

Policy bulletin

October 2008

EUROPEAN CITIES
AGAINST CHILD POVERTY



Tackling child poverty: the role of education in improving life chances for children and breaking cycles of deprivation

European Cities Against Child Poverty is a network whose members exchange mutual learning among local and regional authorities, in order to inform initiatives and policies which will successfully reduce child poverty. London is the lead partner in the network, which is comprised of five core partners (London, Milan, Helsinki, Amsterdam and Budapest) and five associate partners (Copenhagen, Uppsala, Sollentuna, Solna and Vasteras).



Educational attainment and child poverty in partner cities

Poverty and social exclusion have a major impact on the cognitive development and educational attainment of children. Not only children from poorer families but also those from disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities, immigrants or children with disabilities are more likely to face social exclusion and lower educational attainment.

Facing poverty in early childhood tends to affect school achievements and children in poverty are at greater risk of exclusion from school. They are also more likely to drop out of education early.

The right to education is established all over Europe, but is this really achievable for all children? Research has been carried out by each of our partner cities, and shown overleaf are our findings:

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- How can projects improve educational attainment?

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Mutual Learning on Social Protection and Social Inclusion



This newsletter is supported by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013).

Poor children perform worse at school

Only half of the poorest 10% of children in **London** achieve the expected educational standard at age 15, whereas over 80% of children living in the highest income decile reach this level. (DCSF, 2007)

Some ethnic minority children perform worse at school...

From 2005-06 in **Milan** out of a total of 31,764 foreign students attending primary, middle and secondary schools, over a third (12,759) were performing less well than their peers.

A survey of a special school in an area with high levels of immigration in **Solna** (Sweden) in 2006 showed that second generation immigrant children were performing less well than first generation.

...and are less likely to engage in all levels of education

This is a particular problem among the Roma community in **Finland**: only 2% of Roma children participated in preschool education (2001-02).

In **Sweden**, half of ethnic minority pupils at Upper Secondary school leave before taking exams which would make them eligible for university.

Drop-out from education and training is common to many cities

7% of **British** 16 year olds nationally are not in education, employment or training (NEET) but this level rises to 13% amongst those with a disability and 74% amongst teenage mothers (Prime Minister's Delivery Unit 2005).

In **Budapest** drop-out rates have fallen gradually from 10% to 8% in 2003-04, and to 6% in 2004-05, but it remains a problem. The main reasons for dropping-out are: poor command of Hungarian; Roma heritage; socio-economic situation; and disadvantages at Kindergarten.

In **Amsterdam** 15% of the youngsters aged 17-22 years leave school without a starting qualification (2006-07) The rate varies from 8%

to 23% in different areas of the city.

Drop-out levels are low in **Helsinki's** Finnish-speaking comprehensive schools (52 pupils from 2004-7) but most are children from low-income families.

These percentages cannot be compared since there are differences in the definitions (for example, age of the target group) and the extent and quality of monitoring

Lack of education reduces employment chances for young people

In **Amsterdam** absence from school increases with age: from around 4% at age 13 rising to approximately 10% at age 16/17. There is a correlation between absence from school at a young age and drop-out from education at a later stage, which decreases their chances of finding employment.

The more often a pupil was absent from school in **Britain**, the more likely he/she is to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) at age 16: 32% of NEETs were persistent truants at school.

Youth crime is an issue in all cities

In **Hungary**, 12% of all detected offenders are juveniles and they accounted for 13.6% of all victims of violent crimes in 2002. In **Helsinki** the major crimes committed by young people under 18 (in 2005) were: shoplifting (26%), criminal damage (25%) and assault (9%).

Data gathered in **Amsterdam** on 12-24 year olds suggest that most young offenders are involved in petty crime linked to unemployment, school drop-out and family problems. These links are also prevalent in **London**, where the overall number of youth crimes in 2007 fell slightly compared to 2006 - from 1,428 to 1,392, a fall of 2.5%.

Youth crime rates in Sweden are low, especially for those under 13 – nevertheless 3% of the 16 year old girls and 13% of the 16 year old boys in the city of **Solna** have committed a burglary during the last 12 months (2006).

Focus on school drop-out rates

This is defined as children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll and who are not receiving a suitable education otherwise.

London: – 7% at age of 16 are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

Milan: 8% at age of 16 leave school

Amsterdam: 15% between age of 17 and 22 leave school without a starting qualification

Budapest: 6% drop-out rate

*These numbers show how NEET status is a possible indicator of increases in youth crime rate. It should be noted that these percentages cannot be compared since there are differences in the definitions (for example, age of the target group) and the extent and quality of monitoring.

Second policy workshop: Milan, 24th September 2008

The role of education in improving life chances for children and breaking cycles of deprivation.

The network held its second policy workshop in Milan, attended by representatives from London, Amsterdam, Helsinki, Milan, Budapest, Solna and Vasteras. Delegates explored the role played by education in improving children's life chances and reducing social exclusion. In particular delegates:

- Exchanged knowledge about strategies and projects in place in partner cities which successfully engage disadvantaged children in educational projects to prevent them from becoming excluded from school or involved in anti-social behaviour;
- Discussed the role played by local government or other organisations working with this target group;
- Considered how cities can learn from each other and build on these examples of successful projects or strategies to improve children's life chances.

Below, we present the main conclusions of the workshop.

What are the causes of poor educational attainment in partner cities?

Levels of educational attainment are not measured specifically in all partner cities but representatives from every city recognised that poor educational attainment is strongly related to child poverty. Drop out and youth crime are symptomatic of this relationship. Children suffer the consequences of deprivation, poverty and social exclusion on **three different and complementary levels:**

○ Personal:

Disabilities and language problems can influence pupils' results at school. In Hungary for example students with special education needs (SEN) study in classes that follow a special curriculum, or in separated special schools established to cater for their needs. However isolation of this kind is the cause of poor educational results and constitutes a barrier to a child's performance.

A poor command of the language used at school can also affect children's performance and chances later in life. In both cases delegates concluded that integrating children as much as possible is crucial to ensuring that these barriers are overcome at a young age. Extra support given by specialist teachers, for children with language needs or learning difficulties, can complement this system.

O Family:

The influence of a child's family on his or her performance at school cannot be underestimated. Research has shown that interventions at an early stage of a child's life make a great impact. Disadvantage at school can be caused by a lack of stimulation by parents or financial inability to have youngsters participate in cultural or sport activities. This can be exacerbated by parents' lack of recognition of the importance of educational attainment, or the low educational level of the parents themselves.

The socio-economic status of a pupil's family as well as parents' education levels have an effect on a child's educational attainments. One way of tackling this problem is to increase the services offered by a school. For example in Amsterdam all primary schools will have to become "community schools" and offer pre-school activities and support services for parents. They are a good example of how social services and parents can be brought together to participate actively in school life. In Solna the financial burden of schooling is significantly reduced: parents do not usually incur any costs for teaching materials, school meals, health care or school transport. This makes a school more inclusive for all its pupils

and gives children the chance to achieve at school regardless of their family background.

O Social context:

The wider context in which a child lives also impacts on his or her education. Differences between neighbourhoods, caused by a lack of integration of immigrants or other social problems (e.g. unemployment, crime, drug and alcohol abuse), can lead to stigmatisation and prejudice which in turn affect a child's motivation and attainment at school.

Children living in high mobility families represent a concern for school institutions and Local Authorities; there are many challenges associated with the integration of immigrant children. In Milan from 2005-06 out of a total of 31,764 foreign students attending primary, middle and secondary schools, over a third (12,759) were performing less well than their peers. While 11% of the children attending nursery, primary and middle schools are from a foreign background, this proportion drops to 8% in secondary school, indicating a level of drop-out among this group.

Areas where many problems interact can also become hotspots of crime, as shown by an example in Hungary where adverse socio-economic conditions have turned some eastern regions of the country into "crime-producing areas" where the rate of youth offenders is above the national average. There are as many young offenders in one of these regions as in Budapest, despite the capital having a population of over twice the size.

How can projects run in European cities improve educational attainment?

Representatives from seven partner cities who took part in the workshop identified the following interventions as successful methods to improve educational attainment.

O Tailored programmes and free pre-school and extra-school programmes: different individuals or communities need different solutions

Tailored programs can tackle different causes of social-exclusion and anti-social behaviour through a personal approach to the child/young person and the development of an individual teaching plan. This can enhance their social skills and lead to an increase in their general knowledge and abilities.

Another important strategy used to reach the same results is to support a child by supporting their family: to help the children by providing more support for working and single parents. Some programmes involve parents directly, making childcare more affordable and education financially possible.

Delegates identified the following projects, which are tailored to meet the different needs of different young people.

O Vocational education delivered at school by specialist staff

Integrating vocational learning and training activities into basic education has been found to improve educational attainment. These methods conform to the aims and content of basic education but use flexibility and instruction which are adjusted to individual needs and situations.

Training teachers, managers and other personnel on issues such as disability, diversity, and wellbeing at school creates a positive background for improvements in educational attainment.

Case study: Own Career - Vesala Comprehensive School, Helsinki

The Own Career project seeks to support young people (14-17 years old) in finishing their basic schooling and applying for further education or training after school. The individually supportive, work-related teaching and family involvement in the support network help pupils to develop life management skills. The objective is to strengthen the young person's motivation to study and to prevent alienation from the educational system.

In an Own Career class, the student alternates between classroom studies and a work placement. The pupil receives two five-week periods of guided workplace learning. The student is assessed for special educational needs (SEN) and receives an individual teaching plan. Incorporated into the programme of support are network meetings for all the pupils which include faculty, social and youth workers, family and extended support.

Around 75 of the school's 380 pupils have SEN status and 25 of them are now integrated into normal classes. The school employs two special educational needs teachers and one youth worker.

Vesala Comprehensive School receives Positive Discrimination funding from the City of Helsinki. The funding is used to employ one extra teacher and to purchase new technology and materials, as well as providing for cultural events for the pupils.

O Involving mentors and local communities

Involving experienced social personnel, mentors and other operators can create closer links to the research and development of methods of tackling social exclusion and can create important positive role models. Utilising the local community and setting up local networks helps to create a common awareness of childhood social problems and incorporates local resources and competences into educational programmes.

Case study: Goal, part of “Particular Initiatives towards Youth at Risk” - Amsterdam

The City of Amsterdam's innovative “Goal” project works with young people (average age 16) at risk of dropping out of education or training. The “Goal” project was developed in 2003 but started in 2004 as part of the “Youth at Risk” programme. Its main objective is to strengthen or repair the links between youngsters (12-23) and education or work.

Young people who are on the verge of leaving school or have left school already without a starting qualification and who do not have regular employment (“youth at risk”) are matched with a volunteer mentor. “Goal!” is aimed at the empowerment of youngsters by one-on-one coaching. A mentor listens to the problems, needs, ambitions of the youngster and coaches them from a neutral point of view and most importantly in a positive manner without stigmatisation.

Mentors are volunteers with a successful professional career and act as a role model. Many of the young people of the target group do not have regular contact with people from that part of society. Through these mentors, young people can get a different look at society. By matching them, both mentor and youngster can get a different look at society. The mentor and participant meet every week for up to a year (minimum of three months).

Although the main goals are obtaining starting qualifications and/or a job, the mentor and participant define their own focus and the content of their trajectory. It can consist of (among many others): homework support, working on their self image, mediation in problems with parents, visiting organisations and leisure activities. The volunteer mentors are supported by mentor supporters. These supporters and the organisation they work for (schools, youth care, community development etc.) are responsible for the recruitment of participants.

Participation is not linked to youngsters at risk who have visible problems in terms of school absence or crime. There is also participation of youngsters who due to family, social, health or financial problems, find it difficult to develop their talents on their own. In a preventative way, all these youngsters are guided to develop their competences and talents in order to enhance their future perspectives.

Since 2004, over 2,000 young people have received coaching and motivational support in this way.

O Improving students' motivation, self-esteem and commitment through informal learning

Improving self-esteem and self-confidence among children, inside and outside the school environment, can help them to reach better educational attainment levels. Within such a setting, a child can be motivated to work on their future chances and develop their own talents.

Case study: The Talent Factory, Milan

The Talent Factory project is closely linked to the range of services traditionally offered by the orphanage, which has been present in the Municipality of Milan since 1500 as part of the two institutions "Martinit" and "Stelline". The project is run in the former premises of the orphanage.

The activities of the Talent Factory are aimed at vulnerable children, victims of injustice and deprivation. The activities encourage and stimulate expression, create the potential for building a positive self image and acquiring the skills that are essential for their future development. These release the child's capability of growing and developing through difficulties.

Starting from this concept, the project encourages the active participation of children in expressive activities. Activities include:

1. Theatrical education (theatre lab)
2. Music lab
3. Atelier of narration - drawing, fairy tales, storytelling (workshop)
4. Dance lab
5. Printing works lab
6. Summer camp: a programme of activities and workshops during summer periods for children and adolescents whose parents cannot afford holiday trips.
7. The talent box: this enables the transfer of The Talent Factory's activities into different contexts like schools, streets (educatori di strada) and international emergency contexts, as successfully tested in Sri Lanka and in Honduras

The types of language used and enhanced in each lab, are "non verbal" and universal. Music, theatre, dance and drawing represent means of communication which can be used in every culture by users of any age, as they are not linked to the verbal development. Usually, each laboratory lasts a week and involves up to 60 children. Children are supported by two trainers: one "technician" and one psycho-pedagogue. The Talent Factory works with around 1,000 children each year.

○ Integrating all children within mainstream schools

The involvement of the local community in the school system is an important issue. The relationship between schools and their local communities has a crucial impact on the success of the delivery of education. By integrating all children into main stream schools, different communities can interact and reduce the chance of social exclusion.

Case study - “From the Back Bench”, Budapest

In Budapest, “special schools” – designed primarily for educating pupils with disabilities separately from the mainstream – find half of their pupils are of Roma heritage. With only one in ten Roma children participating in pre-school education in Hungary, these children suffer a distinct disadvantage at a young age.

The Ministry of Education has developed a nationwide system, called the National Network of Integration in Education, for the provision of the teaching of disadvantaged children, particularly the Roma in integrated classes. The network has two objectives: firstly to create a system of basic institutions mainly responsible for integrating the Roma into mainstream education and secondly to improve professional background services on that basis.

Budapest’s “From the Back Bench” programme is aimed at helping Roma children to return to school classes with other children. The programme increased the numbers of Roma children learning alongside other children in mainstream school by two and half times from 2001-05.

In addition to the programme, the administration for education wished to increase the interest in participation by offering free meals to pre-school pupils in need. Banning the practice of having failed pupils repeat school years in the first three grades and the conversion from grades to textual evaluation increases equity for underachievers in their school career.

○ Integrating education and other services to tackle social exclusion more effectively

Finally the network looked at initiatives which successfully bring together different services and agencies to work in a more integrated way to tackle the issues of improving life chances for children and breaking cycles of deprivation.

Case study: The Rewind project, London

The Rewind project in London’s Royal Borough of Kingston supports vulnerable young people at risk of offending through joining up relevant services - the police, youth offending teams and social and education services – to intervene at an early stage to prevent social exclusion among young people. It operates a cluster based approach whereby clusters of schools and integrated community services work together and are supported by a multi-disciplinary team.

The project uses an integrated database which tracks and monitors progress for all referred vulnerable children and young people. The focus on data collection and analysis ensures early identification and intervention and aids the tracking and monitoring of vulnerable young people at risk of offending. The project is dependent on good information sharing and effective joint working but it has the benefit of reduced costs and pooled resources.

During the project’s lifetime, numbers of first time offenders have dropped by 47% and the proportion of young offenders in employment, education or training stands at over 90%.

Summary points

Poverty and social exclusion have a major impact on the cognitive development and educational attainment of children. In particular the consequences of those phenomena are suffered on three different and complementary levels: the personal, the family and the social context level.

In the face of these barriers, several policies have been found to be successful:

- Running tailored programmes and free pre-school and extra-school programmes which can be easily adapted to suit the different needs of individuals or communities

- Combining vocational training with basic education in school and workplace settings. This special combination is best delivered by trained personnel with experience of working with youth at risk.

- Training and involving members of the public as mentors or community workers. Their involvement can provide an important support network for young people and help to tackle wider social problems.

- Improving students' motivation, self-esteem and commitment through informal learning. Projects which address other problems faced by young people in informal, often creative, settings have successfully tackled barriers associated with a lack of language skills or a lack of confidence.

- Integrating education and other services tackles social exclusion more effectively, especially when social services, local community organisations and the police, among others, are involved.

This publication is supported by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013.)