralised system of education in Flanders, schools enjoy freedom and autonomy over what they choose to do with this funding.

In the **Netherlands**, the educational disadvantage policy (*Onderwijs-Achterstanden Beleid* or OAB) began in the 1970s. It focuses on combating the educational and developmental disadvantage that accompanies social disadvantage, and on promoting equal opportunities. According to the policy, educational disadvantage occurs when a pupil under-performs in school relative to their potential, due to an unfavourable

⁵ Although a similar system exists in the French Community of Belgium, our case study was confined to the Flemish Community.

⁶ Integration of this funding into the structural school financing scheme is anticipated in an upcoming reform.

economic, social and/or cultural environment (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017). For primary and secondary education, allocation is based on a 'lump sum' system under which extra funding is given to school boards. This is further distributed to individual schools. Individual pupils are given a weight, which add up to a total weight for the school (Cebeon, 2015). From 2019-2020, a new regulation will provide funding under the OAB at primary level only to the 15 % of pupils at the greatest risk of educational disadvantage (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017). This measure is dependent on five environmental factors. Schools will receive the additional funding if at least 12 % of the school's population consists of pupils who, according to the new factors, belong to the 15 % of pupils at the greatest risk of educational disadvantage (Lower House of the States General, 2018). The aim of this is to concentrate funding in schools with the highest need. An area-based threshold also exists at secondary level. Some freedom exists at the local level over implementation. The Ministry of Education can only hold schools accountable by setting standards and organising central examinations (Ministry of Finance, 2017). School boards must account for the use of lump sum funding through their annual reports, but are not required to do the same for the OAB (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016; Ministry of Finance, 2017). In the event that educational results are not up to the expected standard, the inspectorate can enquire with the school boards on behalf of the OAB.

In the **UK (England)**, the equity funding scheme is called the *Pupil Premium*. Introduced in 2011, this allocates additional funds to public schools with a disadvantaged pupil population (Foster and Long, 2017). The target group is further divided into three groups: i) pupils who are registered to receive free school meals; ii) pupils who were 'looked after by an English or Welsh local authority immediately before being adopted, or who left local authority care on a special guardianship or child arrangements order (previously known as a residence order'; and iii) pupils with a military parent (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2019). Schools receive the Pupil Premium allowance for six years after a pupil has been identified as falling into one of the groups (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2019). The level of funding allocated depends on the type of school and the specific target group. Local authorities receive the Pupil Premium on a quarterly basis from the Department of Education (Foster and Long, 2017) and further distribute the resources to schools. Academies and Free Schools, which are funded directly by the government, receive the funding via the Education and Skills Funding Agency (Foster and Long, 2017). There is a 'virtual principal' in this chain of funding allocation who identifies needs, plans interventions (by funding separate facilities or pooling resources), and monitors progress (Department of Education, 2015; Foster and Long, 2017). Schools are free to use the funding as they wish, as long as they can demonstrate the impact it has on the English and Mathematics performance of the target pupils (Department of Education, 2010; OECD, 2017b; Foster and Long, 2017). In addition, to encourage the use of evidence-based practices, extra funding is provided to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (Gomendio, 2017), which promotes the effective and strategic use of funding.

In **France**, *l'Éducation Prioritaire* helps to identify priority education networks called REPs (*Réseaux d'Éducation Prioritaire*). An enhanced version, REP+, also exists for areas with the highest concentration of social problems that have a severe impact on pupils' school success. The objective of REP and REP+ is to reduce to no more than 10 % the difference in performance between of pupils attending a school within the priority

education network, and pupils outside it (Court of Audit, 2018; Éduscol, 2018). A social index is used to identify the target areas, based on the proportion of pupils in various categories of social disadvantage: i) the percentage of pupils whose parents are unemployed, or who fall into disadvantaged social and occupational categories; ii) the percentage of pupils receiving school grants; iii) the percentage of pupils living in vulnerable urban areas; iv.) the percentage of pupils who have retaken a year in college (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016; Rocher, 2016). The French Court of Audit has proposed the elimination of the REP and REP+ labels so that underprivileged pupils who attend school outside the priority education network can still receive extra support (Court of Audit, 2018). Funding is allocated and monitored at national (the Ministry of Education), regional (*académies*) and local (networks) level (Meuret, 2004; *Ministère de l'Éducation nationale*, 2018b). Networks develop network projects based on the educational and professional requirements outlined at national level. The local networks are required to carefully implement a strategy defined by the regional *académie* (MENESR-DGESCO, 2017). Further adjustments have been made to the working conditions of teachers to attract more experienced and qualified teachers into priority areas.

Comparison of the policy objectives in the seven case studies (stage 1)

Although all equity funding schemes share some general objectives (such as reducing the gap in educational achievement between disadvantaged groups and the 'average student'), there is a wide degree of variation in the precision of their operational objectives, as well as in the practice of setting measurable targets. Table 1 provides a synthetic overview of the operational objectives that are reflected in national policy documents on equity funding. This is followed by an in-depth country-by-country discussion.

In **Ireland**, the Department of Education and Skills (2019) lists five policy goals for DEIS, out of which the first is improving the process of identifying DEIS schools by making it more robust and responsive. While this is necessary, no mention is made as to how this can be measured, because 'effective resource allocation' has not been defined (see case study). Ireland, however, is able to emphasise the importance of identifying target pupils so that school support can be improved. The second goal relates to improving the learning experiences and outcomes of pupils in DEIS schools, but 'improving' is neither clearly defined nor is it time-bound. In the evaluation reports, the expected improvement is compared to non-DEIS schools and also to the school's own past achievement scores. In addition, the evaluation reports place heavy emphasis on scores for numeracy and literacy achievements, but the measurability of the learning experience of the pupils is not elaborated. The third and the fourth goals mention improving support for schools and teachers and fostering inter-agency collaboration, which in turn are seen to have an effect on the types of schemes available under DEIS. The final goal relates to supporting schools to achieve the goals of their action plan through research, information, evaluation and feedback. The body responsible for this is the Educational Research Centre (ERC), to whom DEIS schools submit reports. According to Smyth, McCoy and Kingston (2015), Ireland still needs to improve its response to specific educational needs, especially in Urban Band 1 schools, which contain a higher concentration of disadvantage and a greater complexity of need (see

the case study in the Annex for further information on categories under DEIS). Achievement scores were found to be lowest for urban Band 1 schools, and thus they require more support. Our own assessment is that DEIS could generate more effective outcomes if its objectives were more SMART (specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound). The objectives listed by the Department of Education and Skills (2019)

Table 1. Overarching categories of objectives behind policy making

	Ireland	Finland	Slovakia	Flanders	Netherlands	England	France
Achieve minimum standards for all	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Strengthen support for schools and teachers	X	X					X
Encourage educational activities to promote school success	X	X		X	X	X	X
Promote cooperation between local stakeholders	X	X	X	X	X		X
Respond to the specific educational needs of disadvantaged groups (e.g. language)	X	X		X	X	X	X

are realistic, as they are based on continuous research, but they are not very time-bound and require further specification. Overall, the objectives form a strong foundation for policy building, but excessive attention is given to measuring attendance and achievement scores, and insufficient attention is given to the other specified policy objectives.

In **Slovakia**, there is a lack of specific compensation funding schemes. While there is no particular policy in place, the fine print can be found in the legislation through the Education Act which mentions an equality of access to education (European Agency, 2018). With the Government Programme for 2016-2020, Slovakia announced objectives including supporting pre-primary education for learners from socially disadvantaged background and creating conditions for inclusive education (European Agency, 2018). Through this, they are able to promote the acquisition of basic skills, but the downside is that most children with socially disadvantaged environments end up in special schools which affects their basic skill acquisition. There was also an amendment to the School Act in 2015 which emphasised prevention of the segregation of Romani children (see case study for more information). Through these legislative changes, it appears Slovakia is trying to make improvements, and future studies will be able to measure the impact

of any such changes. Most of the objectives behind Slovakia's legislation remain vague and due to a lack of precise guidelines, there is more confusion than clarity on the issue. Legislation continues to operate in such a way that it expects children to keep up with the system, rather than 'adjusting the system to meet the different needs of different children' (European Commission, 2017, p. 17). Therefore, while on paper, Slovakia aims to improve support for schools and teachers, current policy is unable to target the specific educational needs of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Amnesty International and ERRC (2017), a set of eight criteria is used by the Slovak Ministry of Education to identify children from an SDE. School leaders can use these indicators to identify SDE children within their schools and apply for additional funding. However, in some schools a lack of awareness and training can further prevent such children from being identified, making it difficult to target their specific educational needs. Overall, rigidity appears to hamper structural change and the specific use of positive discrimination. Although Slovakia has faced criticism over its treatment of Romani children, the objectives employed to address this situation are not SMART.

According to the Finnish National Board of Education, national policy in **Finland** is shaped by the objectives of equitable and equal education. Since the goal of the country's general education funding scheme is to even out local differences, the objectives that shape policies are not only specific but also realistic. However, since there are differences within municipalities, the objectives behind the policies in each area also differ. Based on the needs of local schools, the school board in each area can choose to innovate and create newer policies to combat a specific issue at hand (Silliman, 2016).

In **Belgium (Flanders)**, the objective of the Equal Education Opportunities decree in Flanders, called the GOK (*Gelijke Onderwijskansen*), is to achieve optimal learning and development opportunities for all pupils, to avoid exclusion, segregation and discrimination, and to promote social cohesion within Flemish primary and secondary education (Flemish Parliament, 2002). The GOK decree explicitly states that compensation financing should benefit not only disadvantaged pupils, but should benefit all pupils (Flemish Parliament, 2002). However, ambiguity exists because the circular 'het *gelijk-onderwijskansenbeleid voor basisonderwijs*' (the equal education opportunities policy for primary education) limits the target group to disadvantaged pupils (Ministry of Education and Training, 2006).

During the period 2003-2012, all schools receiving equity funding were required to select at least two strategic themes from the following menu of six: i) the remediation of developmental and learning disadvantages; ii) language skills education; iii) intercultural education; iv) career guidance; v) socio-emotional development; and vi) student and parent participation. Since the inclusion of the GOK into the regular staff framework in 2012, however, these themes are no longer mandatory in primary education, because the staffing of schools is deemed to depend exclusively on needs. The reduced emphasis on strategic thinking appears to have caused a slide from structural measures at school level towards a more individualised 'care' perspective: the school is rarely seen by teachers as a lever to eliminate structural inequality, despite this being one of the policy objectives (Court of Audit, 2008; Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise, 2012). The Education Inspectorate also found that since 2012, primary schools have often abandoned the underlying system and its systematic, theme-based approach

(Flemish Education Inspectorate, 2015). There is, therefore, a risk that primary schools will no longer recognise the issue of the unequal educational opportunity, and will not pay sufficient attention to it (Court of Audit, 2017). At present, secondary schools are still expected to develop a GOK policy based on the list of themes laid down for implementation mentioned above. A 10-year evaluation of the GOK decree showed that schools prefer themes that are directly related to their core assignment (Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise, 2012), and opt less frequently for themes with a more indirect influence on children's learning (such as student and parent participation and intercultural education). However, the Court of Audit (2017) found that successful schools refer more often to factors such as parent involvement, vision development, internal quality assurance and increased support from teachers.

Similarly, in the **Netherlands**, the educational disadvantage policy (OAB) focuses, in particular, on preventing and combating the learning and developmental disadvantages faced by pupils with a disadvantaged background in order to avoid them underperforming in relation to their potential (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Despite the relative definition of the OAB, many of its arrangements stipulate absolute goals such as tackling language and educational disadvantages and preventing early school leaving (Ministry of Finance, 2017). As a result, teachers focus more often on students who perform poorly, and spend limited time on students whose scores are average but whose full potential is not being reached (CBS, 2017). This focus on achieving the minimum standards by the weakest pupils while not encouraging or challenging stronger pupils with an underprivileged background can result in an uneven approach. Equity funding must be invested sufficiently in promising underprivileged pupils, as well in maximising return on the funding (Plucker, Burroughs and Song, 2010).

In **England**, the goal of the policy is to reduce the performance gap between target and non-target pupils, and improve cognitive educational outcomes. The Pupil Premium policy is aimed at students between 3 and 16 years of age (Foster and Long, 2017). The two main objective of these measures are: i) improving the performance of target pupils, and ii) reducing the performance gap between target pupils and their peers (Rowland, 2015; Witty and Anders, 2014). Due to the policy's focus on learning outcomes, there is a tendency for teachers to place heavy emphasis simply on achieving minimum standards for students found to be near or at the threshold (Craske, 2018; Plucker, Burroughs and Song, 2010). The policies are measurable, time-bound and realistic but that is also because they focus exclusively on easily quantifiable factors such as outcomes. As per the analysis made in this report, a holistic set of objectives that includes non-cognitive outcomes such as self-confidence and motivation could achieves a greater impact.

In contrast, **France's** aim is to reduce to 10 % the difference in performance between pupils attending a school within a priority education network, and pupils attending a school outside such a network/area (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse*, 2018). In order to support the development of a focused priority education policy, a frame of reference was drawn up that contains six priorities, around which network projects must be developed. These priorities are: i) acquiring basic skills; ii) building a caring and demanding school; iii) working with parents and the environment; iv) promoting cooperation between different educational networks; v) stimulating cooperation in professional development; and vi) the development of educational

interventions (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale*, 2014). These priorities are further elaborated in 63 detailed sub-priorities. An example of a detailed item falling under the second priority is: 'The institution establishes a prevention group against early school leaving. This must intervene as early as possible when signs of early school leaving occur with a student.' Priority education networks know in concrete terms what is expected of them, and schools are evaluated on this basis. In a similar way to the situation in England, the focus on quantifiable cognitive outcomes may not be holistic and consequently may be less effective than it could otherwise be.

Comparative assessment

- The key objectives of equity funding policies can be categorised under five headings: achieving minimum standards for all pupils; strengthening the capacity of schools and teachers; developing specific educational approaches to enhance school success (e.g. intercultural education); fostering inter-agency collaboration (the 'extended school' approach); and catering for specific needs (e.g. language support).
- Most of the countries covered in the case studies have not really formulated clear objectives. In those countries that did, priorities were set without any specific targets, let alone evaluation tools. France can be seen as an example of good practice in this regard, with clear quantitative targets for each objective. Other countries would benefit from a more SMART formulation of their objectives.

In **Ireland**, the target group was defined on the basis of a combination of pupil characteristics and geographical criteria. Schools were surveyed and principals reported background information on their pupils, which was used to identify those schools catering for students with educational disadvantage. Unemployment, the percentage of pupils in local authority accommodation and the percentage with lone parents, from traveller backgrounds and those with large families (five or more children), as well as pupils eligible for free books at primary level, were the identifying factors for primary schools (Archer and Sofroniou, 2008, as cited in Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). For post-primary schools, centrally held data were used to identify pupils. Equity funding in the form of DEIS grants and schemes is therefore heavily reliant on pupil characteristics. However, a further distinction is made at primary level between DEIS schools in rural and urban areas. This is the area-based component of equity funding. Since the complexity of needs differs between regions (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015), differences also exist between the services available for primary schools in rural versus urban areas (see case study). This further identification on the basis of geographical areas is helpful because the evaluation revealed the effect of pupils' residence. On an ancillary note, although no particular neighbourhoods or areas are labelled as 'priority areas', labelling still occurs via the differentiation of DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Middle-class families may avoid enrolling their children in DEIS schools, which could further increase the segregation of children with an educational disadvantage.

Comparison of the design of equity funding schemes (stage 2)

Table 2. Comparison of the design of equity funding schemes.

	Ireland	Finland	Slovakia	Flanders	Netherlands	England	France
Area-based vs pupil-based							
Area-based	X	X		(X)* *Brussels only	X		X
Pupil-based	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Indicators used							
Cultural capital							
Parents' education level		X	X	X	X		
Mother's country of origin					X		
Home language		X	X	X	X		
Social capital							
Temporarily/permanently placed				X		X	
Parents' occupational situation	X	X	X				X
Migratory population	X	X		X			
Parent(s) in military service						X	
Residence of pupil		X	X	X	X		X
Postcode of school		X			X		
Economic capital							
Poverty index			X				
Education allowance	X			X	X		X
Free school meals						X	
Other							
Single parenthood	X	X	X	X	X		X
Size of family	X						
Health index		X	X		X		
Length of stay		X					

Similarly, in **Slovakia**, although regions differ in terms of equality and equity, the target population is identified on the basis of pupil characteristics. The Psychological-Pedagogical Centres (PPCs) were given a set of eight criteria to identify students from 'socially disadvantaged environments' (SDEs). These are: i) the family is not performing a socialising-educational function; ii) poverty and destitution; iii) at least one parent has been unemployed long-term and belongs to disadvantaged category of job applicant; iv) insufficient education of legal guardians; v) inadequate housing and sanitation; vi) the language of instruction is different from the language spoken at home; and vii) the family lives in a segregated environment. While PPCs are able to take account of a pupil's geographical area, such identification continues to rely on the expertise of PPC staff. Due to a lack of administrative data, Slovakia has to rely on screening carried out by the PPCs, which is subject to selection bias. In order for additional funding to be granted, the leadership of schools that identify SDE children within their student population must submit an application. This requires personnel to possess assessment, identification and writing skills, which disadvantaged schools may lack. Furthermore, the central issue remains that there is yet to be a strong distinction between children from SDEs and children with special educational needs (SEN). Target pupils are often placed in special schools, but following the amendment to the School Act, this can now be tackled with effective implementation.

In **Finland**, funding schemes follow a two-tiered approach. Due to the decentralised funding system in which municipalities fund their own schools, the funding mechanisms used at national level are mainly area-based. The funding formula used at national level takes into account socio-economic indicators and demographic indicators, and funding is distributed accordingly. Some of these factors include the area's unemployment rate, health index, and the number of foreign speaking individuals in the area. However, pupil-based characteristics are also taken into account, especially at local level. Municipalities use a mix of territorial and pupil-based funding criteria. This design is also used for evaluation purposes, in the form of the level of parental education or the language spoken at home.

In **Belgium (Flanders)**, unlike Finland, pupil-based characteristics are used to identify the pupils. Some of the factors taken into account are the mother's education level, home language, and education allowance received. Most of this information is available from the first day of a pupil's school career (Franck and Nicaise, 2017b) but is collected by the Ministry and forwarded to schools in aggregated form. Whereas this approach avoids paperwork (as well as fraud at the level of schools), it also means that schools are unable to identify precisely which pupils belong to the target group population. In the Brussels region, an area-based supplement is applied alongside the pupil-based design, as the vast majority of pupils are from non-native backgrounds, and there is a concentration of educational disadvantage.

Similarly, in the **Netherlands**, information on the pupil-based characteristics can be drawn from the central databases of the Central Bureau of Statistics (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The issue with this is that many pupil characteristics are unknown to both the school and the government database. Some of the factors taken into account include the parents' education level, the mother's country of origin and length of stay, residence and postcode of the pupil, and any education allowance received. Starting in 2020, an indicator of immigrant origin will also be used to identify pupils (House of

Representatives of the States General, 2018). In addition, schools located in an 'impulse' area (i.e. a postcode area with many inhabitants on low incomes and/or receiving many benefits) receive extra resources. This combination of identification measures ensures such policies have a stronger impact.

In **England**, the target population for Pupil Premium includes i) pupils registered for free school meals; ii) pupils who are or were covered by special youth care; and iii) pupils with a military parent (Department of Education, 2018b). The pupil characteristics taken into account therefore include whether the pupil has been temporarily or permanently placed in care, whether they have parents who are or were in the military and whether they receive free school meals. The Department for Education recognised the specific challenges faced by pupils with military parents and in 2011, introduced the Service Pupil Premium, which exists mainly to provide socio-emotional support (Department of Education, 2018b). In 2017, it was discovered that a proportion of students eligible for free school meals were not registered to receive them (National Audit Office, 2015) because parents found form-filling to be stigmatising. A new criterion was proposed, based on the recently introduced social security scheme Universal Credit. This criterion covers income-based support, and will provide lump sum funding (Department of Education, 2018a) without the need for forms to be filled in.

In **France**, the target population is identified using area-based mechanisms. Schools receive additional resources if they are located in a recognised priority education area. The two main factors taken into account are: i) the residence of the pupils; and ii) the occupational status of parents. Although this approach simplifies implementation and synergies across different policy areas, it has a downside. Many disadvantaged pupils do not live in the said priority areas, which makes it impossible for them to benefit from the policy.

Comparative assessment

- Three broad categories of pupils are targeted: socio-economically disadvantaged pupils; linguistic/ethnic minorities; and children from 'broken' or vulnerable families. Ideally, the weights given to such groups are based on statistical analyses of the impact of various characteristics on educational achievement, as in The Netherlands.
- The identification of priority pupils is a complex issue. In countries where schools have to apply for support and to demonstrate a certain level of need, there exists a risk of unequal treatment depending on a school's 'bureaucratic capacity', and inconsistencies between the weights attached to different risk factors. In countries with a longer tradition of equity funding, governments tend to use their own administrative indicators of disadvantage in order to avoid paperwork and data manipulation. In avoiding the latter, the provision of aggregated data runs the risk that schools do not know precisely which pupils belong to the priority groups, unless the government forwards lists of individual 'priority pupils'.
- Several countries combine pupil characteristics with area-based criteria to allocate equity funding. This combination is useful, because the degree of disadvantage does not depend exclusively on individual characteristics: the concentration of disadvantages within particular schools or areas enhances the degree of risk. On the other hand, in countries such as France, where only those schools in particularly disadvantaged areas receive additional funding, large numbers of disadvantaged pupils are *de facto* excluded from equity funding.

Comparison of resource allocation (stage 3)

Ireland has been able to introduce a varied range of schemes aimed at targeting the multi-faceted issue of educational disadvantage. Under DEIS, funding for each scheme is carefully earmarked for a specific use. Furthermore, although the General Allocation Model (GAM model) provides teaching resources for students with learning disabilities and special needs in DEIS schools, it was found that Urban Band 1 schools require a higher allocation of funding (Frawley et al., 2014; as cited in Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). While little flexibility exists for schools when it comes to the use of the funds, various schemes have been developed in an attempt to target every possible problem that may be encountered by a DEIS school. Although the classification of schools under DEIS into primary Urban Band 1 schools, Urban Band 2 schools and rural schools makes it possible to measure the achievement levels of pupils with differing environments and support, as yet funding allocation is not sufficiently differentiated. A recent review by Smyth, McCoy and Kingston (2015) revealed a need for further distinction in allocation. Ireland is able to achieve horizontal equity, in which resources are distributed evenly between schools and pupils with similar characteristics of disadvantage. However, little vertical equity exists, because schools belonging to the Urban Band 1 category appear to require funding above the standard DEIS funding but so far, this has not been implemented. By refining the GAM, Ireland will be able to enhance the benefits achieved by the allocation of the equity funds.

In **Slovakia**, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport continues to provide legislative guidelines, but the municipalities and school leaders are responsible for non-normative (equity) funding allocation at the local level. Non-normative funding provides allowances for specific facilities or requirements such as teaching assistants, school meals or textbooks – therefore, funding is usually earmarked. However, due to the high level of autonomy of schools within the Slovak system, this funding could be used for other purposes as no strict monitoring or evaluation systems are in place to ensure the accountability of the funds. While it is promising to see the allocation of funding for services such as teaching assistants, free school meals, transportation and textbooks, this allocation depends on the initiative of the school leaders in the various municipalities, which undermines horizontal as well as vertical equity.

In **Finland**, State funding (which makes up 25 % of total funding) is not earmarked. This gives municipalities ‘full autonomy in using the funds as long as they offer all statutory services for residents’ (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). This type of decentralised allocation system enables local authorities to identify their own challenges, and to target funding accordingly. On the other hand, the large share of local government funding may generate inequalities at local level.

In **Belgium (Flanders)**, the allocation method differs depending on whether it concerns GOK hours (secondary education), SES lesson periods (primary education) or SES funding (operating resources). For primary education and for operating resources, extra resources are integrated into the basic funding through a fixed formula. School boards further distribute these resources among their schools in an autonomous way (OECD, 2017b). This is similar to the Finnish system of allocation, which provides greater autonomy to schools over implementation. In contrast to primary education, the extra support for secondary education (GOK lesson periods) has been (until now) allocated separately from the basic support, and is to some extent earmarked: not by the nature of the expenses, but by the objective. Schools must select ‘priority strategies’ from a list prescribed by the Ministry. The intention behind this was to align the scheme for secondary schools with the one used for primary education. However, doubts have risen as to whether this gives too much discretion to school boards, as some boards that are responsible for different schools may even re-distribute the extra resources between schools (Groenez et al., 2015). Given the scheme’s perceived lack of effectiveness, the debate about a return to more earmarked remains open.

In common with the allocation structure of primary schools in Belgium (Flanders), the allocation of equity funding in the **Netherlands** is integrated into basic funding and is provided to school boards for implementation. This further allows schools to spend the money in the way that best suits them. Despite the advantage of this type of funding, it is again difficult to monitor whether or not funds are being used efficiently. It was found that even though Dutch school principals know the how much they receive for OAB, they still may spend these funds on support for pupils other than the target group (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Furthermore, since schools do not know exactly which pupils fall into their target group, it is up to the individual school to use its own identification skills to allocate the extra support. On top of this, if a teacher harbours a prejudice, this could further affect which pupils receives the extra support.

In the **United Kingdom**, equity funding is provided separately from basic funding, and is earmarked for a particular purpose, namely reducing the performance gap between

pupils in the target group and those not in the target group (Foster and Long, 2017). Separate funding in the country allows for a more transparent system of distribution and provision of equity funding via the Pupil Premium. Despite this earmarking, a degree of autonomy is still granted to schools (Kendall et al., 2005).

By contrast, in **France**, funds are allocated to specific targets in such a way that only priority education networks/areas receive equity funding. Regional *académies* receive these additional resources from the Ministry of Education in the form of extra class time reduction and they distribute these resources across priority education networks (MENESR-DGESCO, 2017). This earmarked funding, which is distributed via the networks in 'priority areas', could be better tracked but this might leave limited flexibility at the school level to meet local needs.

Comparative assessment

This comparative study reveals that national authorities are struggling with the dilemma as to whether or not equity funding should be earmarked. To inform this debate, several arguments must be taken on board:

- Granting greater autonomy to school boards allows them more flexibility in setting local priorities (reducing class sizes, hiring teacher assistants, buying in external services etc.) The efficient allocation of these resources largely depends on (a) the commitment of school boards to equality of opportunities; and (b) their capacity to assess the efficiency of alternative spending choices. This probably explains the autonomy granted to local authorities and even to school principals in Finland, where educational staff have a reputation for a high level of professionalism and a strong commitment to equity.
- At the same time, in all countries, it is important to build capacity at local level in order to ensure the optimal use of these additional funds. This can be achieved by earmarking part of the resources for in-service training and expert guidance.
- Earmarking can occur either in terms of *inputs* (particular types of professional support, equipment, pedagogical materials, infrastructure etc.) or in terms of *strategies* (differentiation, home-school liaison... as seen in the DEIS policy in Ireland). Depending on the management capacity of schools, the latter type of earmarking seems preferable, as strategies relate to desired outcomes.
- The French and English examples show that (irrespective of the degree to which resources are earmarked) funding can be linked to particular *performance targets* (e.g. reducing the gap between priority and non-priority areas by x %). Such 'management by objectives' can even translate into specific incentives (e.g. linking the amount of equity funding to the results obtained). Such measures have been taken successfully in The Netherlands to reduce dropout and grade repetition.

Comparison of implementation (stage 4)

In **Ireland**, since equity funding is heavily earmarked under different schemes for different types of facilities, implementation is tied to the guidelines on usage published by the Department of Education and Skills and Social Protection. Each school enjoys some autonomy, but must maintain a log in the form of an action plan that illustrates the reasoning behind the implementation. Through the provision of various schemes, DEIS attempts to cover the spectrum of problems faced by these schools. Although this may be adequate in most cases, it may render some schools incapable of handling local challenges. Pupils in urban schools have been found to have more difficulties at home, and thus lower achievement scores in comparison to the pupils in rural schools (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). Such a situation calls for differentiated allocation and implementation. The risk entailed by allowing autonomy over implementation is the inefficient use of funding, but under the current monitoring and evaluation system, this risk can be eliminated.

In **Slovakia**, schools enjoy greater autonomy and school leaders are required to apply for extra funding. Therefore, most of this funding is heavily dependent on the discretion of the school leaders and municipalities which may give rise to the Matthew effect, by which some schools in more disadvantaged areas or those with more SDE children tend to receive little or no extra funding, or the funding is not used efficiently. Furthermore, interviews with experts revealed that certain funding schemes such as free school meals can unintentionally turn out costly for parents, who are obliged to pay for such meals if they fail to report the absence of their child from school. Schools with a higher number of SDE children also often have teachers that are either out-of-field or are insufficiently well equipped, or have a lower number of teaching assistants. Moreover, the school leaders are also now authorised to create specialised classes (see the case study in the Annex) for children who are 'not likely to successfully manage the content of education in the corresponding year, in order to compensate them for the lacking content of education' (European Commission, 2017, p. 16) – but again, this is left to the discretion of the municipality and the schools.

In **Finland**, which has a decentralised system of funding, regions have greater autonomy to use funding for issues they deem it important to target. The 25 % of funding that is received from the State is not earmarked at all, and the same holds true for municipality funding. Schools can apply for additional funding from the State for issues pertaining to language instruction. Such extra funding is earmarked for this specific use. Finland's system of accountability works well in combatting the inefficient use of resources at school level. Once the principal decides how funds will be allocated, in some schools the decision needs to be 'ratified by the governing board of each school, generally composed of the principal, teachers, and other staff, parents and often a student' (Silliman, 2016, p. 32).

In **Belgium (Flanders)**, when it comes to the implementation of the allocated funds, primary schools have greater autonomy than secondary schools. Schools tend to use this funding for extra lesson periods, class-size reduction, infrastructure, and educational trips, amongst other things. Due to the autonomy given to schools, it is difficult to highlight every form of implementation activity. In primary education, schools must include their vision on equal opportunities in their school work plan (Flemish Parliament, 2011). For secondary schools, the allocation is for three school years during

which the schools must follow a policy cycle: analyse the problems and causes, develop a plan, evaluate it and make adjustments to its processes or actions after careful deliberations (Court of Audit, 2017). Schools are required to build their GOK policy around two of the previously mentioned six themes: i) the prevention and remediation of developmental and learning disadvantages; ii) language skills education; iii) intercultural education; iv) student career guidance; v) socio-emotional development; and vi) student and parent participation.

Similarly, in the **Netherlands**, as mentioned earlier, greater autonomy is granted to schools over the implementation of funding. Schools were reported to use this funding for activities such as extra lessons, educational assistants, class-size reduction, and infrastructure. The number of experienced teachers in schools with many underprivileged pupils is three times lower than in privileged schools with few underprivileged pupils (Lachmansingh, 2016). Schools with less experienced teachers and a higher proportion of underprivileged pupils run the risk of using funds in a less cost-effective way.

In **England**, schools are able to use the Pupil Premium to fund extra lessons, educational assistants, reduce class sizes, infrastructure, and educational excursions, among other uses. They are permitted to use the funding in whatever way they feel best supports the pupils, as long as the effect can be seen on their Mathematics and English performance scores (Department of Education, 2010). Schools with less disadvantaged pupils are more likely to use the funds to recruit care coordinators or a psychologist, to fund school trips and summer camps, or to provide after-school sports and music lessons (Carpenter et al., 2013). To introduce resources that have roots in evidence-based practice, additional funding is also provided to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (Gomendio, 2017).

In **France**, unlike the other countries, equity funding comes with a specified use. Extra lessons, educational assistants, financial bonuses and class-size reduction are among the activities for which such funding is earmarked. The largest share of the budget goes to class-size reduction (Court of Audit, 2018). However, this aim is not complementary to the recruitment of more experienced teachers and changes in pedagogical approach, which can be problematic. To attract more experienced teachers and promote the stability of teaching teams, working hours have been reduced and conditions for teachers who teach in priority areas have been adapted (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale*, 2018a; 2018b). Achieving these objectives remains a major challenge.

Comparative assessment

A great deal of variation exist in the way equity funding is used at school level. Some local practices have been challenged by research:

- Because schools (and teachers in particular) tend to adopt a micro-level perspective in tackling disadvantage, they opt overwhelmingly for class size reduction. However, empirical research has found very mixed – and, indeed, contradictory – evidence about the impact of class size on (equity in) outcomes (for a review, see De Witte et al., 2017).
- A related ‘prejudice’ holds that a lower student-teacher ratio (i.e. fewer students per teacher), achieved for example through the engagement of teacher assistants, should result in better student outcomes. Recent research, however, shows that investing in *more qualified* teachers is more effective than simply lowering the student-teacher ratio. Often the additional teachers employed in disadvantaged schools are less qualified and less experienced, which results in Matthew effects (Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise, 2015; OECD, 2018).
- Governments can strike a balance between earmarking and local autonomy by prescribing a ‘menu’ of strategies and instruments from which the schools can select their priorities. Offering expert guidance to schools can also contribute to more effective strategies.

Comparison of monitoring and evaluation (stage 5)

In **Ireland**, evaluation and monitoring focuses on the key themes identified by the Department of Education and Skills. These are: increased school attendance; higher retention; educational progression; higher literacy; higher numeracy; increased partnership between schools, parents and communities; smooth transition; and increased wellbeing and examination attainment (for post-primary only) (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). The themes include indicators for the evaluation of the achievement of the set goals. Evaluation is carried out by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) and the School Inspectorate. The ERC focuses mainly on pupils’ achievement scores in literacy and numeracy, including trends over the years and comparisons with other DEIS and non-DEIS schools. It also publishes quarterly reports which are then used to shape policies. For example, the approaches used to collect data for evaluation at the post-primary level include questionnaire studies, large-scale standardised achievement testing programmes, school visits, interviews and focus groups. The data used also shows the effect of social context on outcomes, with higher proportions of students from a poor socio-economic background affecting the outcomes of students across the school (Weir and Kavanagh, 2018). The system in place ensures transparency at school level: where necessary, it is possible to assess how the compensation funding is being used (OECD, 2017b). According to the Department of Education and Skills, schools must prepare a three-year plan, which should be aimed at the targets listed in the DEIS Action Plan. There appears to be sufficient vertical accountability where there is a top-down evaluation to ensure compliance with guidelines. In the process of evaluating DEIS schools, heavy emphasis is placed on

achievement scores and attendance. However, horizontal accountability appears to be limited, with the stakeholders concerned being given the opportunity to be included in the decision-making processes and policy evaluation (Hooge, 2016).

In **Slovakia**, since no system of equity funding is as yet well-established, neither is there any national evaluation or monitoring of such funding. The national monitoring system focuses only on adherence to the legislation in place for normative and non-normative funding. The school inspectorate is obliged to comment on whether or not schools follow the national legislation and rules. Inspectorate reports do not assess the effectiveness of the funding structure in place. Since funding is localised, the budget of the municipality dictates how much funding is allocated and implemented. At this level, no system is in place to monitor this. Due to the unchecked autonomy enjoyed by schools in Slovakia, there is a higher risk of the funding being used inefficiently.

In **Finland**, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) conducts the evaluations for the government. As an external organisation, it aims to be critical not just of the achievement of the objectives set, but also of the funding structures in place. Schools submit data and have the opportunity to request a report on their performance and their policies. Furthermore, the teachers and principals of schools are trained to hold evaluations at local level. A system of professional accountability and trust has been established for the monitoring of activities.

In **Belgium (Flanders)**, there is a lack of a well-developed accountability mechanism for equity funding under the GOK policy (Shewbridge et al., 2019). The high degree of autonomy at school level, the lack of clear guidelines or adequate target group description, limited support given by government to schools to develop a strategic approach, and a lack of public accountability have the potential to undermine the effectiveness of the support policy (Court of Audit, 2017). The inspectorate that evaluates the schools does not have permission to request the results of the regular surveys conducted by scientific resource centres, to check whether or not attainment targets have been met (Flemish Parliament, 2009). The schools themselves, however, can use these reports as a tool for self-evaluation. In addition, the pupil-monitoring system is an important instrument at school level. The Court of Audit (2017) found that primary schools with a well-developed pupil monitoring system were significantly more effective in implementing the GOK policy to achieve equal educational opportunities. Without limiting the freedom of education, it might be helpful to impose quality requirements and consider quality assurance for the pupil monitoring systems that make it possible for a school to assess its pupils' progress (Court of Audit, 2017). Note also that the monitoring data collected by the Ministry of Education are used for scientific evaluation at system level.

In the **Netherlands**, accountability is achieved by setting standards and organising central examinations. School boards account for the use of the lump sum funding in annual reports but are not obliged to report to the OAB on their use of the funding (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016; Ministry of Finance, 2017). The exception to this scenario is when attainment outcomes are disappointing; this situation allows the inspectorate to call for a detailed accountability report on the use of OAB funding (Ministry of Finance, 2017).

In **England**, schools have the freedom to decide what they use extra resources for, in order to effectively respond to the local challenges of the school context (Roberts and Bolton, 2017). For monitoring purposes, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has developed a number of tools to promote the effective and strategic use of the additional resources (Department of Education, 2018b). The first of these is a teaching and learning toolkit, which provides practical tips to support teachers and schools in the effective use of the Pupil Premium. This is similar to the monitoring system guidelines that Ireland provides under DEIS. Second, the EEF provides and maintains an extensive database that shares good practice from similar schools, so schools can learn from each other. Third, the EEF has developed a tool for schools to evaluate the impact of their interventions on pupils' performance. Finally, there are Pupil Premium Reviews which are reports that show how a school uses the funding: these reports are assessed by an external actor to optimise the school's strategy (Department of Education, 2018b). In addition, schools are required to publish their funding expenditure and strategy online (Department of Education, 2010). The Ofsted Inspectorate repeatedly evaluates the impact of the funding and reports on the performance and progress of pupils (Foster and Long, 2017). Schools that are successful in the effective use of the Pupil Premium are recognised, and their strategy is published online on the Pupil Premium Awards website (Foster and Long, 2017). A-level examinations are the central exams in the country, and the attainment scores of target versus non-target pupils are tracked to evaluate the effectiveness of Pupil Premium implementation.

In **France**, various actors are responsible for follow-up on the country's priority education policy. At regional level, instructors from the *académies* support the education networks in implementing their network projects. In addition, the IA-IPRs (*Inspecteur Académique – Inspecteur Pédagogique Régional*) work closely with the network teams at local level and communicate with the *académies* about the policies being used. IENs (*Inspecteurs de l'Éducation nationale*) are used to evaluate interventions at classroom level. They analyse the implementation of each network project through class observations, and transmit this information to the steering committee and the monitoring committee at national level (IGEN-IGAENR, 2015). In addition, DEPP (*Direction de l'Évaluation de la Prospective et de la Performance*) publishes various statistics on the organisation and progress of the priority education policy (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale*, 2018a). The attainment scores from the central exam, the *Baccalauréat*, are used to track performance and progress.

Comparative assessment

This comparison illustrates three types of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:

- Centralised mechanisms, such as central examinations and inspectorate reports, via which Ministries exert direct control over the effectiveness of the equity funding at school level;
- 'Delegated' mechanisms, under which intermediate bodies are entrusted with advising and/or evaluating schools; and
- Self-evaluation mechanisms that enable schools to monitor their own progress.

Finland appears to employ only the third type of approach, which fits with the strong autonomy and professionalism of school teams. Systems in some other countries (Flanders and Slovakia) are also highly decentralised but have insufficient capacity for self-evaluation. As a consequence, there is a lack of accountability. Given the complexity of equal opportunity policies, it is important to invest in a balanced mix of instruments at central as well as local level.

Chapter 2. Effectiveness of the Schemes

In addition to the comparative assessment of the governance of the seven schemes, this report aims to review the evidence on the effectiveness of the equity funding schemes in each of the case study countries. The existence of national evaluation studies is part and parcel of good governance. Furthermore, existing studies may provide interesting feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the schemes.

In **Ireland**, DEIS is a comprehensive policy that aims to cover all the facilities and funding grants that have been found to be effective in international research on equity funding. Periodic evaluation reports are produced by the Educational Research Centre (ERC), which are then used for future policy making. These evaluations show increased performance in literacy in DEIS schools, and less in numeracy. Attendance and retention have also increased in target schools. However, a significant gap still exists between DEIS and non-DEIS schools (Smyth et al., 2015).

Our evaluation also reveals a structural weakness in the scheme: schools that demonstrate progress are now given less funding, because funding is prioritised for schools that are the most in need. However, the decision to revise the policy in this way has been questioned. The main argument is that DEIS schools are being 'punished for getting better' (Downes, 2018). Overall, the structure of DEIS is strong, but it may be helpful to provide greater autonomy to schools at local level. For example, Urban Band 1 schools have been found to exhibit the lowest achievement and attendance scores and the highest hurdles experienced by pupils. Such schools may benefit by using the funding for their local needs.

In **Slovakia**, steps are being taken against the segregation of Romani children, in the form of amendments to the School Act. Although the country does not have an established, structural equity funding scheme, it does promote inclusive education in its

legislation. However, a large discrepancy exists between the legislation on paper and the implementation of that legislation in practice. Furthermore, due to the decentralised system of funding, allocation and use is difficult to monitor and evaluate. In addition, certain mechanisms have been put in place to combat segregation, but these appear to cause more harm than good – for example, the ‘zero grade’ policy, under which children who are deemed unprepared for primary education are placed into an extra year of education. Schools that offer this year usually do not have highly qualified teachers (the Matthew effect), and since this ‘zero year’ is counted as a part of compulsory education (European Commission, 2019) pupils from socially disadvantaged environments (SDEs) complete their mandatory years of compulsory education before they are able to graduate with a certificate, thus harming their future professional trajectories. In addition, since there is little clarity as to the implementation of the newly amended School Act, which prohibits the admission of SDE pupils into special schools, the situation remains unchanged (Amnesty International and European Roma Rights Centre, 2017). Lastly, although schools are required to accept every student, they have the authority to turn them down if they claim not to possess the facilities required to cater for such pupils. Potential exists for improvement, and clearer guidelines, together with the monitoring of practices, could achieve have a greater impact.

In **Finland**, education is founded on equity and equality. Funding policies are designed to keep this in mind. The design of equity funding in Finland is decentralised, which makes it possible to identify local needs and to allocate and implement funding in a more targeted way. In addition, the teaching profession continues to enjoy a high status and thus, the quality of principals and teachers is high. Finland’s monitoring and evaluation system is based on professional accountability and trust between various stakeholders (Silliman, 2016), which is another strength of the Finnish funding system. However, reports continue to show that graduation rates are lower among Roma and Traveller pupils, as are secondary education applications among these groups. Furthermore, there are still reports of prejudice, racism, negative attitudes and bullying against Roma pupils (Helakorpi, Lappalainen and Mietola, 2018).

In **Belgium (Flanders)**, Franck and Nicaise (2018) found the first robust evidence of improved equity in outcomes (cognitive tests, school well-being and study orientation), 15 years after the enactment of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act. Based on a difference-in-differences analysis using PISA data from 2003 and 2015, they found that the SES gradient in outcomes had declined. However, this equalisation was (partly) due to a decline in achievement among high-SES students, rather than increased achievement among the most disadvantaged. Moreover, as noted in the previous sections, the governance of equity funding in Flanders remains sub-optimal (due to unclear targeting, a lack of know-how at school level, and poor monitoring). Poesen-Vandeputte and Nicaise (2015) also found that schools with many underprivileged pupils are at a disadvantage from the beginning in terms of their financial, social and human capital. Moreover, systemic inequities such as high and increasing segregation, excessive grade repetition and early tracking continue to produce unequal outcomes. Franck and Nicaise (2018) conclude that equity funding cannot be considered a standalone scheme to solve all inequities in education.

The Education Inspectorate found that 37 % of primary schools displayed only limited insight into the effects of care and equal education opportunities policy, and that 7 %

of schools had no idea of what care and GOK policy involve. It is therefore important to use greater accountability to strengthen the obligation of schools and school boards to motivate and communicate with their teaching teams in order to increase support for the GOK policy among staff (Flemish Education Inspectorate, 2018).

In the **Netherlands**, evidence of the OAB's effectiveness is limited. Primarily, it is difficult to determine whether reductions in inequalities are produced by OAB funding, or as a result of other measures (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Only for pre-school education has a significant improvement in educational outcomes been observed for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and this is the result of a different policy measure (Leseman and Veen, 2016). No convincing evidence has been found of positive effects from reception classes for newcomers, or from other forms of extra teaching time spent on children with an educational disadvantage (Cebeon, 2016; Faber, Timmerman and Kievitsbosch, 2014; Mulder, Driessen and Rossen, 2015). In addition, the Education Inspectorate (2016) found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds still receive less favourable career advice compared to non-disadvantaged pupils with equal performance, which contributes to increased inequality of opportunity.

In **England**, there continues to be a strong correlation between pupils' social background and performance (Ofsted, 2016; Outhwaite and Pass, 2016; Reay, 2006; Social Mobility Commission, 2016). In some schools, the Pupil Premium has been found to produce moderately positive effects on the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils (Education Policy Institute, 2017). Analysis of the statistics shows that since 2011 (the start of the Pupil Premium), the gap in primary education has been reduced by 10.9 %, and in secondary education by 8.0 %. However, it is noted that there is a delay in the effects. The Educational Policy Institute concludes: 'Based on current trends, the gap at the end of secondary school would take over 100 years to close.' (EPI, 2018).

In **France**, too, the national policy target (reducing the performance to 10 % the gap between schools in priority and non-priority areas) has not yet been achieved. Current performance differences range between 20-35 and 10 per cent (Court of Audit, 2018). The Court of Audit acknowledges, however, that the performance gap between pupils both within and outside the priority education network has not increased, even though the socio-economic living conditions in many priority areas have deteriorated (Court of Audit, 2018).

The evaluation system in place assures that funding is used purposefully and that the actors are held accountable. However, the regulations leave very little room for the autonomous use of the funding to meet local needs. Furthermore, pupils that meet the criteria but do not reside within the areas covered by the priority area networks fail to receive any type of support or assistance. The most popular use of resources has been found to be class reduction, but this is often not accompanied with more experienced/qualified teachers and more diverse pedagogical approaches, which have been found to make a difference when applied together. Attracting experienced teachers to priority schools remains a big problem that is currently under consideration. Although adjustments have been made to reduce the working hours and increase the salaries of teachers who choose to work in these schools, it has been found that these teachers still tend to quit after a year or two. Employing area-based identification of disadvantage can thus have counter-effects in the form of stereotypes and a bad/less desirable reputation for those areas/schools identified.

Comparative assessment

- The results of our evaluation of the case study countries confirm the impression prevalent in the international literature: that equity funding schemes do contribute to reducing unequal outcomes by social background, but progress is slow and the improvements do not meet expectations. Various explanations have been suggested: pre-existing (often hidden) inequalities in school resources (the so-called 'Matthew effect' in the allocation of teachers)⁷, poor implementation and lack of accountability mechanisms, as well as adverse mechanisms in the education system (such as early tracking or segregation).
- In some cases, the effectiveness of equity funding schemes is reduced by flaws in the schemes themselves: for example, the 'zero class' in Slovakia; lack of guidelines as to the use of extra funding (Flanders and the Netherlands); or the stigma effect of 'priority areas' in France.
- All in all, these findings are very useful because most of the deficiencies identified in the evaluation studies are capable of being eliminated, so that over time, the impact of equity funding can be enhanced.
- Nevertheless, equity funding does not appear to be a panacea against educational inequity. The elimination of deep-rooted segregation and selection mechanisms (such as grade repetition, early tracking, ability grouping) that systematically discourage learning, is a condition for success.

⁷ See footnote 2 on p. 5 for a further explanation of the Matthew effect.

Table 3. Overview of evaluation studies in the 7 countries.

	Finland	Slovakia	Ireland	Belgium	Netherlands	England	France
Impacts measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ECEC: self-assessment, thematic system evaluations ■ Basic: learning outcomes, thematic system evaluations ■ Upper-secondary: Matriculation exam results thematic system evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Compliance with conditions ■ General effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cognitive performance (literacy and numeracy) ■ School careers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Attainment targets met successfully by the school. ■ School-level polls cognitive performance, well-being, student careers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cognitive performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cognitive performance ■ Self-evaluation by the schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cognitive performance ■ Process monitoring
Instruments	<p>Local/internal qualitative evaluations by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ principals ■ teachers ■ students <p>Sample-based quantitative testing by Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Inspectorate reports ■ Case studies of schools ■ PISA results 	<p>Longitudinal and cross-sectional comparison of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Achievement scores ■ Attendance ■ Junior and leaving certificates between DEIS and Non-DEIS schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Inspection reports ■ Student panels ■ International large-scale student assessments (ILSA) ■ Qualitative research in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Central exams ■ Pupil panels (COOL) ■ ILSA ■ Descriptive reports of usage by schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Student performance in central exams ■ Education Endowment Foundation research ■ National school rankings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Supervision of the (regional and local) networks ■ Observations at class level ■ Student attainment scores in the central exam
Main findings	<p>Overall regional equality achieved, but persistently lower competence in non-native language groups.</p>	<p>High segregation, persistently lower achievement and attendance scores of Roma/SDE children. Matthew effect in teachers. Rare use of differentiation.</p>	<p>Increased performance by DEIS schools in literacy, less in numeracy. Attendance and retention have also increased. However, a significant gap still exists between DEIS and non-DEIS schools.</p>	<p>Decreasing inequality, but the explanation for this lies partly in the decreasing achievements of better-off students.</p>	<p>Positive result in pre-school education (reduction of disadvantage). Effects in compulsory education are unclear.</p>	<p>Since 2011, the disadvantage gap in primary and secondary education has diminished by 10.9 % and 8.0 %, respectively (2 % per year).</p>	<p>The performance gap between priority and non-priority schools has shrunk, but differences in attainment remain between 20 % and 35 %.</p>

Comparative assessment

- The results of our evaluation of the case study countries confirm the impression prevalent in the international literature: that equity funding schemes do contribute to reducing unequal outcomes by social background, but progress is slow and the improvements do not meet expectations. Various explanations have been suggested: pre-existing (often hidden) inequalities in school resources (the so-called 'Matthew effect' in the allocation of teachers)⁸, poor implementation and lack of accountability mechanisms, as well as adverse mechanisms in the education system (such as early tracking or segregation).
- In some cases, the effectiveness of equity funding schemes is reduced by flaws in the schemes themselves: for example, the 'zero class' in Slovakia; lack of guidelines as to the use of extra funding (Flanders and the Netherlands); or the stigma effect of 'priority areas' in France.
- All in all, these findings are very useful because most of the deficiencies identified in the evaluation studies are capable of being eliminated, so that over time, the impact of equity funding can be enhanced.
- Nevertheless, equity funding does not appear to be a panacea against educational inequity. The elimination of deep-rooted segregation and selection mechanisms (such as grade repetition, early tracking, ability grouping) that systematically discourage learning, is a condition for success.

Chapter 3. Lessons for Future Equity Funding Policies

The comparisons made in the previous chapters point towards certain factors that can contribute to more successful equity funding systems in the future.

First, some of the case studies revealed vague *objectives* and *target group definitions*. These leave a lot of room for interpretation and misunderstanding when schemes are implemented at local level. In contrast, countries that defined clear, well-defined policy-making objectives tended to have clearer and more effective guidelines to help practitioners to implement funding efficiently. Countries such as Finland, Ireland and England were able to clearly define their objectives, and their policies aim to address the said objectives. It is important that equity funding policies, overall, are SMART (specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound). Policy objectives in countries like England and France qualify as SMART – even though they are still quite narrow in scope, since they focus mainly on cognitive performance.

Carefully designed *funding criteria* are essential, not just in order to adequately cater to the needs of the target group, but also to avoid 'leaks' (e.g. the targeting of non-disadvantaged groups) and adverse effects. In particular, countries such as France, which makes exclusive use of area-based funding mechanisms, have to deal with the problems of stereotypes being attached to schools and further segregation in society. Schools in priority areas tend to be labelled 'ghetto' schools, which further drives away non-target pupils. Schools containing high percentages of socially disadvantaged pupils

⁸ See footnote 2 on p.5 for a further explanation of the Matthew effect.

also become less attractive for teachers and, consequently, often have less-experienced or out-of-field teachers (as in Slovakia). By the same token, the funding provided to these schools is often used less efficiently due to the lack of required expertise, which results once again in lower attainment scores and early school leaving. Ultimately, the target group of pupils is further distanced from non-target pupils, and this segregation leads to a strengthening of the Matthew effect.

The Dutch and Irish schemes use mixed formulas in which the weights assigned to pupil criteria are enhanced in certain schools or areas with a concentration of disadvantage. This choice is consistent with research findings, which show that schools containing higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils suffer additional problems, over and above the sum of the individual disadvantages, as a consequence of segregation.

It was further found that the most efficient systems exist in countries that employ a *balance between earmarked and free allocation* systems. While it is important to earmark funding for certain aspects (in particular, the professionalisation of teaching staff and school management), schools should be given sufficient autonomy to tackle local needs. Schools do not face the same problems in every country. Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and England allow some degree of freedom at local level, which enables schools to handle the aforementioned problems. The degree of autonomy left to schools should be proportional to the *management capacity* of local actors.

Autonomy of implementation should also go hand in hand with *monitoring and evaluation*: the greater the autonomy granted, the more SMART the monitoring systems should be. Countries such as Finland set a great example by inculcating professional accountability and trust within teachers and principals, whose job it is not only to monitor themselves but also to evaluate and make changes. However, the Finnish model of accountability cannot be transposed overnight to other countries.

The *impact assessments* carried out so far illustrate the diversity of available tools (central exam results, reports by an inspectorate, self-evaluation tools, student panel studies, international large-scale student assessments, and qualitative process evaluation). Generally speaking, the available evidence tempers enthusiasm about the range of impacts that can be achieved by equity funding: it should be seen as a necessary condition for greater equality of educational opportunities, but not sufficient on its own. What matters more is a pervasive climate of equity within education systems: this translates into the provision of accessible, high-quality education in early childhood, the avoidance of segregation and practices such as grade repetition, late tracking, etc. At best, equity funding plays an auxiliary role in improving social and pedagogical approaches at school level.

Recommendations: contextual issues

- Enhancing political commitment to equity: in the debate over equitable education, positive discrimination is not always welcomed by public opinion –nor, indeed, by political elites. Thus, policies do not pursue objectives that are conducive to effective implementation. Further damage is inflicted when incorrect information is spread to avoid structural change. For example, the Open Society Foundations/Roma Education Fund/UNICEF (2017) reported that the right-wing media in Slovakia cooked up a rumour called the ‘Roma myth’. People in Slovakia

are encouraged to believe that the main cause of high taxation and the public deficit is the financial aid provided to Roma communities.

- Investing in initial and in-service training for teachers: in most of the case studies, it was found that teachers in schools catering to students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be either less qualified (Ireland, Belgium, and France) and/or out-of-field (Slovakia). It is, therefore, necessary not only to provide solid initial teacher training programmes that address the teaching skills required for equitable education, but also to provide professional development opportunities for all teachers. For example, Finnish teachers and principals are trained specifically to handle a mixed classroom and to evaluate their own practices (Silliman, 2016). In addition, intercultural training could help fight the negative bias that some teachers may hold with regard to certain disadvantaged groups. For example, a report by Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre (2017) found that in Slovakia, some teachers themselves speak in a negative manner about Roma children.⁹ If teachers harbour prejudice, it is bound to have an effect on their behaviour and interactions with students. This will naturally lead to further segregation. With appropriate training aimed at inclusion, such negative attitudes can be changed. In addition to pedagogical, social and intercultural skills, teachers require a strong, scientifically grounded insight into 'what works' to effectively overcome social disadvantage, including insight into the systemic aspects of exclusion and inclusion.
- Fighting stereotypes: a study by Helakorpi, Lappalainen and Mietola (2018) found that the special policies for Roma children in Finland were worded in such a way that they implied that being a Roma pupil automatically meant facing certain issues. For example, Roma pupils have parents that '[lack] abilities or resources to support their children in school' (p. 9). This further affects the form of funding support offered to the children in the form of 'special support' to make up for the lack of prerequisites. Furthermore, the Romani language and the culture is portrayed in the Finnish education as 'having a vulnerable position in society' which further may impact the way the pupils are treated and supported (Helakorpi, Lappalainen and Mietola, 2018, p. 12). Similarly, in France, due to area-based allocation, schools may be mislabelled as 'ghetto schools', which strengthens segregation. Such characterisations must be avoided to promote equality and equity.
- Reforming inequitable education systems: if the overall architecture of an education system remains inequitable, equity funding resembles a 'plaster on a wooden leg'. Research has extensively demonstrated that systems characterised by strong 'academic segregation' (putting children on different trajectories for a long period – e.g. through segregated special education, selective admission in schools, early tracking, grade repetition, ability grouping) inevitably results in social segregation, and intensifies inequalities in outcomes (OECD, 2016). Minimising academic segregation can therefore be expected to have a stronger impact on equity than equity funding.

⁹ One teacher was quoted saying '*Did you see the children from Ostrovany? How they speak? How they smell? No wonder the non-Roma don't want to be with them... it's a little zoo*' (Rorke and Szilvasi, 2017).

Recommendations: governance issues

- Setting clear goal-oriented policy objectives and targets: in countries such as Ireland, Slovakia, Belgium and Netherlands, the legislation and policy tools do not have time-bound and realistic objectives. Due to the vagueness of the definitions used, confusion can arise with regard to implementation. Because of this, optimal results may not be obtained. By contrast, France and England can be seen as examples of good practice.
- Careful targeting: a balance must be struck between pupil-based, school-based and area-based targeting criteria. For example, while Ireland focuses on pupil-based characteristics, the effect of the location of the school (rural versus urban school) is not adequately taken into account. Implementation is thus weaker for those in areas that face more socio-economic challenges. Alternatively, France has a predominantly area-based identification process in various municipalities, but this ignores the needs of disadvantaged groups outside these priority areas, and further runs the risk of creating more segregation. The Netherlands now opts for an intermediate formula that combines pupil and school characteristics. This approach is supported by recent research, which found that the 'density' of disadvantage in a school reinforces individual disadvantage. In relation to pupil characteristics, the case studies show three broad categories of social risks: socioeconomic disadvantage, migration or ethnic background, and family-related vulnerability (children from single-parent families, children placed in care, children of military parents). Research has confirmed the negative impact of these three factors on educational opportunities. The Dutch allocation system, in which the weight of each risk factor is proportional to its impact, can act as an inspiration for other countries.
- Earmarking as necessary, but encouraging autonomy: it is important to strike a balance between the two, because an extreme of either can lead to ineffective and inefficient results. Ireland and France are examples of the tight earmarking of funds, which leaves a limited margin for the flexible use of funds within DEIS schools. Slovakia, on the other hand, is an example of extreme autonomy, where the non-normative funding is managed and allocated by local authorities and is thus contingent not only on the school leaders themselves, but also on the influence of various local stakeholders. Countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and England are able to strike a balance, but such moves must be accompanied by appropriate monitoring systems.
- Monitoring to see what works and what does not: Finland seems to have struck a balance by inculcating the practice of professional autonomy and trust within teachers and principals. The decisions made by a principal in Helsinki, for example, are also reviewed by the governing board of the school, which includes the principal, teachers and other staff, parents and often a student (Silliman, 2016, p. 32). Ireland is also able to strike a balance through the use of action plans that require schools to report on the implementation of the funds/scheme. Due to the lack of effective monitoring of non-normative funding in Slovakia, a huge gap exists between attainment levels among Roma pupils in comparison to non-Roma pupils.

- Transparent communication: according to Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre (2017), practitioners of psychology and pedagogy in Slovakia were unable to explain how the reformed system of education worked. Confusion exists as to the process of identifying pupils from an SDE, or with SEN. Therefore, such anti-segregation legislative changes may only *appear* to be effective – clearer guidelines and training are necessary to ensure implementation is successful.

Recommendations: strategic issues

- Distinguishing clearly between social disadvantage and disability: in countries such as Slovakia, where there is an over-emphasis on special educational needs, it is important to put in place testing or identification mechanisms that can differentiate between low achievement due to obstacles relating to social background, and low achievement due to a disability (either physical or mental), to ensure that children are not mislabelled.
- Avoiding stereotypical labels: in Ireland, Slovakia, and France, there is tendency to view schools that cater to disadvantaged populations as 'weaker schools', thus strengthening segregation within education. While policies in these countries aim to level the playing field for pupils with an educational disadvantage, they may also lead to further segregation. In 2015, Slovakia introduced amendments to the School Act, with the aim of eliminating the segregation of Romani children. However, concerns have been raised over the effectiveness of these amendments, which may in fact perpetuate the segregation of Roma children and pupils (European Commission, 2017, p. 19). For example, the amended Act leads to the 'creation of ethnically homogenous, so-called 'Roma classrooms' or Roma schools, separate floors, separate school buildings, school play yards, and out-of-school activities' (Open Society Foundations/Roma Education Fund/UNICEF, 2017, p. 44). By contrast, Flanders has deliberately merged its equity funding (provisionally only in basic education) into the mainstream funding system, following the dictum that 'every school should be an equal opportunity school.'
- Acting locally, thinking globally: qualitative research in Flanders has repeatedly shown that teachers typically adopt a 'micro-pedagogical' perspective (focused on individual learners), and tend to ignore the potential impact of collective or structural strategies (investing in language policy, anti-discrimination policy, inter-agency collaboration, parental participation, measures to reduce school-related costs, and so on – see Juchtmans and Nicaise, 2011). Expert guidance and professional learning communities relating to school-based policies are powerful levers to promote equity at meso-level.

Annex: Case studies of equity funding systems

This annex contains descriptions of the equity funding schemes in Ireland, Finland and Slovakia, structured according to the five stages of the policy cycle, as background information for the analysis in this report. Similar descriptions of the four other case study countries can be found in Vandevooort et al. (2020).

Equity funding system in Ireland

Policy objectives

Under the Education Act (1998), educational disadvantage was defined as 'the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.' (Irish Statute Book, 1998, 32). This definition was used to identify and set policy targets for educational disadvantage in Ireland. After years of separate schemes working simultaneously to combat educational disadvantage, in 2005, action was taken to consolidate these schemes under one umbrella (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). Consequently, the Delivering Equality of Opportunities in School (DEIS) programme was introduced as a primary policy instrument in the same year by the Department of Education and Skills (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). The aim of this programme was to not just to streamline the provision of funding to combat educational disadvantage, but to also improve its effectiveness by tackling the shortcomings of previous schemes (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). The Department of Education and Skills undertakes the responsibility of attending to the issue of educational disadvantage within the education system through its Social Inclusion Unit (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). The DEIS programme is administered by this unit. The vision of the programme is 'for education to more fully become a proven pathway to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion' (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). According to the Department of Education and Skills (2019), the DEIS programme seeks to achieve five policy goals:

- To implement a more robust and responsive Assessment Framework to identify schools and allocate resources effectively.
- To improve the learning experience and outcomes of pupils in DEIS schools.
- To improve the capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan and deploy resources to their best advantage.
- To support and foster best practice in schools through inter-agency collaboration.
- To support the work of schools by providing research, information, evaluation and feedback to achieve the goals of the plan.

Ireland's DEIS policy tool is motivated by the presence of the 'multiplier effect' in certain schools: 'part of the rationale for programmes targeted at schools derives from a belief that the disadvantage associated with poverty is aggravated when large proportions of pupils in a school are from poor backgrounds (the 'social context' effect)' (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2003; as cited in Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). The design of DEIS is therefore targeted at reducing this aggravated disadvantage through

the key DEIS themes identified by the Department of Education and Skills (2019): increased school attendance; higher retention; educational progression; higher literacy; higher numeracy; increased partnership between schools, parents and communities; smooth transition; and increased wellbeing and examination attainment (for post-primary only) (Department of Education and Skills, 2017).

Design

The children targeted by DEIS are primarily those of low social class status (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). Within the category of DEIS schools, primary schools are categorised as either 'urban' or 'rural' DEIS schools. Among urban DEIS schools, a further distinction is applied: schools with a larger disadvantaged population are called Urban Band 1 schools, while those with fewer disadvantaged children are known as Urban Band 2. At post-primary level, no such distinction exists between DEIS schools. For the 2019-2020 academic year, there are currently 231 schools listed under the Primary Urban Band 1 school category; 104 schools were listed under Primary Urban Band 2; and 358 schools were listed under the Primary Rural school category. At secondary level, 198 schools were listed under the Post-Primary school category (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). The selection of DEIS schools is based on a survey carried out by the Educational Research Centre (ERC). According to the Department of Education and Skills (2019), analysis of the survey, which is completed by principals, takes into account variables such as 'unemployment, proportion of local authority accommodation and proportion of lone parenthood, travellers, large families (five or more children) and pupils eligible for free books at the primary level' (Archer and Sofroniou, 2008, as cited in Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015, p. 7). For the post-primary level, data from post-primary pupils and state examination databases were used. Schemes to help combat educational disadvantage are then available to schools recognised as DEIS schools. According to the Department of Education and Skills (2019), the following schemes fall under the support provided to DEIS schools:

- Lower class size (For DEIS Band 1 and 2 only)
- Administrative principals (For DEIS Band 1 and 2 only)
- Guidance counsellor posts (For post-primary schools)
- DEIS grant (For all DEIS schools)
- School book grant scheme (For all DEIS schools)
- School meals programme (For all DEIS schools)
- Home school community liaison scheme (HSCL) (For DEIS Band 1, 2 and post-primary)
- Priority access to the Centre for School Leadership (CSL)
- Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
- Priority access to the Incredible Years Classroom Management programme for teachers, and the friends programme
- School Completion Programme (SCP).

DEIS is therefore an umbrella policy tool under which various schemes exist. Once a school is recognised as a DEIS school, schemes become automatically available on the basis of this categorisation.

Resource allocation and implementation

The bulk of the equity funding is provided by the Department of Education and Skills, but a substantial amount is also provided by TUSLA (the Child and Family Agency) and the Department of Social Protection (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015). Funding under DEIS is mainly earmarked and within each scheme, schools are given little autonomy as to its use. DEIS schools are required to prepare a three-year Action Plan for Improvement with ‘specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time specific’ (SMART) targets that are to be evaluated annually’ by monitoring the impact of actions undertaken in the key DEIS themes’ identified. Schools must consider certain benchmarks and cut offs, and must be able to link the use of funds to the themes mentioned under the policy objectives:

- With respect to lower class size in DEIS Band 1 schools, the pupil/teacher ratio (PTR) is of 20:1 at junior level and 24:1 at senior level for the 2019/20 school year (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). Band 2 schools and Rural schools follow the general staffing ratio. Schools can thus hire staff members on the basis of the ratios provided.
- Administrative principals can be appointed when a minimum of 116 pupils are enrolled in DEIS Band 1 schools, or a minimum of 144 in Band 2 schools.
- Based on a school’s three-year Action Plan for Improvement, aside from its DEIS activities, the school can use DEIS grant funding for ancillary costs such as heating, lighting, and other charges’ arising from the extended opening hours of the school. However, it is important that these costs can be directly linked to the five themes mentioned in the DEIS policy.
- Under the school book grant scheme, the guideline for per-capita book funding since 2013 has been EUR 21 for primary DEIS schools and EUR 39 for post-primary DEIS schools. Each school is expected to establish a rental scheme, and may be required to ‘engage in fundraising activities to obtain initial capital’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2019, p. 6) or to take out loans until the scheme becomes self-financing. The suggested deposit ranges from 10 to 20 %. Each school must decide what its fee should be, and which books are included in the scheme.
- Under the school meals programme, which is under the Department of Social Protection, food services are provided either through the statutory urban school meals scheme for primary schools (run by local authorities and partly funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection), or through the non-statutory school meals local projects scheme (funded directly by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection but run by schools and local/voluntary groups). Funding for the latter is only provided if consistent results are produced (Department of Social Protection, 2019). The current rate of payment, per meal, per child, per day is: breakfast = EUR 0.60; lunch = EUR 1.40; dinner = EUR 1.90. Schools are free to pick the type and range of meals to be provided.

- The Home School Community Liaison scheme (HSCL) is preventive in nature and focuses on collaboration and partnership between parents and teachers and the community surrounding at-risk children. It is funded by the Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency. Teachers at the school are appointed as HSCL Coordinators. Their task is to work in association with all the adults in the lives of the students. Since their work requires coordination and collaboration, they often work with other support services such as the School completion programme (see below) and the Educational Welfare Officers to 'implement a whole-school approach to improving attendance, participation and retention in education for the most marginalised and educationally disadvantaged pupils' (TUSLA, 2019). The coordinators are also the key persons when it comes to the development and implementation of the school's DEIS Action Plan through relevant initiatives and activities. For this reason, at least 10 % of the HSCL grant is given to the HSCL Coordinator for use in their activities.
- The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) are both obliged to give priority to DEIS schools if they request assistance or support.
- With the help of the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) provided by the Department of Education and Skills, teachers at all DEIS schools gain access to two programmes. The first is 'Incredible Years', an 'evidence-based programme for reducing behavioural difficulties' that 'strengthens social and emotional competence' (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p. 4) of primary students. The second is the Friends programme, which aims to reduce anxiety and 'promotes coping and resilience in children from 4 to 18 years and can be delivered by teachers universally' (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p. 4).
- The School Completion Programme is an integrated service programme that is described as a 'collaborative programme which works in partnership with family, community, youth, and sporting organisations and with relevant national statutory and voluntary bodies' (Department of Education and Science, 2005, p. 6). Based on school usage surveys across Ireland, a number of best practices for the SCP grant were identified by the Department of Education and Science in 2005 (p. 7), such as:
 - *Attendance tracking and monitoring*, in which schools track the daily attendance of the students belonging to at-risk target groups and, if needed, make contact with the family members.
 - *Breakfast clubs*, which are usually funded by the SCP and the Department of Social and Family Affairs, where students are provided with meals in the morning in a relaxed setting. The *after-school* support focuses on 'personal and social development of students by indulging them in activities of drama, music, art, craft and sports'. Similarly, development of *homework clubs* is another initiative under which schools provide a 'structured environment to complete homework' along with a light snack and academic help.
 - *Transfer programmes* within the SCP are crucial. They assist the students in making the transition from primary to post-primary education by not only providing 'information on the new system and structures which they will

encounter’, but also by teaching them strategies that can be used to overcome the obstacles faced in this phase of transformation.

- The *Out-of-school programme* is an integral part of the SCP. It is intended for students who ‘left the school system before the statutory age but are targeted as they may still return to mainstream education’. These are usually one-to-one sessions in which the student is provided with flexible curricular work, and training is provided for social as well as personal development.
- The *Holiday programme* is also vital for the SCP, as it caters to students during holiday periods, when a student is more prone to making the decision to drop out of school. Activities may include sports, culture, arts, etc.
- The *Mentoring programme* involves either a peer or a parent/teacher/member of community acting as a mentor for a student. It aims to promote the development and growth of the student.
- *Learning support programmes* provide additional academic in-school support to students to facilitate appropriate learning resources.
- *Social and personal development programmes* differ between schools, and encourage a holistic personality in students.
- *Parental programmes and family support* work in close coordination with HSCL, and encourage families to take part in the educational development of the student.
- *Therapeutic support* is provided for students who struggle with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Appropriate interventions are provided to facilitate educational progress.

In addition, teaching resources are provided by the General Allocation Model (GAM) for students with either learning difficulties or special educational needs (Department of Education and Skills, 2010). These are especially aimed at pupils who need to learn English as an additional language (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015).

Monitoring and evaluation

DEIS funding schemes are to be used according to the DEIS Action Plans developed by schools. Each school is required to prepare an action plan describing its targets, and associated facilities to be provided. At all times, schools must keep a record of their funding usage and implementation, as the DEIS scheme can perform inspections at any time. Evaluation of DEIS is carried out by the Educational Research Centre (ERC), which measure the impact of the activities funded. Heavy weighting is given to student outcomes in literacy and numeracy, which are compared to test scores from previous cycles (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). In addition, the Department of Education and Skills conducts its own evaluations via the Inspectorate. The Inspectorate assesses the effectiveness of DEIS planning in a sample of both primary and post primary schools in its Inspectorate Evaluation Studies. The assessment is made on the basis of the key DEIS themes identified by the Department of Education and Skills. Schools must be able to justify their expenditure of the grant funds in relation to these themes. Along with this system of accountability, DEIS schools are subject to random surveys to ensure adherence with their action plan. To aid schools in this evaluation

procedure, DEIS provides manuals and checklists for each scheme and grant that can be used by schools to develop an action plan, and to allocate and use funding in an appropriate manner.

Equity funding system in Finland

Policy objectives

Under the Finnish education system, compulsory education starts at the age of six and continues until the age of 15 (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018). The first year is pre-primary, in which education is advanced through play. At the age of seven, children proceed to basic education for the next nine years under a comprehensive education model. After completing compulsory education, children choose either general upper-secondary school or vocational upper-secondary school, based on their preference and grade point average scores (Silliman, 2017). The Basic Education Act of 2008 is grounded in the 'ideal of equal opportunities for education irrespective of ethnic origin, age, wealth or place of residence' (Nordberg, 2017, p. 13). The Act also mentions Roma pupils, for whom Romani can be the language of instruction and whose parent/guardian can choose whether or not Romani should be the mother tongue (Helakorpi, Lappalainen and Mietola, 2018). According to the Finnish National Agency for Education, soon after a child's birth, its parents have to register the chosen language to the Population Information System. The state provides funding for minority language teaching, but education providers are not obliged by law to arrange Romani teaching, for example. The Pupil and Student Welfare Act (1287/2013), commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture, focuses on preventive communal student welfare at all levels of education. Since the Finnish education system is equitable by its nature, basic education is free of cost for all children and all receive free instruction, textbooks and other materials, school lunches, health services, welfare services and transportation to school if the child's parents choose a school other than the nearest one (Eurydice, 2019; Finnish National Board of Education, 2014).

Design

State funding and municipality funding both take into account the characteristics of localities to identify the funding required for particular areas. Funding across Finland is therefore mainly area-based. According to the National Center on Education and the Economy (2019), the following pupils are recognised as 'disadvantaged students' by the Finnish Ministry of Education:

- Immigrant students who have resided in Finland for less than four years
- Low-income students
- Students in single parent families
- Students whose parents are unemployed or uneducated.

The state funding formula takes into account differences in the demographic and socio-economic indicators between municipalities. More resources are also provided per student to schools in remote areas (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). In Helsinki, for example, catchment areas with greater educational needs and indicators of

greater socio-economic need are allocated more funds under the city's positive discrimination (PD) funding. However, according to Silliman (2016), although this area-based characteristic funding may increase the PD funding to schools in an area, students from these neighbourhoods who have outward mobility may attend schools outside the said catchment area. Thus, using area-based funding alone could 'over-estimate the school level socio-economic characteristics' in that particular area (Silliman, 2016, p. 83). Therefore, a mix of pupil-based characteristics and area-based characteristics could be more effective.

Access to education is free of charge for all students. All children (including pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds) also receive free warm school meals, as well as health care services, a nurse and dentist service, a psychologist and social worker service (for those in need), and transportation to school for those who live further away (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018). Every family also receives child benefits for each child under the age of 17 which covers all general costs incurred by parents. To help support pupils further, social and health services work in collaboration with the school (OECD, 2013). There is no tuition fee for pre-primary and basic education, and the cost of books and any extra support is covered by funding at municipal level. Although upper-secondary schooling is not compulsory, it is also free of charge. However, the cost of books and transportation at this level was initially not free (European Commission, 2019). This stood as a potential barrier to further education for children coming from a socially disadvantaged background. As a solution to this problem, it was recently suggested to make study materials free at secondary level (European Commission, 2019). As of August 2019, according to the Finnish National Agency for Education, it is now possible for pupils from low-income families at upper-secondary level to receive supplemental funding for learning materials. Furthermore, many municipalities offer travel subsidies for general upper-secondary students without a limit on the distance between home and school. For example, all first-year students who attend either general upper-secondary school or vocational school receive free tickets for public transportation during the school semester.

Resource allocation and implementation

Funding for schools is provided by the municipalities (75 %) and the State (25 %) (Eurydice, 2019). The State funding allocation is not earmarked, and a lump sum is calculated using a formula that takes into account the real expenditure and the share of residents (aged 6 to 15 years) in each municipality (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014; Eurydice, 2019). State funding also takes into account 'different circumstances between municipalities' (Eurydice, 2019), and is thus also affected by the geographical location of the municipality and its socio-demographic characteristics. Factors such as the unemployment rate, health (and diseases) of parents, average income and the number of foreign language speakers in the area are taken into account automatically through the data collected, and the funding to each municipality is adjusted accordingly. The ultimate goal of the statutory government transfers is to even out local differences (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014).

Based on our interview with the Finnish National Agency for Education and the data found on FINLEX (2009), equity funding is provided under the terms of three distinct Acts. The first is the Act on Central Government Transfers to Local Governments for

Basic Public Services, which takes into account age brackets and population density, morbidity, the unemployment and foreign language coefficients, the proportion of bilingualism, and educational background factors among others, to calculate the basic service cost. The second piece of legislation is the Act on the Financing of the Provision of Education and Culture, for which the financing is governed and provided by the previous Act. Under this Act, State funding is provided to the municipalities not just for operating costs but also for activities relating to upper-secondary schools, vocational training, sports and museums. Some of this extra funding is earmarked to be used for the specified allocation. Lastly, the Act on Discretionary Government Transfers provides the criteria and procedures governing the receipt of government grants. This funding is also earmarked, and is granted via an application procedure. Last year, according to the Finnish National Agency for Education, EUR 32 million was granted for various equity initiatives within the country.

For students with an immigrant background, education providers can use the State subsidies to arrange preparatory instruction, ranging between 900 and 1,000 hours, which consists of learning Finnish as a second language, learning about Finnish culture, as well as basic education subjects and the learner's mother tongue (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). Similarly, State subsidies can also be used for remedial instruction, if required (for example, additional instruction in the pupil's mother tongue). However, it is crucial to mention that there are no extra state subsidies for remedial education. Additional state subsidies are only granted for teaching Finnish as a second language, or for teaching the home language of the pupil. Under the Act of the Financing of the Provision of Education and Culture, additional subsidies can be granted to municipalities for the teaching of foreign language/mother-tongue such as Sámi. Other subsidies include SEN education, but there is no special subsidy designed to specifically target pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

The municipalities have their own systems of taxation, and the revenue collected by them is used for the funding of schools. Therefore, at local level, there exists a high level of autonomy. Every municipality can make its own decisions about the allocation of funding 'as long as they meet the minimum number of curriculum hours for each subject as set in the National Core Curriculum' (Silliman, 2016; Silliman, 2017, p. 5).

Since most of the funding allocation is the responsibility of the municipalities, the distribution and use of funding varies. Helsinki, for example, operates a positive discrimination (PD) system, which provides 'additional resources and funding to schools working under difficult circumstances' (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017, p. 16). A mix of pupil-specific and geographical characteristics is used to identify such schools. Low learning outcomes among pupils, the average income level of residents in the area, and the number of immigrants in the area, together with parental education level and the popularity of the school, are some of the factors that affect the calculation of the PD index (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017; Silliman, 2017). The popularity of the school for the PD index takes into account the proportion of pupils who 'leave the catchment area [of a given] school compared to the number of pupils in [that] local school from outside the catchment area' (Silliman, 2017, p. 5). The School Board, which consists of 11 members of the city council, makes decisions about the distribution of funds between schools in Helsinki (Silliman, 2016). Schools have the autonomy to decide on the most beneficial use of

the additional resources. For example, they can either 'hire a resource teacher (a teacher without their own class to teach) or diminish class sizes' among other uses (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017). According to Silliman (2017), interviews with principals showed that PD funding was spent mainly on classroom assistants. The implementation of funding can differ from school to school in Helsinki, due to different interpretations of PD funding. According to Silliman (2016), different schools identify their target groups differently. Some target PD funding towards either non-Finnish speakers, towards pupils from lower socio-economic strata, or towards pupils who require assistance and additional aid for other reasons.

Monitoring and evaluation

There is no formal school inspection procedure in Finland. The matriculation exam is not used exclusively for formal evaluation but as a gateway to tertiary education (Nordberg, 2017). School principals in Helsinki submit budgetary reports to the Department of Education and School Board, but the essence of the evaluation is based on a 'high degree of trust in the professionalism of principals and teachers' (Silliman 2016, p. 80). Principals make decisions about the implementation of funding. In some schools, decisions are then 'ratified by the governing board of each school, generally composed of the principal, teachers, and other staff, parents and often a student' (Silliman, 2016, p. 32).

The Finnish National Agency for Education does not conduct any evaluation, but the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), an independent expert organisation, performs evaluations every year using sample-based testing. The cross-sectional and longitudinal evaluation is carried out separately for each level of school education: early childhood education, pre-primary and basic education, and general upper-secondary education. FINEEC (2019) defines evaluation as a comparison between the activities or issues and the specified objectives. According to FINEEC, 'evaluation strives to determine if the set objectives have been reached and the goals have been achieved, and if the necessary changes in the activities have been made' (FINEEC, 2019, p. 11). In addition, the evaluator, 'based on the criteria and objectives set for the activity, determines if the activities are good or bad' (p. 11). According to FINEEC's 2019 education evaluation report, 'providers of basic and general upper-secondary education and early childhood education show the greatest need for [the] development' (p. 8) of a quality system. As acknowledged by the providers themselves, their self-evaluation competence requires further development. In 2015, aside from evaluating Finnish and Swedish languages, evaluations were also carried out for the first time on minority languages such as Sámi, Romani and Finnish sign language (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). The educational background of teachers, the number of teaching hours and the scarcity of learning materials were found to be obstacles in achieving the learning targets. According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2017), welfare evaluations are also conducted by Finnish authorities. The School Health Promotion (SHP) is one of the main questionnaires used to collect information about pupil welfare. SHP is carried out nationwide every two years. Its Wide Health Review is 'for pupils in the first, fifth and eighth grades' and covers 'pupils' growth, development and wellbeing, as well as a statement about the welfare of families and parents (p. 14). In order to combat the issue of bullying, a programme called KiVa

was developed by the University of Turku in Finland through the funding of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Equity funding system in Slovakia

Policy objectives

Legislation in Slovakia does not officially apply the term 'inclusive education', nor does it provide for a specific equity funding scheme. However, the Education Act states that there should be 'equality of access to education, taking into account the educational needs of an individual'. Further to this, it emphasises the 'prohibition of all forms of discrimination, particularly segregation' (European Agency, 2018). In 2015, the European Commission launched an infringement proceeding against Slovakia 'for failure to correctly implement the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), due to the different situation of systemic discrimination and segregation of Roma children in schools' (European Commission, 2017, p. 18). In response, Slovakia amended its School Act to state that 'children whose special educational needs stem exclusively from the fact that they come from a "socially disadvantaged environment" (SDE) cannot be placed in special settings but must be educated in mainstream ones' (Amnesty International and European Roma Rights Centre, 2017, p. 9). Psychological-Pedagogical Centres (PPCs) are therefore now obliged to conduct thorough diagnosis to rule out the possibility that a child's special educational needs may stem from a 'socially disadvantaged environment', before the child can be referred to a special school. Another provision of the amendment allows primary schools 'with approvals from the school to establish a "specialised class" for the education of those pupils who are "not likely to successfully manage the content of education in the corresponding year, in order to compensate them for the lacking content of education"' (European Commission, 2017, p. 16). This authority to schools lacks a set of criteria to identify such needs. Since it is therefore still quite vague, it still allows subjective interpretations that may lead to further segregation. The legislation continues to operate in a way that expects children to keep up with the system, instead of 'adjusting the system to meet the different needs of different children' (European Commission, 2017, p. 17).

In 2016, the Government Programme for 2016-2020 was approved. According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2017a), its educational plan was to focus on learners from socially disadvantaged backgrounds by developing inclusive conditions in education. In addition, the plan also focuses on improving professional psychological/special educational counselling and diagnosis services. The Government Programme not only aims at the pre-service training of teachers, but also aims to ensure that every learner masters the basic curriculum (European Agency, 2017a). Ultimately, these objectives are vaguely defined, reflecting a lack of clarity in policy. Since Slovakia is currently under pressure to resolve the issue of its ongoing segregation of Roma children in the country's education system (European Commission, 2019), there is a need for clearer and more comprehensive goals and objectives to ensure effective implementation to combat educational disadvantage and give all students a fair chance.

Design

Slovakia uses pupil characteristics to identify children from 'socially disadvantaged environments' (SDE) as being 'those whose educational needs stem exclusively from their development in a socially disadvantaged environment' (European Commission, 2017, p. 17). The State Pedagogical Institute (2019), an agency that depends on the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, defines a socially disadvantaged environment as 'an environment which, given social and linguistic conditions, does not sufficiently stimulate the development of the individual's mental, will and emotional qualities, does not promote effective socialisation and does not provide adequate incentives for personality development'. According to the 2011 census, 15.3 % of the country's overall population comprises Roma children under the age of 15 (Open Society Foundations/Roma Education Fund/UNICEF, 2017) Following an infringement process by the European Commission, in March 2016 the Ministry of Education laid down criteria to identify children from SDEs. According to Amnesty International and ERRC (2017, p. 19), the eight criteria are:

- The family is not performing a socialising-educational function
- Poverty and destitution
- At least one parent has been unemployed long-term and belongs to a disadvantaged category of job applicants
- The pupil's legal guardians have insufficient education
- Inadequate housing and sanitation
- The language of instruction is different from the language spoken at home
- The family lives in a segregated environment
- Social exclusion of the family or community from the majority population.

While the criteria above are well laid-out, there is still a need for professionals to be trained to identify the pupils effectively. Equity funding for pupils with educational disadvantages catered for as part of non-normative funding for schools in Slovakia. According to the review of school resources by Santiago et al. (2016), this includes:

- Free-of-charge pre-primary education for children one year before the start of compulsory schooling at six years old
- Teaching assistants
- Travel costs for students in compulsory education (only if the school is located in another municipality)
- School grants to support the education of socially-disadvantaged students
- Education vouchers for extra-curricular activities
- Textbooks.

Resource allocation and implementation

Government funding for schools in Slovakia follows a per capita funding system where a formula is used to calculate the costs. Under this, the majority of normative funding is provided to cover personnel costs and the rest is for operating costs. The formula helps to divide the budget into these elements (Santiago et al., 2016). Weights are given to specific student categories, including pupils learning in a language other than Slovak (0.080); pupils taking bilingual programmes (0.250); or pupils in 'year zero' of basic school (1.000) (Santiago et al., 2016). However, these weights only refer to the normative funding formula. Since the funding system encourages schools to compete for students, it has resulted in 'encouraging mainstream schools to have more children identified as having special educational needs', thus increasing the number of pupils in special schools, especially Roma children (Santiago et al., 2016; Amnesty International and ERRC, 2018).

Equity funding in Slovakia is part of non-normative funding, which represents 10 % of the total education budget (Santiago et al., 2016). Public education funding is provided by three bodies or groups: the Ministry of Education (37.5 % of total funding), the Ministry of Interior (30.5 % of the total funding), and the municipalities (33.8 % of the total) (Eurydice, 2019; as cited in European Commission, 2019). A financial incentive of EUR 109 per student (in 2016) is offered to 'regular' schools to cater to students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Amnesty International and ERRC, 2017). Pupils who qualify to attract this subsidy are those whose families receive 'benefits for material need or have an average monthly income for the last consecutive six months below the subsistence minimum' (Educational Policy Institute, 2015; as cited in Santiago et al., 2016, p. 129). The funds are not earmarked, but the State Pedagogical Institute (2017) lays down certain 'conditions which are required for successful education':

- Reducing the number of pupils in a regular classroom to increase work efficiency and to allow an individual approach to the pupil
- Implementing a full-time education system in a motivating school environment that helps the pupil spend their time meaningfully and prepare for learning
- Creating an attractive educational environment that respects the social, cultural and linguistic specificities of the pupil
- Implementing programmes aimed at improving cooperation between Roma children's parents and primary schools
- Providing tutoring activities for Roma children that are lagging behind (e.g. after-school courses, etc.)
- Creating alternative curricula by adapting content for Roma children from SDEs (e.g. content reduction, more practical orientation, experiential learning, alternative forms of education, and desegregated classes)
- Implementing multicultural and anti-prejudice education programmes as part of the curriculum.

Although these are the conditions identified as being required for successful education, schools are not obliged to incorporate them all, since a high level of autonomy exists at local level. Schemes are available to fund free school meals, transportation, teacher assistants and teacher salaries, but the allocation of these is dependent on the school leader making a request to the Ministry. School leaders can also choose to credit salary rises of teachers with an 'allowance for working with students with disabilities and students from a socially-disadvantaged background' (Santiago et al., 2016, p. 174). Such an allowance is defined by internal school regulations and is only applicable if 'at least 30 % of the maximum class size are individually integrated students with disabilities or from a socially disadvantaged background' (Santiago et al., 2016, p. 174). Similarly, professional development for teachers or the hiring of teacher assistants is at the discretion of the school leaders and their respective municipalities. If extra-funding is required for hiring teaching assistants or for teaching materials for students from socially-disadvantaged environments, the school must apply to the Ministry for the 'per-student extra amount for each student identified' (Santiago et al., 2016, p. 179). In addition, the transport cost for attending a school in a different municipality must be paid upfront by the parents, and is then reimbursed by the Ministry of Education through the municipality and the school (Santiago et al., 2016). Our interviews with experts revealed that the schemes targeting free school meals can be expensive for parents. If they fail to give one day's notice to the school about their child's absence, they are obliged to pay for the day's meal.

Since the non-normative funding channelled to schools via municipalities falls under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, it is up to the discretion of the school director to effectively and efficiently manage the school's budget and assets (Santiago et al., 2016). If a primary school has at least 85 students from socially disadvantaged environments, the school leader is required to use half of the non-normative funding 'to improve the conditions for education and training' using teaching assistants (Santiago et al., 2016). Overall, the school should use its SDE funding for assistant teachers, didactic techniques, teaching aids and participation in educational activities such as trips, excursions, language courses, sports training, etc., as well as specialised classes and an allowance for working with pupils from SDEs (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, 2019).

Monitoring and evaluation

No formal evaluation of equity funding schemes is carried out at national level in Slovakia, because the funding of schools is decentralised. Inequity in schools can be found in the country's PISA results, and through research carried out by external organisations such as the European Roma Rights Centre, Amnesty International and the OECD. The State School Inspectorate is required to report on the laws followed by schools, but not on the system of school funding. Following the amendment of the School Act in 2015, a provision now exists under which the State School Inspectorate must undertake responsibility for monitoring the Psychological-Pedagogical Centres and intervene where necessary in their diagnostic practice (Amnesty International and European Roma Rights Centre, 2017). However, the powers of the inspectorate within schools remain limited as 'it does not have the power to request that the Ministry of Education act nor is it able to initiate legal proceedings when violations are identified' (Amnesty International and ERRC, 2017, p. 19). Moreover, there is no official collection

or evaluation of `ethnic data at national or municipality level, which makes it difficult to take steps towards desegregation (Open Society Foundations/Roma Education Fund/UNICEF, 2017, 46). Reports by the European Commission (2019) and Amnesty and European Roma Rights Centre (2017) have found that children from socially disadvantaged environments are still over-represented in special educational schools/classes.

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