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¹ **Type:** Use one of the following codes (in consistence with the Description of the Action):

- R: Document, report (excluding the periodic and final reports)
- DEM: Demonstrator, pilot, prototype, plan designs
- DEC: Websites, patents filing, press and media activities, videos, etc.
- OTHER: Software, technical diagram, etc.

² **Dissemination level:** Use one of the following codes (in consistence with the Description of the Action)

- PU: Public, fully open, e.g. web
- CO: Confidential, restricted under conditions set out in the Model Grant Agreement
- CI: Classified, information as referred to in Commission Decision 2001/844/EC

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Country [Abbreviation]	Project partner(s)
Finland [FI]	Helsingin Yliopisto (UH)
Germany [DE]	Universität Mannheim (UMA) Universität Trier (UT)
Hungary [HU]	TÁRKI Társadalmi Kutatási Intézet Zrt. (TARKI)
Ireland [IE]	The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)
Lithuania [LT]	Viešosios politikos ir vadybos institutas / Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI)
Luxembourg [LU]	Université du Luxembourg (UL) Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER)
Norway [NO]	Høgskulen på Vestlandet (HVL) Universitetet i Bergen (UiB)
Spain [ES]	Universidad Complutense Madrid (UCM)
Switzerland [CH]	Universität Bern (UBERN)

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PIONEERED

1 Introduction

This working paper compares stakeholders' knowledge and experiences of current practices that aim to tackle educational inequality across PIONEERED project countries. The overall aim is to identify both context-related variations and common ground in pioneering practices targeting educational inequalities from the perspective of stakeholders. The analysis is mainly based on the "*Report on stakeholders' knowledge about current practices tackling/reducing educational inequalities in each country*" (Alonso et al. 2022). This report gathered information about understandings of inequality, problem definitions, dilemmas and existing pioneering approaches or strategies for tackling educational inequalities in each PIONEERED partner country.

The present working paper thus forms a second step of analysis in WP5 in PIONEERED. Besides comparing *stakeholders' knowledge about current practices tackling* educational inequality, it prepares the next step in WP5 – namely the qualitative case studies aiming at gaining deeper insights into selected practices that foster equitable participation in education. Furthermore, it helps to identify further research dimensions and select concrete practices for the case analysis.

The next section outlines the methodology and conceptual underpinnings used for comparing stakeholders' perspectives. This is followed by a presentation of the results of the cross-country comparison. Here we focus on similarities and differences between PIONEERED partner countries in terms of a) stakeholders' understanding of the problem and b) key elements of pioneering practices to tackle educational inequality. We conclude with a summary of the results, a critical reflection of our analysis and further implications.

In order to take better account of the heterogeneity of the country contexts we have included features such as charts and boxes with further information or explanations or highlighted key terms in bold.

2 Methodology and conceptual assumptions

This working paper is organised as an international comparative analysis of all PIONEERED partner countries including Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain and Switzerland. The empirical basis for the comparative study is the "*Report on stakeholders' knowledge about current practices tackling/reducing educational inequalities in each country*" (Alonso et al. 2022). The report used the vignette design as "a useful methodological first step for transforming the findings of the country-specific reports into neat and dense data" (Alonso et al. 2022, p. 1) that directly informs the comparative analysis in the present deliverable D5.2. Thus, a main source of comparison are the vignettes of the nine countries³.

The vignettes, in turn, are based on data collected by combining several qualitative methods – namely six individual expert interviews, two focus groups and one workshop per country⁴. The term *stakeholders* entail experts that have knowledge and experience of policy and practice areas related to educational inequality and practices aimed at tackling it. These can be national, regional and local government officers responsible for educational equality and inclusion, policy makers, teacher union experts, educational practitioners, teacher educators, representatives of community-led neighbourhood groups, parental organisation representatives, representatives of transnational networks tackling educational inequalities (c.f. PIONEERED, 2020a: 28; Jensen and Skrobanek, 2021:28). It was important that the chosen experts can inform about pioneering practises regarding

³ Where it was deemed necessary for the present analysis, we double-checked the full country-specific reports to expand upon the information provided in the D5.1 vignettes.

⁴ Hence, our database for analysis is based on 48 expert interviews, 16 focus groups and 8 workshops.

the preschool, primary and secondary school level as well as pioneering practices in fields of non-formal education. Thus, partners were free to decide as long as stakeholders identify concrete practices.

Guidelines were developed for focus group and workshop data analysis to ensure that each partner had a consistent approach when analysing data⁵, when writing the country-specific reports and for providing common ground for the comparative analysis templates on *how to* analyse stakeholder interview. The following five codes formed the common guideline for the analyses:

- 1) general conceptions about educational inequality,
- 2) reducing educational inequality,
- 3) pioneering practices,
- 4) MILC dimensions,
- 5) main dilemmas and challenges.

2.1 Aim and elements of comparative analysis

The *tertium comparationis* of comparison are pioneering practices tackling educational inequalities. The project defines pioneering practices as “innovative and (empirically) efficient tools to tackle educational inequalities” (PIONEERED, 2020:1) which address educational inequalities from a multi-level, intersectional and life-course perspective (PIONEERED, 2020). The aim of the comparison is to identify both context-related variations and common ground in pioneering practices that target educational inequalities in the respective partner countries. The aim is to answer the following three questions:

- 1) What are the similarities and differences between the countries in relation to “stakeholders’ problem understanding” and “pioneering practices”?
- 2) What is the meaning of the similarities and differences in the wider context of the different education systems and welfare regimes?
- 3) What are the theoretical and practical conclusions?

In analysing the data, we followed a ‘three-step model of comparison’. In a first step, the perspectives of stakeholders were juxtaposed based on the national descriptions in the report D5.1. The description of similarities and differences was then organised along two dimensions “stakeholders’ problem understanding” and “pioneering practices” (see chapters 3.1 and 3.2 in this report).

Table 1: Elements of comparative analysis

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Main data source in D 5.1</i>
Stakeholders’ problem understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding • MILC⁶ • problem solution 	<i>Country vignettes - text section 1</i> <i>Country vignettes - text section 4</i> <i>Country vignettes - text section 2</i>
Pioneering practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • characteristics • dilemmas 	<i>Country vignettes - text section 3, 6, Appendix 1</i> <i>Country vignettes - text section 5, Appendix 1 in country reports</i>

⁵ The interview, focus group and workshop guides were designed by the University of Bergen (UIB) in collaboration with the Universidad Complutense Madrid (UCM) taking account of feedback from the partner countries. See D5.1 for an elaboration on the steps taken to collect data and writing country vignettes.

⁶ MILC is an abbreviation of **M**ultilevel, **I**ntersectionality, and **L**ife-**C**ourse. This framework encompasses state-of-the-art research on formal and non-formal educational inequality.

As a next step, the findings were contextualised within international trends and national constellations of the education system and the welfare state. Where analytically plausible, we grouped the countries inductively based on the empirical data and placed them in relation to the existing models of education systems with regards to welfare regimes (see Section 4.). As will be outlined in the following section, two different overarching approaches for comparison were used – a more open, case-specific approach focusing on the two dimensions of comparison (see Table 1) and a comparison based on different education systems and welfare regimes⁷. Third, as a result of comparison, conclusions were drawn and further implications were established (see Section 5).

2.2 Analysing pioneering practices in context

The suggested approach for cross-country comparison of pioneering practices regards partner countries as configurations based on a typology of education systems (PIONEERED, 2020b, p. 15). Comparing education systems is a common approach for cross-country comparison (Bray & Jiang, 2014, p. 139) and has often been linked to the types of national welfare regimes that exist in different countries (Beblavý, Thum, & Veselkova, 2011; Moe & Wiborg, 2016; Sass, 2020; West & Nikolai, 2013). In this regard, typologies of welfare regimes have been thoroughly developed in existing research (Bambra, 2007; Bonoli, 1997; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kautto, 2002; Korpi & Palme, 1998; Ragin, 1994) and are the foundation for comparison according to the PIONEERED proposal (PIONEERED, 2020b, p. 15). In the PIONEERED proposal, the welfare regimes in partner countries are classified as “social-democratic”, “conservative”, “post-socialist”, “liberal” or “southern/family-oriented” and are further described by the level of stratification in the education system as well as the level of educational inequality in each country. In other words, this typology provides an opportunity for cluster comparison based on education systems and welfare regimes⁸. Furthermore, using this typology enables cluster comparison of countries by using the classic comparative “method of agreement” and “method of difference” (Mill, 1869). These methods are used to investigate the most homogenous and the most heterogenous configurations in the data and are commonly used in comparative research (Hörner 1997, Hörner & Schlott 1983, Lieberman, 1992, p. 105).

The following clustering of countries is based on the above literature on welfare regimes and education systems as well as the proposed clustering in the PIONEERED proposal (PIONEERED, 2020b, p. 15):

Table 2: Education systems, welfare regimes and level of educational inequality in partner countries

Country	Welfare regime	Level of stratification in the education system	Level of educational inequality
Finland	Social-democratic	Low	Low
Germany	Conservative	High	High
Hungary	Post-socialist	Medium	High
Ireland	Liberal	Medium	Medium
Lithuania	Post-socialist	Medium	Medium
Luxembourg	Conservative	High	High
Norway	Social-democratic	Low	Low
Spain	South/family-oriented	Medium	Medium

⁷ The approach for comparison suggested in the PIONEERED proposal was a starting point but the methodology of identifying and comparing pioneering practices was further developed and elaborated in the non-public Deliverable 2.3 (D2.3). As such, D2.3 lays the foundation for the methodological steps that are taken in all of WP5.

⁸ To reduce complexity, this approach enables comparison within and between clusters, meaning that comparison of countries within the same welfare regime cluster may be compared in a first step. In a second step, the clusters of welfare regimes are compared with each other.

Switzerland	Conservative	High	High
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Thus, the analysis contrasts segregated education systems with high levels of stratification (Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland) with comprehensive education systems with low levels of stratification (Finland, Norway). Furthermore, the analysis is nuanced by including countries with medium levels of stratification (Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Spain).

However, as proposed in D2.3, the first step was to use a more open, inductive approach for cross-country comparison of pioneering practices considering both context-related variations and common ground. Using predefined typologies of welfare regimes provides an opportunity to reduce complexity by comparing clusters but may also work as a constraint for conducting an analysis that is truly based on the empirical findings. Therefore, a more case-specific approach was suggested in D2.3. Against this background, the identified pioneering practices in each partner country have been inductively categorised based on an empirical-based typology of practices. Although this categorisation has also been derived from the initial analytical frame of PIONEERED (MILC categories) in a confirmatory manner, open inductive coding has been at the forefront to account for unexpected phenomena in the empirical data. As argued by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 61), the field will, in most cases, be vastly more complex than social scientists' initial analytical frames. Thus, it would be unwise not to look for phenomena that go beyond the theoretical categories developed before data was collected.

In this regard, Figure 1 shows contexts in which concrete pioneering practices are embedded for analysing the identified pioneering practices. Combining both approaches based on an embedded understanding enabled us to characterise each pioneering practice in a contextual manner. For example, what are the aims of the practice and why (what should be done to tackle educational inequality and what has already been done), and which level or levels are addressed (macro-, meso- or micro-level)? Additionally, by using this approach we distinguish between practices that address formal or non-formal education (or both).

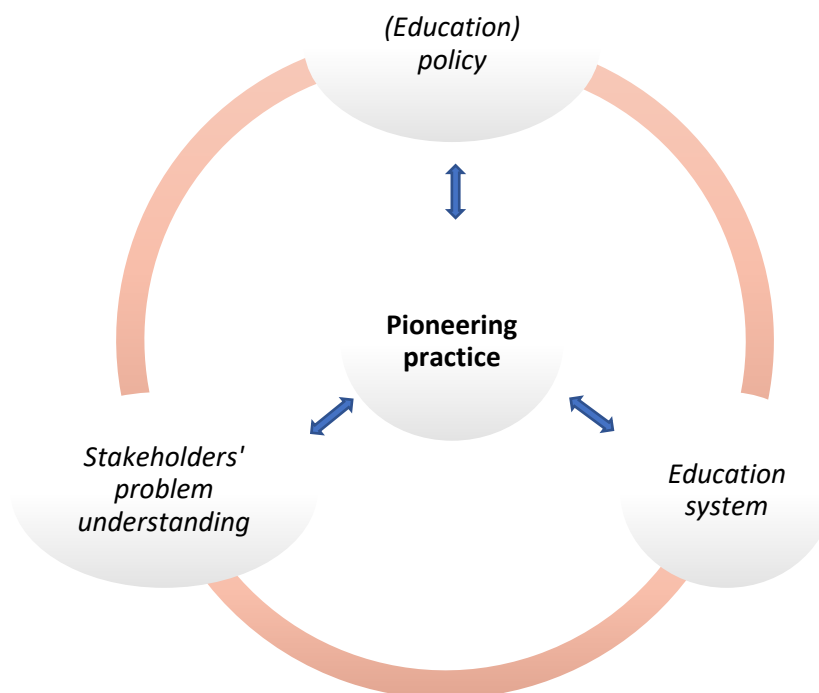


Figure 1: Contextualising pioneering practices

In this regard, paradoxes and dilemmas that exist in tackling educational inequalities through the identified pioneering practice have also been explored. Lastly, the identified pioneering practices are contextualised by being placed in the larger frame of education systems, welfare regimes and educational inequality in each country. Thus, stakeholders' understandings of educational inequality as well as policy and the type of education system in each country provide more substantial knowledge of how and why the pioneering practices have come about.

As Figure 1 shows, the aim has been to examine the relation between the different types of practices and education policy, the education system and the general understanding of educational inequality in partner countries. Additionally, practices have been contextualised by considering the relation between the different types of practices and the wider society (welfare system) within which they exist. This approach is not unlike the one used by Allmendinger and Leibfried (2003), who explore the interconnection between education and social policy from a comparative perspective.

The PIONEERED conceptual framework of educational inequality is concisely articulated in the PIONEERED proposal, and especially through the MILC⁹ framework. Against this background, several codes were developed to serve as basis for the initial analysis of the qualitative data gathered for WP5 (see Jensen and Skrobanek, 2021). *Factors that contribute to* educational inequality include structural aspects such as social class and the distribution of wealth in society (coded as “embeddedness/maldistribution”), cultural aspects such as *devalued identities* based on gender, sexuality, ethnic background and race (coded as “cultural capital/misrecognition”) as well as temporal aspects including transitions and learning as a cumulative process (categorised as a “life-course perspective¹⁰”). Additional codes used were a “multi-level perspective¹¹” (meaning that educational inequality is regarded as a phenomenon that encompasses more than one level of analysis) and “intersectionality¹²” (meaning a combination of several structural and/or cultural aspects). With regards to *types of* educational inequality, Jensen and Skrobanek (2021) referred to Repstad (2005) and his typology of inequalities: (in)equality of opportunity/access, (in)equality of treatment and (in)equality of outcome¹³. Furthermore, Jensen and Skrobanek (2021) described an analysis consisting of both MILC dimensions and “going beyond MILC” – combining confirmatory and inductive approaches – but as mentioned above, this section focuses on the codes derived from the understandings of educational inequality developed in the initial analytical MILC frame.

⁹ As stated in section 2, this conceptual framework was further elaborated on in D2.3. Building upon the MILC framework of the PIONEERED proposal (PIONEERED, 2020a, 2020b) as well as a content analysis of a collection of partner statements regarding their understandings of educational inequality, it was argued in D2.3 that both *factors that contribute to* educational inequality and *types of* educational inequality should be addressed in the comparative analysis.

¹⁰ Blossfeld, Blossfeld and Blossfeld (2019, p. 20) refers to Dannefer (1987) and the term “Matthew effect” when describing how early stages of educational trajectories have consequences for later outcomes.

¹¹ Including the macro-, meso- and micro-level.

¹² As argued by Fraser (2003, p. 49), the paradigms of ‘redistribution’ and ‘recognition’ are not mutually exclusive because “axes of subordination partake simultaneously of the status order and the class structure”. Therefore, different structural factors (e.g., socio-economic class and the distribution of wealth) as well as various devalued identities (based on factors like gender, race or sexuality) can all overlap in an intersectional understanding of inequality. This means that a person can belong to more than one disadvantaged group (e.g., migrants with low socio-economic status) and only considering such factors separately should be avoided.

¹³ The notion of “equality of opportunity” means that all citizens should have the same formal rights and equal access to education. “Equality of treatment” means that everyone should be treated equally within the educational system. “Equality of outcome” is a more radical concept of equality. According to Repstad (2005, p. 31): “As long as we practice equality of opportunity and equality of treatment, the end result may still be that people have very unequal standards of living.” As different social groups do not have the same resources as a starting point, equal opportunity/access and treatment within the educational system still leads to unequal outcomes.

3 Results

3.1 Stakeholders' problem understanding

3.1.1 Understanding educational inequality and MILC dimensions

In this section, the stakeholder interview, focus group and workshop data for each PIONEERED partner country are compared by looking at the PIONEERED theoretical concepts that constituted the initial *analytical frame* (Ragin & Amoroso, 2019) that was developed before data collection.

When analysing the empirical data, the first thing that catches the eye is that there are more similarities than differences between the countries regarding the MILC framework. For example, in four countries all MILC dimensions are addressed (**Finland, Luxembourg, Norway** and **Switzerland**). Furthermore, most dimensions are addressed in other countries as well. Both “embeddedness/maldistribution”, a multi-level perspective and “cultural capital/misrecognition” are addressed in all countries. Only the life-course perspective is not as prominent in the **German** and **Hungarian** data, while only intersectionality is not mentioned as much in the **Spanish** data. Generally, it seems as if stakeholders in most countries understand educational inequality in a way that corresponds to the MILC model. The life-course perspective is little mentioned (this is particularly noticeable in the German, Hungarian, Irish and Lithuanian data), followed by intersectionality (little emphasis in the Lithuanian and Spanish data). Thus, structural and cultural factors are most prevalent when looking at the results from all countries combined.

As such, there are some country differences regarding stakeholders' understanding of factors that contribute to educational inequality. However, when regarding the analytical frame of educational inequality developed in the PIONEERED proposal and in D2.3, there is **not a general pattern of differences**. In most countries, many or all MILC dimensions are addressed. There is no clear clustering of countries in the data that corresponds to the welfare regime model presented in the PIONEERED proposal (PIONEERED, 2020b, pp. 14-15) when regarding the MILC framework. For example, even though all MILC dimensions are addressed by stakeholders in **Luxembourg** and **Switzerland** (high level of stratification in the education system), this is also the case in **Finland** and **Norway** (low level of stratification in the education system).

When it comes to (in)equality of access/opportunity, (in)equality of treatment and (in)equality of outcome, stakeholder views in most countries cover all three aspects. However, there are some differences, especially as to where the focus is placed in the various countries. **Lithuanian** stakeholders only briefly mention inequality of outcome and mainly focus on inequality of opportunity/access to formal and non-formal education. Among the stakeholders in **Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Spain** and **Switzerland**, there is also a predominant focus on opportunities as well as unequal treatment of those who are disadvantaged. Conversely, in **Norway** there is a great deal of focus on unequal treatment but as a way of *balancing outcomes* rather than creating inequalities. Although stakeholders in **Finland** have their main focus on inequality of opportunities, they also refer to unequal treatment being necessary as a form of “positive discrimination” (Edwards, 1987).

In many countries, *unequal treatment in the education system* is regarded as an important manifestation of inequality. In the **Swiss** data, separating people with disabilities from others in the school system is regarded as problematic because the possibilities for later integration into mainstream classes are reduced. **Lithuanian** stakeholders argue that there is a need for equalising learning conditions (especially between public and private schools) and thus provide equal treatment of all. **Hungarian** stakeholders argue that treatment of pupils is characterised by a middle-class bias, creating advantages for privileged youth. According to **Irish** stakeholders, not all pupils have the same

opportunities based on the subjects offered by different schools. In the highly segregated systems of **Germany** and **Luxembourg**, unequal treatment of pupils is also regarded as problematic. For example, **German** stakeholders argue that unequal treatment leads to discrimination in the education system and that there is insufficient individualised support. However, in both social-democratic countries included in the analysis (**Finland** and **Norway**), unequal treatment is regarded by stakeholders as a necessary approach to realise more equal outcomes through positive discrimination¹⁴. Thus, unequal treatment may be regarded by stakeholders as both negative and positive regarding educational equality, depending on the ideology dominating the country-specific education system.

The data indicates mostly similarities rather than differences between countries with regard to the typology of educational inequality of the initial analytical frame; there is no overarching pattern that corresponds to different welfare regimes and education systems here, either.

Contextualization

*However, when considering the country-specific contexts within which educational inequality is embedded, the data point to these categories not necessarily having the same meaning in all countries. The notion of (in)equality of treatment being regarded differently in country-specific contexts, with the stakeholders from **Finland** and **Norway** contrasting their views of the countries with medium and high levels of stratification, may be the clearest clustering corresponding to welfare regime theory. There are other differences between the countries that are harder to make analytical sense of based on the data at hand. For example, in **Switzerland** stakeholders largely focus on educational opportunities and to a lesser extent on treatment, and there is especially little focus on outcomes. **Ireland** is an outlier as only two MILC dimensions are addressed, and there is a dominant focus on the structural and cultural aspects of educational inequality. However, it is hard to draw definitive conclusions here; rather, the meaning of these differences needs to be further explored.*

The main pattern is that there are mostly similarities among all countries, which makes the identification of country-specific clusters regarding stakeholders' views a futile exercise. The empirical data simply does not support such an intuitive analytical clustering of countries. Rather, the data show that most of the state-of-the-art conceptualisations of educational inequality described in the MILC framework (and elaborated in D2.3) are characteristics that go beyond specific countries, welfare regimes and educational systems. On the one hand, this may be an indication that many stakeholders use academic discourse and are aware of the state-of-the-art conceptualisations of educational inequality that the MILC framework encompasses. On the other hand, it may indicate that most capitalist countries face many of the same challenges regarding educational inequality (although there may be context-related variations as to how such inequalities manifest and are tackled). This is reminiscent of world systems theory spearheaded by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, who argues that it is world systems – not nation-states – that should be the main unit of analysis in social sciences (Wallerstein, 2004). Applying this to educational systems, Adick (2003) contends that Wallerstein does not include education to a sufficient extent in his theories, and connects world system theory to education through other theoretical frameworks such as the concept of cultural capital developed by Bourdieu (1984). In this regard, she argues that world-wide developments in education have led to a global model of education systems. In other words, all modern schools have features that correspond with a notion of a global education system based on capitalism and neo-liberal policies. Comparative studies on education can therefore be criticised for focusing too much on a “case and country-study tradition” (Adick, 1992, p. 241). Against this background, the overarching understandings of educational inequality in all partner countries can be regarded as features of a global capitalist society rather than country-specific factors.

¹⁴ The paradox and dilemma of having ideals of an inclusive, comprehensive education system combined with the notion of unequal treatment to balance outcomes is further explored in section 3.2.2.

3.1.2 Problem solution – What needs to be done to tackle educational inequality?

While stakeholders' understandings of educational inequalities across countries are fairly similar, independent of welfare regimes and education systems, there are clearer differences between groups of countries when it comes to how stakeholders think educational inequalities should be tackled. Regarding the question about what needs to be done to create more equality in the education system, country-specific, country-group-specific but also similarities between the countries can be identified.

Similarities

➤ **Tackling educational inequality needs to perceive education in a societal context.**

In line with the commonalities between countries just outlined – namely perceiving educational inequality as a complex phenomenon, stakeholders also share complex perspectives when it comes to concrete ideas and proposals to tackle educational inequality. Regardless of their national context, the stakeholders agree that creating more educational equity requires a broad perspective that perceives education in a societal context. In this sense, for example, stakeholders from **Finland** speak of “a ‘wholeness’ where societal and individual-level structures, financial factors, social policies tackling inequality as well as practices influence each other” (D5.1 p. 3) or **Hungary** even sees the need to make “systemic reforms”: “The fundamental argument regarding tackling educational inequalities is the need for systemic reforms. This implies an acting on the structural characteristics of the education system, as opposed to auxiliary or peripheral reforms that serve only as patches. ... Many of the inequalities found in schools reflect inequalities and discrimination that exist outside the school. Economic reforms and improved infrastructure in disadvantaged areas are necessary to move towards greater educational equity” (D5.2; p. 8).

➤ **The teaching profession is an important means of combating educational inequality.**

In almost all countries stakeholders point to the **teaching profession** as an important means of combating educational inequality. There seems to be a consensus that teacher training and teaching quality needs to be improved, especially when it comes to dealing more sensitively with heterogeneity. **Finnish** stakeholders see a need for the development of pre-service teacher education and “a shared understanding of teachers' professional capabilities” (D5.1 p. 4, Finish country report, p. 11). In **Hungary**, there is talk of a “radical reform” of the teacher training process (D5.1, p. 14). In the other countries of **Lithuania, Norway, Luxembourg, Switzerland** and **Germany**, there is also a demand for a teaching profession that is more geared towards improving educational equity for all. Stakeholders in **Germany**, for example, emphasise the “implementing of educational inequality-sensitive pedagogy in study programmes and further training” (D 5.1, p. 12), or in **Switzerland** it is argued that “special needs’ education expertise and competencies should be incorporated more into regular teacher training” (D5.1, p. 20). In **Lithuania**, stakeholders also highlight the need for more freedom, trust and respects for teachers to enable them to focus more on educational equity.

Contextualization

Although the teaching profession is seen as an important means for combating educational inequality in all countries, the meaning of the teaching profession must be seen in the country-specific context since the stakeholders argue against the background of different national developments and constellations. When Finland, for example, emphasises that teacher training needs to be improved, this is against the background that the academisation of teacher training in Finland is already being emphasised as pioneering and it is now a matter of strengthening a common understanding of the profession across all levels of education. In contrast, in Hungary it is about a radical reform and in other countries like Germany, Switzerland and Luxembourg, Lithuania and Norway it is rather about strengthening a pedagogy that is sensitive towards inequality and diversity.

➤ **Personalised education – changing treatment of children**

Stakeholders across the countries express the need to change the way children are treated within education. The focus is on greater consideration of individual needs and problems. This can be illustrated with the following examples:

- Stakeholders in **Lithuania** speak of “*a need for a general change in the focus of the education system ... whereas formal education should focus more on meeting individual student needs, beyond preparing students for the labour market or for standardised tests*” (D5.1, p. 11).
- Stakeholders in **Spain** speak of “*improve[ment of] individualised attention*” (D5.1, p. 18).
- In **Ireland** “*addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups in education, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, but also ethnic minority groups*” (D5.1, p. 20) is a common suggestion among stakeholders.
- In **Switzerland** stakeholders talk about “*individualised learning opportunities and a holistic approach in terms of assessment and career aspirations ... or integration of children with disabilities into the public school*” (D5.1, p. 20).
- Stakeholders in **Luxembourg** focus on “*inclusion of children with additional needs*” including “*linguistic diversity*” (D5.1; p. 12).
- Stakeholders in **Germany** argue that “*professionals should become better prepared and educated for diagnosing and supporting learning problems, but most importantly for being aware of social problems in children’s everyday lives and related disadvantages in learning*” (D. 5.1; p. 6).
- Stakeholders in **Norway** argue in favour of a “*greater focus on individual needs and situations*” (D5.1, p. 16).
- **Hungarian** stakeholders speak about a “*change [in] pedagogical methods*” (D5.1, p. 8).

Further information “personalised education” 1

The change in teaching/school culture in the sense of a more personalised and socially sensitive pedagogy is directly related to teacher education (like in Germany) or to the need for a better cooperation between different pedagogical professions – such as “between the education system and social services” in Hungary (D5.1, p. 8), between “different departments, agencies, regulatory bodies, the families of the children/young, schools and vocational industry organisations” in Norway (D5.1, p. 15) or “more multidisciplinary teams in schools – including schoolteachers, social workers, psychologists, and therapists” or “connecting formal and non-formal education” in Luxembourg (D 5.1, pp. 12-13).

Further information “personalised education” 2

Finnish stakeholders also argue that it is important to provide students with different types of support throughout their educational path, depending on their individual needs. In contrast to the other countries, however, they argue that inclusion is already implemented in everyday school life in Finland. (D5.1, p. 3)

Country-group-specific aspects

The following themes, which can be identified from the data, embody country-group-specific ideas on how to combat educational inequality.

➤ **Changing the structure of the education system**

In particular, the stakeholders from countries with *high level of stratification* in the education system – namely **Germany**, **Luxembourg** and **Switzerland** indicate the need for changing the structure of their education system to reduce educational inequality. In **Germany**, for example, it is stated that the “*structures within the education system are an important reason for educational inequality since they foster the illusion of meritocratic selection into school tracks while actually selecting by SES and recognition/non-recognition of cultural capital*” (D5.1, p. 6). A better transition between the levels of

the education system and a desegregation of the education system are highlighted as possible ways towards an integrative comprehensive school model.

Desegregation and enhanced transition pathways between different types of school are considered by stakeholders from **Lithuania** and **Spain** as a necessary step for more equality in the education system. However, there are country-specific characteristics here. The focus in **Lithuania** is on the desegregation of private and public schools – the suggestion is to “*reduce the gap between private/prestigious and public/stigmatised schools*” (D5.1, p. 11). In the case of Spain, the focus is also on desegregation, but with a special focus on the difference between prestigious and non-prestigious public schools (especially relevant in terms of social composition). However, stakeholders in **Lithuania** and **Spain** do not mention changing the existing structure of the education system, but stress the need to change the focus of the education system to better address the needs of children and adolescents (cf. personalised education) (D 5.1, p. 16). In **Hungary**, however, stakeholders see the structural change in the context of societal reforms: “[*This [systemic reform] implies an acting on the structural characteristics of the educational system, as opposed to auxiliary or peripheral reforms that serve only as patches*” (D5.1, p. 8).

➤ **Compensatory measures**

Stakeholders in the countries with high levels of stratification of the education system, like **Germany**, **Luxembourg** and **Switzerland** as well as **Ireland** (medium level of stratification), consider compensatory measures to be an important means to tackle educational inequality. Here, **Germany**, **Luxembourg** and **Switzerland** focus on “*family support and parent education*” (D5.1, p. 5 (Germany)), “*support in homework activities for students from lower SES families*” (D5.1, p. 14 (Luxembourg)) or on *extracurricular activities* (e.g. “*special language courses help young children arriving in Luxembourg*”) or “*support services in the field of early childhood education and care*” in **Switzerland**.

In the case of **Ireland**, compensatory measures focus on schools in disadvantaged communities – DEIS schools (low SES, ethnic groups) (D5.1, p. 10). Thus, in contrast to **Luxembourg** and **Switzerland** and to a large extent to **Germany**, the main national initiative to combat educational disadvantage in **Ireland** “tends to be area-based rather than family-based”.

Country particularities:

➤ **Changes to the curriculum**

In some of the partner countries, stakeholders emphasise that the curriculum should be changed in order to combat educational inequality. **Hungary** states that “*middle-class-centric curricula are prevalent*” (D 5.1; p. 7) or **German** stakeholders speak about how schools are “*selecting by SES and recognition/non-recognition of cultural capital*” (D5.1, p. 6). Further phenomena that are criticised include the “*day-to-day classroom, where academic knowledge continues to be privileged in traditional terms*”, like in **Lithuania** (D5.1, p. 11) or that “*theoretical knowledge in the education system discriminates against practical knowledge and experiences*”, like in **Norway** (D5.1, p.16).

➤ **Awareness-raising: change the values in the overall society**

Some countries such as **Germany**, **Switzerland**, **Luxembourg** and **Hungary** emphasise the need for awareness-raising in order to build an *inclusive culture*. The **German** stakeholders specify this further and see the need to question *meritocracy* (illusion of meritocracy). In **Luxembourg** and **Hungary**, stakeholders focus on the self-awareness of teachers that should involve self-reflection and willingness to change (Luxembourg Country Report, p. 4; Hungary Country Report, p. 14).

3.2 Pioneering practices tackling educational inequality – Identification and description

3.2.1 Main elements of pioneering practices

This section discusses the stakeholders' awareness of pioneering practices, i.e. practices that are actually being carried out. The data analysis revealed national differences and similarities in terms of the degree of institutionalisation of those practices, as well as in terms of the interconnected aspects of pioneering practices and tactics.

Degree of institutionalisation

Concerning the “degree of institutionalisation” three types could be identified: Countries with a high amount of systemically institutionalised pioneering practices, practices with model character and grassroots practices.

1. Systemically institutionalised pioneering practices originate from the existing national or federal education system and education policy that is seen as a pioneering. Those practices are exclusively identified in the **Finnish** and **Norwegian** educational contexts where the principle of inclusion and education for all is a central element.

2. Pioneering practices with model character originate from national, regional policies or grassroots movements that have taken shape as a specific programme or practice. The model characteristic can originate from a systemic policy but negotiated into a programme with specific scope and deliverables. The model characteristic as a pioneering practice can also have originated from the grassroots level but evolved into a higher-level concept. Apart from **Finland and Hungary, all participating countries** in the PIONEERED project have identified “model practices”.

Example of a model practice that originated from the grassroots level in Norway

*In the **Norwegian** context, there is a public-private practice which consists of an alternative teaching programme for disadvantaged students. The practice originated from the grassroots level but developed into a concrete model practice through bottom-up decision-making with local and municipal support. The practice can be further identified as a separated learning setting (see contexts subcategory) because it seeks to offer disadvantaged students a customised “practical” learning environment using outdoor activities (see e.g. D 5.1.)*

3. Pioneering practices as grassroots practice or tactics are initiatives started by groups or individuals to confront specific problems or lack of framework to address educational inequality in the education sphere. The initiative takers often start at the local level aiming to change practice or offer additional support for disadvantaged youth. Grassroot practices can be characterised as more natural or spontaneous compared to practices originating from/in the systemic level. **Hungary** is the only country that has not identified specific model practices. There are few practices in Hungary due to lack of funding and support in the official education system.

Example of grassroots practices in Hungary

Such practices are *methodologies that are flexible and focused on the individual needs of the students; practices that focus on a greater interconnection between the different actors involved in the education system; and fluid communication with the students’ families and with the environment in a broader sense*. These practices have not yet evolved into higher-level concepts, such as the example from Norway described in the previous example box.

Interconnected aspects of pioneering practices

From the stakeholder data (country vignettes and Appendix 1 in D.5.1), various aspects could be identified inductively which characterise the specific practices. In general, pioneering practices focus on the school system, structural permeability, settings of learning, parental education, teaching profession and redistribution of resources. These aspects are linked as follows:

1. The school system: Certain elements of pioneering practices occur as a direct consequence of national education policy. Here, pioneering practices are realised on the micro/action level, but are linked to the inclusive values, ideology, strategies and associated expectations anchored on the systemic level – e.g. national policies that shape the educational structure to prevent youth from dropping out of school. Only the social-democratic welfare countries Norway and Finland consider their egalitarian education systems (low level of stratification of the students) to be pioneering.

2. Teaching profession refers to teacher education or practices that benefit teachers' competencies to tackle educational inequalities in formal education. In the case of **Finland**, teacher education is imbedded on the "systemic" level whereas the Lithuanian practices are on the "model" level.

Example of practices that benefit teachers' competencies

*Practices identified in the **Lithuanian** context express a strong focus on teacher education and qualification. The first practice is an education offer that seeks to provide professionals in a different field who wish to enter teaching profession with support and training needed to become teachers. These new teachers, who get a lot of support in improving their qualifications, are usually placed to disadvantaged or remote schools to provide more opportunities and better quality education for students in those schools. Another example from Lithuania is a programme to increase school personnel's competencies to work with special needs students. The programme aims to increase inclusive activities through comprehensive measures (improve infrastructure, educate school leaders and teachers).*

*Stakeholders in **Spain** referred to professional development program ("Empieza por Educar") aimed at professionals who aspire to generate educational and social change for the benefit of equal opportunities for all boys and girls. For two years they will teach in educational centers in disadvantaged environments, pursuing the academic growth and skills of their students while receiving training and support to maximize their impact.*

3. Transitions and better permeability between the formal education levels characterises pioneering practices that aim to support disadvantaged students' transition between school levels. Such practices were reported mostly by stakeholders in **Switzerland**. In the Swiss context, several practices have been identified that focus on the transition from ECEC to compulsory schooling, from lower to upper secondary school or transitions from education into the labour market. These practices have a strong focus on disadvantaged students with difficult starting positions that negatively affect the transitions between school levels.

4a Integrated setting of learning characterises practices that seek to tackle educational inequality in the regular school/learning settings without separating disadvantaged students. Such practices rely on holistic and inclusive support structures. Examples of integrated learning settings were identified in **Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Spain and Ireland**.

Example of integrated learning settings identified

*In **Luxembourg**, two practices in specific schools have been identified to combine formal and non-formal education. One practice is also bringing together ECEC and preschool/primary school and all-day care in one place.*

*A practice identified in **Spain** explicitly addresses the segregation of students of Roma background in separate classrooms. This specific practice seeks to intervene in both the school environment and community context (formal and non-formal).*

4b Separated setting of learning characterises practices that separates disadvantaged students from the regular school/learning setting. These can also be additional programmes in the non-formal educational setting aimed at specific groups of disadvantaged students. This element is mentioned in **all countries except Hungary and Finland**.

Example of separated learning settings identified

In the Spanish context several practices are identified that are separated settings of learning. One practice is the Spanish network of second chance schools. The association brings together more than 30 partners whose purpose is to provide concrete and effective solutions to young people who are outside the educational system and unemployed.

*Another practice from the **Spanish** context is an organisation with the aim of promoting social transformation and change. The practice is a community initiative that focuses on collaborative work between various actors that offer educational opportunities for learning and development outside of school time for children and young people.*

5. Parental education characterises practices which have their focus on the family level. Such approaches aim to support and/or educate parents in a way that benefits disadvantaged students. Such practices have been identified in **Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Spain** but also **Hungary** and **Lithuania**.

Example of parental education

*In the **German** context, several practices that seek to develop and help students on the family/parental level can be identified. The first set of practices seek to offer disadvantaged families additional support structures through including threshold parent related services (like language classes, education-orientated courses and counselling) into ECEC and primary schools. Another one, called “family classes” sets the chance for students and parents to go together to school one day a week for at least three to four months to improve the parents’ skills to support students’ school-related learning.*

6. Redistribution of resources characterises practices that arrange resources to benefit disadvantaged individuals, groups, practitioners, schools or areas. Those practices are mentioned in **Switzerland, Germany, Lithuania, Ireland, Spain** but also in **Norway** and **Finland**.

Example of practices on the school and regional level

***Finland** has identified a positive discrimination practice which, as already mentioned, is embedded within the national education system: In the context of resources, the Finnish government seeks to redistribute more funding to schools that are in lower SES areas with additional support for pupils of special needs.*

*In the **German** context, “education communes” were identified, where municipalities receive funding and counselling by a federal state-program to establish outcome-oriented governance of educational activities at the local level, like for instance a communal model for network-tailored support services at schools. This practice closely connects the effects on outcome and the distribution of extra resources.*

*In the **Norwegian** context, there is a regional framework of strategies and practices focusing explicitly on geographical areas regarded as “focus areas” that are in need of extra resources. The common objectives are ensuring inclusive, fair and good education and promoting opportunities for lifelong learning for all.*

3.2.2 Dilemmas of pioneering practices

As we learned elsewhere, (D2.3) PIONEERING practices – like any educational action – are marked by contradictory processes and dilemmas within professional practice (Helsper 2002; Jobst, 2010; Schütze 1996).

Inspired by the analysis of project partner descriptions of how to understand “PIONEERING”¹⁵ and the reflections of stakeholders during the interviews, focus group discussions and workshops, in the following we focus on two kinds of dilemmas regarding the understanding and processing of pioneering practices – *pattern* and *practice dilemmas*.¹⁶ Pattern dilemmas are constructions that are ideal-typical in some way and mark a quagmire that practices for tackling educational inequalities slip into as soon as they become realised in formal or non-formal educational contexts (Jobst, 2010: 198). Thus, we have to keep in mind that it depends on the concrete practice of how the pattern dilemmas come into being in specific practice situations. Another important aspect is how these dilemmas are addressed and solved.¹⁷ In contrast to pattern dilemmas, *practice dilemmas* point to the fact that educational practices in general, and pioneering practices aimed at tackling educational inequalities specifically, can produce counter-intuitive results in concrete practices which try to tackle or reduce educational inequality.

Pattern and practice dilemmas from the PIONEERING consortium partners’ perspective

As part of the data collection and analysis of stakeholder interviews, focus group and workshop discussions, we asked all PIONEERING consortium partners to reflect on dilemmas regarding the implementation of pioneering practices. Against this background, project partners identified in a reflexive manner a range of dilemmas or challenges which will be discussed before we have a closer look at stakeholder perspectives in a cross-country comparative perspective. Casting light on both might help us to better identify and understand challenges and pitfalls of pioneering practices tackling educational inequalities.

A) Pattern dilemmas

Universalism vs particularism: The first universalistic pattern dilemma the consortium partners indicate is the tension between *universalism* on the one hand and *particularism* on the other. Here we have a contradiction between two apparently equally valid principles in society. The dilemma in combating educational inequality lies in the fact that the practices and programmes aim to focus on the specific educational needs of certain groups or individuals – i.e. practices and programmes tackling educational inequality should try to differentiate and adapt pedagogical action in the sense of “needs-based practices”. On the other hand, this happens under the universalistic premise of treating everyone equally.

Top-down vs grassroots: A second pattern dilemma partners indicated is marked by a tension in how practices for tackling educational inequalities come into being or become relevant in practice contexts. One way they can become induced in practices is through *institutionalised, formalised, routinised, material and spatialised frameworks* (top-down), and other is through more *grassroots, experimental, new (respective newness) and reflexive practices* (bottom-up), which often contradict or go beyond institutional frameworks or top-down practices¹⁸. As the feedback of the consortium partners revealed, the two poles give rise to an omnipresent tension in the field of practice where actors try to mitigate educational inequalities.

¹⁵ For a further discussion and insight see Jensen et al. (2022).

¹⁶ We are aware that the poles of these “dilemmas” represent a simplification of the arguments in the partner feedback analysed here.

¹⁷ This will be in focus in the upcoming task of WP5 T5.3.

¹⁸ It should be borne in mind that the poles are a kind of simplification and simple polarisation. As mentioned above, reflexive or experimental modes of doing practice may also become routinised against the odds.

Participatory vs paternalistic strategy: A third pattern dilemma which came about is the tension between *participatory and activating strategies* versus *non-participatory actions or action frames* for confronting educational inequalities which define to very different degrees the agenda of what is to be implemented and how. This, too, implies tensions between more dynamic, open and reflective ‘customised’ actions compared to more continuous, institutionalised and routinised practices. While the former open space for more selective, differentiated and need-adapted actions based on active involvement, the latter focuses more on predefined frameworks and actions where the addressees of the actions are expected to adapt and fit in.

Structure vs agency: This was a final pattern dilemma which arose and problematises the tension between institutionalised and more agency-focused practices for tackling educational inequalities. This pattern was especially reflected in the context of arguments on the autonomy of practices, that is, what degrees of freedom are needed for the successful implementation of pioneering practices. In this context, the problem was discussed of how much structure and how much room for manoeuvre is or would be needed to let pioneering practices successfully evolve when attempting to eliminate educational inequality¹⁹.

B) Practice dilemmas

Alongside pattern dilemmas, consortium partners pointed out practice dilemmas. Hence, intentional practices can produce unintentional or unexpected results which might either foster or contradict the original aims of the pioneering practice.

First, focusing on the special needs of young people can help them and provide better support than just providing them with the ‘ordinary’ or ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions. However, this practice focus can also lead to differentiation, unequal treatment, access or outcome, to negative labelling or stigmatisation. Second, cultivating differences (symbolic boundary-drawing between groups, for example doing special needs treatment and thus providing more support to some young people compared to others) obviously conflicts with ideas and practices of inclusion, equal treatment and equal recognition. It thus contradicts the aim of eliminating boundaries, groupism, othering and differences. Third, recognising educational inequality in its complexity can hinder or torpedo innovative practices which are focusing on less considered or so far neglected aspects of social inequality or which try to focus on only one central aspect of educational inequality.

The dilemmatic character of educational practices is a central aspect in identifying, elaborating and comparing pioneering practices. Thus, although pioneering educational practices focus on tackling educational inequalities, they might produce a range of unintended or unexpected effects. A further critical examination of their impact from stakeholder perspectives will therefore make an essential contribution to the overarching aims of PIONEERED.

Taking all this as starting point, in the following we wish to elaborate – based on stakeholders’ feedback – what kind of pattern dilemmas stakeholders identify in practices which aim to mitigate or eliminate educational inequalities. To this end, the data material was analysed regarding a) core challenges and **pattern dilemmas** as well as b) **practice dilemmas** which were implicitly or explicitly indicated, hinted at or described during the stakeholder interviews, focus groups and in the workshop discussions for which all consortium partners were responsible.

Pattern dilemmas and practice dilemmas from stakeholder points of view

For the following analysis, we use two sources: a) the subchapters “Common narrative and main dilemmas” of the vignette analyses in D5.1 provided for every single consortium partner country, and

¹⁹ However, structure and agency can be considered relational depending on the theoretical stance taken. Having said that, only a minority of consortium partners explicitly expressed this view.

b) concrete dilemmas, which were named or discussed by the stakeholders, as collected and described by all project partners in their respective country contexts (summarised in the annex of D5.1). As indicated above, pattern dilemmas focus mostly on aspects of contexts and embeddedness, as well as the frames of concrete actions and practices while practice-related dilemmas have their origin in the temporally embedded situational doing of practitioners when combating educational inequalities. Both dimensions are strongly interrelated, overlap in form and content but come into being in different ways. While pattern dilemmas frame situations, practices dilemmas make situations.

A) Pattern dilemmas

Similarities

➤ *Universalism and egalitarianism versus particularism and differentiation:*

A first pattern dilemma which came about during the vignette analysis is the tension between *universalism and egalitarianism* on the one hand and *particularism and differentiation* on the other. As the analysis shows, stakeholders in many PIONEERED partner countries are aware that pioneering practices tackling educational inequalities are in some way double-edged. They face the challenge that combating educational inequality requires, on the one hand, a special focus on specific vulnerable groups, individuals, families or local contexts, differentiated treatment and unequal access to resources. On the other hand, this special focus implies unequal recognition and redistribution of resources, which contradicts universalism and egalitarianism. In the stakeholder feedback, the reflection about this pattern dilemma was often embedded in context-related observations like growing social, cultural, ethnic or economic differences within the population, issues of migration or rises in inequality or segregation. It was argued that these growing differences and heterogeneities required more differentiation in practices that aim to eliminate educational inequalities in order to meet specific needs. The ability to flexibly educate diverse pupils and students, to treat them differently, to provide them different access and means to combat educational inequalities – thus particularism – is seen as necessary for realising universalism and egalitarianism. However, as stakeholders point out, the practice itself obviously contradicts universalism and egalitarianism.

From a country perspective, this pattern dilemma becomes most obvious in the PIONEERED partner countries **Norway** and **Finland**. Both countries are social-democratic welfare states with a low level of stratification in the education system. Policy focus is on equalising access to resources, providing equal treatment and striving for equal outcome. Core means for realising this are universalism and egalitarianism, which both aim at coherent and overarching welfare policies and accompanying practices for and in the different groups of society. Based on the statements of the stakeholders (see section “Description of pioneering practices”), these countries possess “systemic practices”, i.e. the existing national education system and education policy are themselves viewed as pioneering. A key element here is that the principle of inclusion and education for all is at the core of the identified practices. Nevertheless, its pioneering character – equalising access to resources, providing equal treatment and striving for equal outcome – increasingly conflicts with the growing demand of needs-focused education to flexibly educate population of pupils and students that is becoming ever more diverse.

As our data shows, the tension between *universalism-egalitarianism* and *particularism-differentiation* was, in a more extenuated manner, also a topic among stakeholders in **Luxembourg**, **Switzerland** and (to a lesser extent) in **Spain** and **Lithuania**.

- Especially aspects of privatisation and segregation in the school system were problematised as opposed to a more comprehensive, inclusive, universalistic and egalitarian education. One striking reflection is found in the case of **Lithuania**. Here it was described that pioneering practices often evolve in the context of private schooling or through processes of privatisation, but this leads to segregation and even more inequality. This is consistent with the results of

the analysis of stakeholders' problem understanding. The analysis also shows that it is considered necessary to reduce "the gap between private/prestigious and public/stigmatised schools" (D5.1, p. 11). It is now becoming apparent that privatisation not only increases school segregation, but also privatises pioneering practices and makes them exclusive – a contradiction in terms.

- Linguistic heterogeneity, mostly an issue in **Luxembourg** and **Switzerland**, and the corresponding acceptance of different cultural capitals as equal in value was likewise pointed out as a challenge for more universalistic and egalitarian education. This becomes especially virulent when specific languages are recognised differently, meaning that they do not have the same value, acceptance or importance in educational contexts compared to more dominant languages. As it came about in **Luxembourg** and **Switzerland**, "positive discrimination" and recognition in the context of multilingualism could be a promising strategy for reducing educational inequality. However, this would in principle contradict egalitarian values. Hence, unequal access and treatment of young people from various socioeconomic and/or cultural backgrounds in a way that explicitly focused on their needs were seen as ambivalent, challenging and contradictory.
- Finally, especially in the **Spanish** stakeholder perspectives, there was a concern about gender equality. How can unequal gender-related treatment for reducing educational inequalities be justified against the universalistic or egalitarian understandings of education? Thus, gender mainstreaming – as well as multilingualism – is seen as means for reducing educational inequality, however, it is done at the cost of violating egalitarianism and universalism.

➤ *Holistic versus segmented/tailored approaches:*

The issue of *holistic versus segmented /tailored* approaches or practices tackling educational inequality also emerged during the qualitative data collection. This was pronounced **in all partner countries** when stakeholders discussed the need for customised and tailored practices addressing specific needs of young vulnerable persons. One of the central issues was how much the education system can/should specialize and differentiate with regard to different groups, interests and needs, where the limits of such a strategy are and what it would imply for the respective education systems. In a comparative perspective, this was mostly discussed as a problem in **Norway** and **Finland**, where education policy programmatically focuses on a more 'one-size-fits-all' approach while allowing for differentiation and need orientation on the classroom level, but also in **Luxembourg**, **Germany** and **Switzerland**, which are characterised by more segmented school systems.

Nevertheless, it is important to ensure a meaningful comparison. In **Norway** and **Finland**, the countries in Europe with the least segmented and differentiated school systems, this dilemma means something different as it does in **Luxembourg**, **Germany** and **Switzerland**. In **Norway** and **Finland**, the discussion circled around the growing need for differentiation and more 'customised solutions' for taking on contemporary challenges and educational inequality due to globally induced changes. However, in **Luxembourg**, **Germany** and **Switzerland**, the discussion focused more on whether they really need the existing complexity of segmentation and differentiation in the school system, how such systems foster educational inequality and whether less segmentation and differentiation would promote educational equality. In **Hungary**, the discussion circled around the issue of creating an alternative schooling universe instead of the betterment of the already existing system. Here, differentiation and segmentation – that is, the introduction of new schooling options in addition to the existing ones – were discussed as a reasonable way to respond to individual needs of young people and to reduce inequalities. In the other partner countries **Ireland**, **Lithuania** and **Spain** this pattern dilemma was a less salient topic.

➤ *Top-down versus grassroots, experimental*

Institutionalised, formalised, routinised, material and spatialised frameworks – often with a top-down focus – versus *grassroots, experimental, and reflexive practices* – so to speak bottom-up practices –

also emerged as a common pattern dilemma in the stakeholder interviews, discussions and reflections about dilemmas **in all partner countries**. Overarching educational policies and frameworks were compared to more differentiated, localised and community-embedded pioneering practices which often do not fit to the ‘traditional’ institutional frameworks, curricula or contents of the existing systems.

Aside from this overarching similarity, country discussions on dilemmas also highlighted differences in the concrete focus. In **Finland** and **Norway**, the discourse often circled around the integration of bottom-up initiatives into the defined common framework of a comprehensive school system and schooling. This was, for example, intensively discussed and reflected on in **Norway** (and to a lesser extent in **Finland**), accompanied by a unanimous conclusion by stakeholders that the comprehensive school system should be the reference point for bottom-up initiatives, and pioneering initiatives should be incorporated into the comprehensive school system and not come into existence alongside it.

In contrast, the discussion in **Finland** found it problematic that neighbourhood schools are organised differently in various municipalities. This happens due to differences in philosophies and economic support, which is in conflict with or even contradicts general legislation. This issue is deemed critical, as it leads to school segregation and unequal opportunities, contradicting the idea of a comprehensive school system and that of common integrated strategies for combating educational inequality.

In **Germany**, which in contrast to Norway and Finland has one of the most differentiated and segmented school systems, the issue came about in the discussion by reflecting on centrally managed and controlled inequality-related quality development versus the growing need for more flexible and customised bottom-up solutions at the local level for minimising educational inequalities. Here it was argued that formalisation – induced by centrally managed and controlled interventions – often contradicts more flexible, short- or longer-range tactics for reducing educational inequalities in local ‘hot spots’ (Brennpunkte). This is because formalisation does not provide the necessary degree of freedom for properly integrating more grassroots, experimental, pioneering (in terms of newness) and reflexive practices.

In **Switzerland**, the static and slow nature of federalism came into focus in the stakeholder discussions. Here, a stark contrast was seen between the slow national processes and procedures for implementing top-down frameworks and the proactive and more timely cantonal and communal policies, processes and procedures. Thus, top-down processes conflict or mismatch with bottom-up initiatives on the local level regarding their content and pace of implementation.

➤ *Formal versus non-formal and informal education:*

A fourth general pattern dilemma appeared in the context of formal and/or non-formal/informal education. This was especially discussed as a problem in **Norway**, **Germany**, **Switzerland** and **Hungary**. In **Norway**, stakeholders explicitly outlined that educational policies and practices have been characterised by close cooperation between both educational arenas, the schools on the one hand and clubs and associations on the other hand, regarding leisure, culture and sport activities. However, stakeholders discussed that over the last couple of years the interlacement of the formal and non-formal educational arenas has been decreasing in intensity, and that there is a trend toward decoupling the two arenas. This is reflected by growing ambiguities regarding the role of the non-formal methods and practices in formal educational contexts, their access to formal educational contexts, and the cooperation between schools and non-formal educational arenas like clubs or associations.

In **Germany** and **Switzerland**, the stakeholder discourse focused more on the relation of formal and informal education, respective the role of family in the context of formal education. Compared to all other PIONEERED partner countries, in **Germany** and **Switzerland** the family is seen as an important factor in the emergence of educational inequality and is named as key for reducing educational inequality. Stakeholders in both countries stated that there is a growing number of initiatives which try to convey education and educational intervention into the responsibility of families by invigorating families’ capacities to support their children’s education. However, this process was seen as ambivalent and a double-edged sword, as it shifts the responsibility for educational inequalities and

for tackling these inequalities to families who are already under pressure. In the eyes of the stakeholders, these ‘familisation’ strategies and the ‘de-schooling of responsibility’ bears the risk of increasing the tensions between formal and non-formal education – i.e. who is in charge of education? – and the risk of cementing or even fostering educational inequalities.

In **Germany**, non-formal activities, like social work was also seen as an important form of support for formal educational arenas when tackling educational inequalities. Stakeholders agreed on the usefulness of close cooperation, or even the inclusion of social work in schools with high levels of inequality and problematic issues. However, they also pointed out that these services need to be structurally anchored, especially in ECEC, as this funding of social work is still left to the discretion of the municipal level in most federal states.

In **Hungary**, the situation was described as being completely different. Here the stakeholder discussion indicated a conflicting relationship between formal institutions and non-formal initiatives. It was indicated that one reason for this is the role state funded formal education plays in promoting a political doctrine in **Hungary**. In contrast, non-formal educational initiatives are often perceived as grassroots, as resisting the existing doctrine and as a game changer. In this respect, they are at a high risk for being seen as a ‘threat’ to the ‘formal schooling arena’, undermining its premises.

➤ *Task complexity versus task specificity:*

A final general **pattern dilemma** came about in the context of task complexity and task specificity in reducing educational inequality. In **all partner countries**, especially in discussions around professionalism and professionalisation, stakeholders explicitly or implicitly hinted at the question of how much general competence is needed for tackling educational inequality compared to more specific, focused and narrow expert competence – hence specific professionalisation. Stakeholders agreed that increasing complexities and challenges in education must be met with a broader professionalisation of teachers to enable them to understand complexities and find appropriate ways for dealing with them. However, although it was seen as indisputable, this perspective was challenged by the standpoint that there are practical limits for understanding complexities and for what practitioners can actually do in their work. Stakeholders were therefore aware that the need for more professionalisation can easily become a strain, especially when taking into consideration the formal character of education, the growing complexity of role expectations for practitioners and the workload in education professions.

Country-specific aspects regarding pattern dilemmas

Aside from common findings among the partner countries, several country-specific differences regarding pattern dilemmas – often only in one or two countries – emerged in the context of stakeholder discussions.

➤ *Overarching institutional cooperation versus confidentiality and the right of protecting personal information of natural persons from third parties*

A first variation in pattern dilemmas came about in the context of *networking, interlacement and overarching institutional cooperation* for addressing educational inequalities. Especially in **Norway** and **Germany**, stakeholders viewed networking and the coordination of services as central aspects for reducing inequality in education in a more comprehensive way. Only through such coordination would it be possible to overcome the multifaceted challenges of educational inequality. However, there was a critical awareness of the issue of anonymisation, confidentiality and the right of natural persons to personal data privacy in the context of service sectors’ attempts to maintain data privacy, attempts that were at times felt to be over-burdensome. Here, stakeholders identified a high likelihood that information control – one of the most central aspects of individual freedom – is at risk when networking and coordinating services, as a person can hardly control the information flow regarding their personal information between institutions. This was seen as a critical issue and challenge in which personal control of information and data protection must be weighed up consciously and rigorously in every concrete situation.

➤ *Education tactics for reducing inequality versus socioeconomic conditions of inequality*

In **Germany** and **Spain**, the specific focus of policy, schools and teachers for understanding educational inequality as a product of individual skills and abilities was seen critically and in stark contrast to socioeconomic inequalities which lie outside the school. Policies and teachers' perceptions often conceptualise or understand educational inequalities as a result of individual skills, abilities or performances of children, neglecting the underlying drivers of educational inequality, namely the role of socioeconomic and cultural milieus and broader structural inequalities. To state it more radically, stakeholders viewed the individualisation of social problems based on political or ideological grounds in the context of educational inequality as a danger. Such individualisation might lead to neglecting or camouflaging socio-cultural, socioeconomic and structural inequalities in society – all factors which can also be drivers of educational inequality. Understanding this inequality as an outcome of different individual performances and thus neglecting social and structural conditions of inequality would reproduce and reinforce educational inequality rather than eliminate it.

➤ *Integrating young people with special needs and disabilities in the common school system versus increasing educational inequality*

Disabilities and special needs education came into focus only in **Lithuania** and **Luxembourg** in the stakeholder interviews and discussions. At the core of the reflections was the dilemma of how to integrate young people with special needs and disabilities in the common school system without risking an increase in educational inequality. Stakeholders in both countries argued that in the general school system, children with special needs are less likely to receive the individual treatment they need, therefore their outcomes might be worse than it would have been in segregated environments. Hence, it that the belief that the existing school system would be able to include such young people without risking higher levels of educational inequality was considered illusory.

➤ *Theoretical/academic knowledge versus practical knowledge*

It was a hot topic among the stakeholders in **Norway** that the importance of theoretical/academic focus in Norwegian schools is increasing to the detriment of practical knowledge and abilities. This was seen as one of the main drivers for growing educational inequality in Norway, and thus considered a kind of pattern dilemma produced by the 'knowledge society focus' which started dominating educational policies and discourse in Norway. There was a consensus among the stakeholders that educational inequality would be less of a problem if practical knowledge and abilities were rated higher in addition to theoretical knowledge in the Norwegian comprehensive school system. However, it was also stated that due to ongoing rifts and changes in the Norwegian economy and society – mostly induced by global developments and the 'de-manualisation' of labour –, in the long run theoretical knowledge would be a better protector than practical knowledge against transition risks and life-course-related inequalities. Thus, combating educational inequalities by strengthening the practical parts in education would reduce educational inequalities in schooling but would also increase transitional and life-course risk outside school. The overly academic focus of secondary education and the neglect of vocational/practical skills emerged as a strong theme in the interviews of the **Irish** stakeholder as well.

➤ *Focus on academic knowledge versus recognition of socio-emotional well-being and health*

In **Ireland** it was identified a tension between stronger focus on academic knowledge and lesser focus on socio-emotional well-being and health. Here, stakeholders argued that educational inequality is not only induced by children's different skills, abilities and social background as well as structural inequalities, but also by differences in health and well-being, which are often ignored in strategies for addressing educational inequality. Thus, schooling contexts should become more attentive not only to ability, social background and structurally induced inequalities but also to issues of health and well-being.

➤ *Digitalisation versus digital divide*

Finally, in **Spain** the digital divide was problematised from two perspectives. First, there are significant local and regional disparities regarding access and resources for carrying out digital education. Although digitalisation is in the focus of education policy in Spain, these disparities are ignored especially when it comes to the reproduction of educational inequality due to structural inequalities in access to digital means. Second, although digitalisation is seen as a means for reducing educational inequalities in Spanish education policy, this perspective ignores findings suggesting that digitalisation does not reduce but instead reproduces educational inequality in the same way as classical teaching.

B) Practice dilemmas

In addition to pattern dilemmas, stakeholders also pointed to more practice-related challenges and dilemmas resulting from the implementation of pioneering practices. These practice-related dilemmas are to be understood as positive or negative side effects or occurrences, that is, unintended outcomes of practice interventions. In other words, intentional practice can produce unintentional or unexpected results which might foster or contradict the original aims of the practice. In line with expectations, the practice-related discussions about dilemmas related to the same issues which came up in the context of pattern dilemmas but in a more concrete manner.

A *first* issue was raised in regard to special needs education. Stakeholders agreed that practices which focus on the special needs of young people can help and support them better and foster their inclusion more than just providing them with the ‘ordinary’ or ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions. However, stakeholders are aware that these practices often imply differentiation, unequal treatment and provision of unequal access, which can foster negative labelling and stigmatisation instead of reducing it or could even lead to further exclusion.

Second, stakeholders broadly agreed that cultivating differences in concrete practices in the sense of symbolic boundary-drawing between persons or groups to better address concrete needs often leads to othering, labelling and new inequalities.

Third, addressing specific needs, individualising needs-based treatment, and creating categorisations for legitimising different treatment or positive discrimination with concrete pioneering practices often imply reinforcing and stabilising power relations. This is the case because such practices are not powerful enough to change the established power relations between natural persons and corporate actors. The stakeholders agreed that the pioneering practices often do not change the game but reproduce or even reinforce these power relations.

Fourth, stakeholders were aware that recognising the complexities of educational inequality in concrete pioneering practice can hinder or undermine innovative practices which focus on less considered aspects of social inequality or which try to focus on only one central aspect of educational inequality.

Fifth, stakeholders discussed the problem that although policies and practices for tackling educational inequalities are needed now more than ever, there often seems to be a lack of willingness among teachers to support reforms and implement them. Starting reforms and fostering the implementation of pioneering practices can therefore lead to resistance and disengagement among teachers – often arising from their existing workload and multiple task roles in schools.

Finally, a practice dilemma was identified regarding the inclusion of young people with disabilities or special needs in mainstream schools. Here, consensus existed that this could subject those youth to further stigmatisation and discrimination while not properly addressing their needs since most mainstream schools are not sufficiently supported nor prepared to meet the special needs of these pupils.

General aspects beyond pattern and practice dilemmas

During the analysis of pattern and practice dilemmas, several aspects came about which are worth being discussed in brief. These aspects were addressed in the context of dilemma reflections but do not represent concrete pattern or practices dilemmas.

A first central aspect is the underfinancing of initiatives for reducing educational inequalities. Apart from Luxembourg, this problem arose in the stakeholder interviews and discussions in all countries. It is argued here that pioneering practices need sufficient and flexible funding which enables adjustment to concrete situations. Interestingly, this was not only an issue in countries that are marked by a systemic underspending in education, but also in the social-democratic welfare state countries, which have higher spending in education compared to the other partner countries. In this context, the redistribution and unequal distribution of money in the educational system and its specific fields were also brought up as problems, indicating an increasing competition between school levels and school fields²⁰.

A second important aspect was the issue of hope vs hopelessness for equal education regarding future developments on the one hand, and a general pessimism regarding openness and processualism in educational innovation on the other hand. Basically, stakeholders reflected critically on neo-liberal developments in education and, in relation to that, on the risk of an increase in educational inequalities. Here, bleak future scenarios were expressed more often by stakeholders than positive and optimistic scenarios.

Finally, time frames are a very important dimension when it comes to the implementation of pioneering practices. In this regard, stakeholders were clear that top-down processes are marked by a different speed of realisation and implementation compared to bottom-up initiatives. Bottom-up initiatives are characterised by a much higher speed of realisation and can thus be carried out faster than top-down policies and implementations. This leads to a desynchronised realisation of top-down and bottom-up practices. The aspects contributing to these differences in realisation time frames have yet to be considered and understood in pioneering practice theory and research.

The dilemmas indicated by stakeholders and systemised above confront professionals on-site with paradoxical situations and expectations as they attempt to carry out pioneering practices to combat educational inequality. For further research, it is therefore important to better scrutinise and understand how practitioners deal with these challenges in concrete situations, how they frame problems, what they conclude from the definitions of situations and how they then act in concrete situations. This will be part of T5.3.

4 Summary and discussion of the results

One aim of this paper was to compare stakeholders' awareness and experiences of current practices that attempt to reduce educational inequality. Another aim was to identify pioneering practices in each partner country. For this purpose, we chose a cross-country comparative perspective using the country vignettes from D5.1 as a starting point with pioneering practices tackling/reducing educational inequalities as the *tertium comparationis*, applying a 'three-step model of comparison'. In the first step, the perspectives of stakeholders were juxtaposed. In the second step, we contextualised the findings regarding international trends and the national constellation of the education system and the welfare state. Here, we explored whether countries could be grouped or clustered in regard to the existing models of education systems and welfare regimes. Finally, we discussed implications of theoretical and practical development of pioneering practices that address educational inequality.

The presentation of the results started with the analysis of the problem understanding of the stakeholders based on the stakeholder interview and discussion results from every PIONEERED partner. Here we found that the **data are characterised by similar understandings of educational inequalities among stakeholders**. Thus, clear differences in stakeholders' understandings and definitions of educational inequalities are an exception even though partner countries represent

²⁰ When deciding what is 'more' and what is 'less', the context plays a key role for interpreting the issue of not having sufficient economic resources for doing pioneering practices.

different welfare regimes and education systems. This we read as an indication that all PIONEERED partner countries are facing similar challenges when it comes to inequalities in the education system, which might be due to an increasingly globalised neo-liberal educational market. However, we are aware that reducing a complex phenomenon like educational inequality into analytical categories may hide or cover existing differences that subsist when such factors are regarded in the contexts within which they are embedded. In addition, one can also raise questions in relation to the adequacy of existing typologies of countries.

In the following, we investigated how stakeholders think educational inequalities should be tackled practically. When doing so, a range of similarities and differences between groups of countries became clear. **Regardless of their national context, stakeholders agreed that creating more educational equity requires a broad perspective that perceives education in its societally embedded context.** In addition, stakeholders pointed to the **teaching profession as an important means of combating educational inequality** and emphasised the **need for more personalised, need-focused education.** Country-group-specific ideas on how to combat educational inequality zooms in on the need to change the structure of the education system (desegregation, transmission) in countries with a high level of stratification in the education system (Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland). It was especially the countries with high levels of education system stratification and Ireland as a country with a medium level of stratification where stakeholders considered compensatory measures to be an important path to reduce educational inequality (family support, parent education, extracurricular activities, support of schools in disadvantaged communities). Besides this, further aspects could be identified – namely, changing the curriculum that does not recognise the cultural capital of special social groups in society and the need for awareness-raising for building a more *inclusive educational culture*.

Regarding **stakeholders' knowledge of pioneering practices national differences and similarities in terms of the degree of institutionalisation of those practices, as well as in terms of the interconnected aspects of pioneering practices** could be identified. Most of the practices in most of the countries can be described as model practices. Systemically institutionalised pioneering practices are exclusively identified in social-democratic system where the principle of inclusion and education for all is a central element of the national education system. Grassroots practices occur in those contexts where there is a lack of appropriate policy frameworks, e.g. where there are also no model practices to address educational inequality in education. Aspects that account for the pioneering character of practices either relate to the egalitarian education system as such, as in the social-democratic welfare countries, or they focus on improving structural permeability, learning settings, parent education, the teaching profession and the redistribution of resources.

Framed by these findings, we also scrutinised and wanted to understand – based on our pre-existing knowledge gathered through eye-opening discussions with the PIONEERED consortium partners – what kind of concrete challenges or dilemmas stakeholders saw when it came to the implementation of pioneering practices. Here, stakeholders pointed us to six more general kinds of ‘pattern dilemmas’ and to a range of partner-country-specific differences. Furthermore, stakeholders indicated a range of more concrete practice-related, often unintended challenges, **dilemmas** and outcomes. These ranged **from unintended labelling processes to teachers’ resistance towards the implementation of such practices due to high workloads and underpayment.** Especially underfunding was highlighted among stakeholders in all partner countries as a significant hindering factor for implementing and realising pioneering practices. Furthermore, **hope and hopelessness** became a topic when envisaging pioneering practices for the future. Finally, **temporality** was an important topic especially regarding top-down and bottom-up processes of emerging or implementing pioneering practices. Here, it was underlined that implementation of practices for reducing educational inequalities are much slower when they follow top-down procedures compared to the high speed and reactivity of bottom-up ways of acting and solving problems.

Seen from an overarching perspective, the findings regarding stakeholder knowledge about practices to overcome educational inequality, the characteristics of these practices and the challenges and dilemmas related to the practices show substantial similarities among the PIONEERED partner countries as well as specific differences. These similarities and differences are both induced by global educational developments on the one hand, and differentiated due to the temporal, national, regional or local embeddedness of educational processes on the other hand. This suggests that there is a clear awareness among stakeholders that educational inequalities cannot be thought of in isolation from the social context from which they grow. This, in turn, includes implemented pioneering practices which face and address both the global dynamics of educational inequality arising from neo-liberal educational policies and the local differentiated and embedded emergence of educational inequalities.

5 Critical reflection and implications

In a final section, we want to cast a critical eye on our analysis. First, the paper presents narratives on the problem of combating educational inequality based on prevalent assumptions – both those of the stakeholders and of the researchers. We can assume that the way stakeholders framed their knowledge depended on their affiliations. For example, some country reports stated that the institutional affiliation of the stakeholders seemed to make a difference with regard to what aspects were brought to the fore in defining, understanding and tackling educational inequality. While stakeholders from the policy field seem to be more focused on overarching strategies and frameworks for education (top-down orientations), stakeholders engaged in concrete educational practices focused more on situational relational dynamics of educational processes (practice orientation). Thus, as already mentioned in Section 3.1.1, if different stakeholders were chosen in the various partner countries, other perspectives might have found their way into our analysis. Additionally, from a reflexive, methodological point of view, it cannot be ruled out that the conversations in some interviews may have been (consciously or unconsciously) steered towards certain topics to a larger extent than others.

However, this paper contributes to an international discourse in which ideas about educational inequality and related factors as well as possible solutions are reflected on in their respective context with the practical aim of transforming educational systems and societies. The stakeholder knowledge and comparative analysis provide basic information that allow us to move from circumstances to solutions concerning both theoretical and practical development. The working paper identified topics relevant in the current national educational systems and discussions as well as their similarities and dissimilarities across countries. However, some aspects need to be further explored – such as the concrete situational handling of dilemmas in the context of the autonomy of practice. This will be a topic of further practical research – namely, the case studies in T5.3 and T5.4. As such, this working paper provides a proper starting point for further analytical induction.

6 Literature

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