



Pioneering policies and practices tackling educational inequalities in Europe

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Switzerland: Country-specific practical implications and recommendations

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Heterogeneity is a common denominator and defining characteristic of many educational processes in Switzerland: The Swiss education system is characterised by a federalist, highly decentralised organisation of school. As a country of immigration, Switzerland has one of the highest shares of students with a migration background, fuelling socioeconomic and cultural disparities within classrooms. With its generally high degree of stratification and early tracking, the Swiss education system creates distinct learning environments, which – besides being socially selective – come with different prerequisites for learning, educational opportunities and later life outcomes.

Tackling educational inequality in the Swiss education system, therefore, require strategies and approaches that manage heterogeneity. Based on literature review, quantitative and practice research, policy analysis and stakeholder panels, a number of practical recommendations can be derived that deserve particular attention and are exemplified by many of the pioneering policies and practices identified in this report.

- 1) Children in Switzerland start learning at vastly different levels – be it due to migration background or lack of early childhood education. Given the limited opportunities and amount of time available in the education system to counteract early disparities before tracking, policymakers are urged to prioritise targeted early support, particularly for children from non-privileged backgrounds who are most at risk of falling behind. *Exemplary policies and practices: Parents as Teachers [22], Free Core Time [23], Selective Compulsory Language Support [29], House of Education Lurup [30]*
- 2) The high degree of stratification at the secondary level has repeatedly been identified as a crucial driver of educational inequality. If not altogether limiting the degree of stratification or delaying tracking, policymakers are recommended to provide structures that enable all students to navigate their educational pathways successfully. This includes targeted measures that prepare and support disadvantaged children (and their families) during educational transitions and valorising a more diverse set of skills so that all students can fulfil their potential. *Exemplary policies and practices: Finnish Comprehensive School [1], MOSAIK [12], QUIMS [19], New Opportunity Schools and Second Chance Schools [31], Two-year basic vocational training (EBA) [32]*
- 3) Educational inequalities are multi-faceted and context specific. To develop coherent and effective practices and policies, policymakers should consider various and often interlinked drivers of educational inequality as well as the specific contextual features a measure is implemented in. While not all pioneering policies and practices can be adopted directly to a specific context, it is worthwhile experimenting with bold ideas and refining policy features and practices according to students' needs and contextual features. The federalist structure of Switzerland's education system makes it a suited playground to advance policies and practices to tackle educational inequality. *Exemplary policies and practices:*

Mannheim Support System School [15], City Connects Pilot [17], Magnet Program [20], 6000 Scholarships [28], Selective Compulsory Language Support [29]

When implementing practices and policies, ensuring ways of personalising support and strengthening the link between formal and non-formal educational spheres is a promising prerequisite. Fostering interprofessional cooperation as well as allowing for practitioners' autonomy, while providing sustainable funding are important institutional requirements.