

VI. Resistance processes to EU initiatives

The Lisbon Strategy, Europe 2020 and EU instruments and/or comparison such as the European Qualification Framework (EQF), the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) are taken as reference by the countries involved and have an impact on the national discussions and positioning in terms of education. Policy implementation, including on ESL, relates to the use of international benchmarks and recommendations setting targets and developing national and regional strategies. Moreover, in several participating countries, poor or lack of awareness of EU policies is common among local actors and much less evident among actors at the national level, who revealed deeper knowledge about it. This unbalance can be associated with diverse levels of resistance and implementation deriving from the fact that some EU funds and initiatives are partly provided through national funding processes. As mentioned in the Hungarian Report, the European Social Fund (ESF) is seen as relevant but the distribution of resources and its bureaucratic features may be questioned, as it builds on and leads to uneven access.

Inclusion plans, plans against poverty, and against ESL are being developed in parallel throughout the different countries as national expressions of the EU guidance. The extension of compulsory education and the concern about qualifications to ease labour insertion are also common features in countries' educational systems, mirroring EU proposals and targets, and are re-contextualised within different national realities.

However, resistance to implementation may arise from the so-called "soft binding" of European measures, where there are less formal forms of controlling the achievements agreed upon, and from difficulties of communication among the different levels of decision-making, as highlighted in the Dutch Report. The stakeholders in the Netherlands were aware of initiatives and EU funding available for reducing ESL, however, they were also worried about the administrative workload and knowledge required to apply for such EU funding. Also, as mentioned in the Portuguese and Spanish reports, resistance emerges from the changes in management principles of the education systems, fostered by changes in governments and legislation. As these changes are expected to introduce structural and procedural transformations, actors apparently resist becoming involved in projects whose development could be at stake.

In Belgium, resistance rises from the tension between the construction of a knowledge economy and the educational need to reduce ESL. This tension concentrates mostly around the translation of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) into the goals of Flemish education and requirements for attaining a qualification (more focus on the demand from the labour market or a broader/ emancipatory education for all). Another example is the resistance to EU desegregation initiatives by Swedish schools. Segregation has increased in recent years in line with free school choice. In the Netherlands, local actors' resistance to EU initiatives relates to the definition of the basic qualification, seen by some of them as unrealistic in its feasibility.

In some countries, as emphasised by the Austrian report, EU initiatives may raise political resistance from political parties that see it as undue EU interference in national matters. Furthermore, in Hungary there is a clash between EU priorities and national priorities.