



Pioneering policies and practices tackling educational inequalities in Europe

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Evidence-based co-authored and open-access report of most promising pioneering policies and practices

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Hungary: country-specific practical implications and recommendations

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1) Systemic reform

While there are numerous initiatives in Hungary that address educational inequalities and aim to compensate for the disadvantages of vulnerable groups, structural characteristics of the system inherently reproduce the said inequalities. In such an environment, civil society, municipalities, and even state-level programs addressing a fraction of vulnerable students can make a difference in individual lives at best. The restructuring of public education (most importantly, reducing the stratification of the system and delaying early tracking and selection) and political willingness to improve the quality of education for all (and thus mitigating the impact of free school choice) is essential for reducing inequalities.

2) Increasing the quality and quantity of professional staff in education

Current data indicate that there is widescale disillusionment among teaching professionals (teachers, special educators, and other supporting staff) in Hungary due to overwork, low salaries, methodologically restrictive policies, and no perceived social recognition of their work. Professionals working in schools must be acknowledged financially and morally to ensure the continuity of their professions and quality education for all. The lower the number of well-trained and competent teachers, the more competition there is for their services. Therefore, the ability of at-risk families and schools to pay for quality services must be enhanced from the central budget by providing significantly higher financial and professional resources to such institutions, so they become attractive to the best professionals. The provision of competent staff is also essential to ensure the effectiveness of policies that aim to increase participation in education (such as mandatory kindergarten).

3) Resources for services that meet individual needs

The current structure and operation of the education system in Hungary is highly inflexible. Our findings suggest that responding to each student's individual needs – considering their cognitive and psycho-social development, family background, and educational history – is a key factor in decreasing inequalities. Individual attention not only to cognitive skills but also emotional wellbeing, sense of belonging to school and motivation is fundamental. It is critical that schools receive the appropriate amount of human and financial resources to tend to every child and cooperate with families for the sake of better student outcomes. Such changes are subject to the above-mentioned structural reforms and a significant rise in the attractiveness of teaching professions.

4) Greater support for vulnerable families through the social sector

The education system cannot be understood and developed independently from other care systems (healthcare, social services). Children at risk of educational inequalities often come from families that are in touch with either of these – such as children with special educational

needs, lower socio-economic backgrounds, or both. The educational outcomes of students depend highly on factors such as their mental health, living conditions and support from their families. Reducing educational inequalities, therefore, does not only require action in the education system but also comprehensive, intersectoral cooperation that can prevent the social exclusion – and educational segregation – of vulnerable children.