

# Inclusion4Schools

## D2.2 Recommendations to National Data Services



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## Revisions

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## *Inclusion4Schools Project Summary*

The emerging European context is to a large extent characterized by widening and deepening inequalities, the crisis of democracy, and the disintegration of communities. It is especially the case in the Central-Eastern European semiperipheral, post-socialist context, where there is a growing tendency of rearticulating authoritarian, nationalist, neoconservative discourses, which are increasingly infiltrating the political landscape within and beyond Europe. This „retrotopia“ is conducive to the hegemonic production of an imaginary social homogeneity, which consequently stirs up reactionary xenophobia, fear, and hatred through the construction of external intruders (e.g. the migrant) and enemies within (e.g. the Roma). Such a milieu steeped in fear tears up old wounds and produces new divisions as well, hence the construction of new walls – symbolically, as well as physically. Since the leitmotif of this programme is primarily educational, the proposed action targets such (imaginary, symbolic, and real) walls of exclusion which are intended to segregate children (based on class, ethnicity, gender, etc.), which are meant to divide and alienate the local communities to which those children nonetheless belong, thus actively (re)producing inequalities. **In contrast to the power-relations of exclusion, the culture of silence, and the reproduction of unjust structures, the project aims to foster and promote pedagogical relations of inclusion, a culture of dialogue, and the transformation of unjust structures through education.** Running in parallel to the research and innovation actions the central objectives of the proposed action are

- (1) to support and coordinate community schools (as being central to the constitution and maintenance of cohesive local communities) and their respective communities of practice, and
- (2) to create a place and culture of sharing (knowledge, praxis, solidarity) between such communities by initiating and coordinating the convergence and synergies of local, regional and transnational communities.

The expected impact of the proposed project is to contribute to the European initiatives and interventions that aim at reversing inequalities. Adopting a mission-oriented, impact-focused approach to address the specific challenges of the call, synergies will be enhanced between the relevant stakeholders through coordinating and supporting the cooperation between teachers, researchers, local communities and other relevant stakeholders (such as policy-makers), in order to generate networks of policy development and to promote the policy uptake of the project.

### *Partners*

Participant No	Participant organisation name	Country
1	<a href="#">Regional Centre for Information and Scientific Development</a>	Hungary
2	<a href="#">John Wesley Theological College</a>	Hungary
3	<a href="#">C.E.G.A. Foundation</a>	Bulgaria
4	<a href="#">J. Selye University</a>	Slovakia
5	<a href="#">Oltalom Charity Society</a>	Hungary
6	<a href="#">Albanian National Orphans Association</a>	Albania

# 1. Identification of the main challenges

## Revealing Differences: Europe's Request for Help

Europe, particularly the European Union (EU) and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), is experiencing a large social change. This change is shown in a number of ways such as education, work, health and other systems that are all interconnected. Despite ongoing efforts to address these issues, challenges such as gender inequality and regional disparities persist, disparities between genders or territories continue to serve as symbols for different levels in society.

The dynamism of this societal transformation is profound, resonating across various sectors and affecting the lives of millions. As Europe navigates these societal challenges, it confronts a complex interplay of historical legacies, cultural norms, and economic forces. Gender disparities, for instance, reflect deeply ingrained social attitudes and structural biases that resist easy remedies. Similarly, regional inequalities stem from historical trajectories, uneven development, and competing interests.

## Interconnected Economic and Social Challenges

Economic disparities present a significant challenge within the EU, especially in CEE countries. Since the early 1980s, many developed economies, including those in the EU, have experienced a rise in income and wealth inequality. While a small portion of business owners have substantial earnings and various CEE nations undergoing structural changes have prevalent unemployment rates, the overall income inequality in these countries remains notably lower than in developed Western nations. The Great Recession of 2008 brought about a disruption in the declining trend of income inequality across the EU, resulting in a slowdown in income convergence and a significant increase in inequality within many countries. This economic disparity is further complicated by regional inequalities within the EU, with particular attention paid to the role of capital cities and large urban agglomerations, especially in the Central and Eastern European countries (CECs).

It is becoming increasingly clear that these economic disparities are intertwined with educational inequalities and ethnic disparities, creating a complex web of social inequalities. For instance, the Roma population in CEE may face some challenges, including discrimination and segregation in education. It is clear that educational inequality persists in European educational systems. This is not simply a reflection of differences in students' effort, skills, or resilience, but also of the obstacles that some groups face due to their social background. Despite decades of efforts to reduce these obstacles, they remain a significant challenge.

## Addressing the Interconnected Challenges

The nexus between economic and social disparities underscores the complexity of the challenges facing Europe. While economic inequality often manifests in income gaps and wealth concentration, its ramifications extend far beyond financial disparities. Social inequalities, such as those rooted in education and ethnicity, exacerbate economic disparities, creating a vicious cycle of disadvantage for marginalized communities.

Effective policy interventions and robust governance mechanisms are imperative to address these interconnected challenges. By targeting both economic and social determinants of

inequality, policymakers can foster a more equitable and inclusive society. This requires a holistic approach that acknowledges the interplay between economic structures, social norms, and institutional frameworks.

Central to this effort is the need to build inclusive institutions that prioritize equality of opportunity and social justice. This entails reforming education systems to ensure equitable access to quality education for all, regardless of socioeconomic background or ethnicity. It also requires combating discrimination and promoting diversity in all spheres of society, from the workplace to public services.

At its core, tackling economic and social inequalities is about fostering social cohesion and solidarity. By bridging the divide between different socio-economic groups and marginalized communities, Europe can unleash its full potential as a diverse and vibrant continent. This necessitates a concerted effort from governments, civil society, and the private sector to address the root causes of inequality and create a more inclusive future for all Europeans.

## **Policy Relevance and EU Priorities**

It could be argued that research on educational inequality is highly relevant to policy, especially considering the emphasis on access to quality and inclusive education as expressed in the European Pillar of Social Rights. Enhancing equity and inclusion in education and training would be a strategically significant step within the context of the European Education Area.

The Lisbon summit in March 2000 marked a significant shift in the EU's approach to education. With the understanding that education and training play a vital role in achieving their economic and social objectives, EU Member States began working together to set specific goals in the field of education.

## **Legal Framework**

The EU is founded on principles of equality, human dignity, and the safeguarding of fundamental rights. These principles are upheld by a comprehensive legal framework designed to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all individuals.

The EU has introduced a number of key directives, such as the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) and the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC), with the intention of guaranteeing equal treatment and combating discrimination in employment and occupation.

Despite ongoing efforts to reduce educational inequalities in the EU, disparities persist. These are fuelled by a number of factors, including socioeconomic factors, institutional issues and resource-based discrepancies, which disproportionately affect students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

## Tackling Social Inequalities in the EU: the Need for a Comprehensive Approach

Despite numerous pieces of legislation aimed at reducing social inequalities in the European Union (EU), these inequalities persist, pointing to the need for a deeper understanding of their causes. These inequalities are multifaceted, encompassing economic, educational, health and gender inequalities, each driven by different social, cultural and economic factors.

Sociological studies highlight the role of structural elements, such as social stratification and unequal distribution of power, in perpetuating inequalities. The Marxist perspective, for example, emphasises the role of capitalist economic structures in creating class divisions.

The paradox of social mobility suggests that inequalities can persist even when legislation promotes equal opportunities. Cognitive biases, such as in-group favouritism or confirmation bias, can hinder the even implementation of laws and policies designed to reduce social inequalities.

Finally, there is an important link between spatial and social inequalities. Economic inequality, a key driver of wealth concentration and reduced social mobility, together with the lack of regional development and the unequal distribution of resources within the EU, contribute to persistent social disparities between different regions and Member States.

The EU is a strong advocate of the eradication of segregation and the fight against social inequalities. However, there is a striking discrepancy between normative aspirations and actual reality. Despite political and legal frameworks condemning social inequalities and segregation, practical implementation often falls short.

Policy makers in most EU countries tend to favour the middle class over marginalised groups, thereby perpetuating and exacerbating social inequalities. This preferential treatment perpetuates a system in which disadvantaged groups continue to struggle for equal opportunities and representation.

Tackling social inequality in the EU requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. First, existing policies and legislation need to be reassessed to ensure that they do not inadvertently perpetuate inequality.

## The Inclusion4School Project: Addressing Social Inequalities

The Inclusion4Schools is a four-year Coordination and Support Action (CSA) project under the H2020 framework, dedicated to addressing the escalating issue of educational inequality in Europe. The project focuses on fostering pedagogical inclusion, promoting a culture of dialogue, and transforming unjust structures through education. By challenging the systemic reproduction of inequalities and the logic of exclusion, Inclusion4Schools aims to enhance social mobility and equal opportunities, especially in regions where such disparities are most pronounced. The project operates primarily in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia, countries that share a history of segregation and social inequality, particularly impacting the Roma communities. A significant focus of Inclusion4Schools is on addressing Roma segregation and improving the quality of education in resilient segregated schools. The project recognizes that desegregation is a long-term goal that requires broad social consensus and multi-sectoral involvement. By supporting segregated schools in raising standards and involving local communities and NGOs, the project aims to foster deeper social changes and create a bridge between isolated rural communities and the broader society.

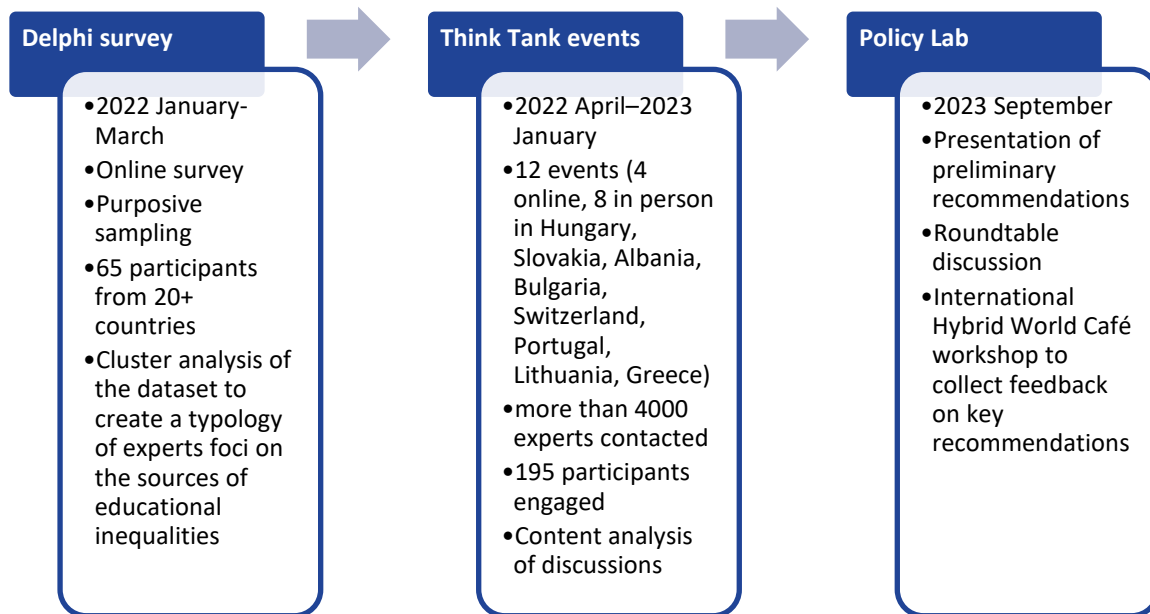
Central to Inclusion4Schools is the development of cohesive local communities and transformative practices and education to dismantle barriers of segregation. The project supports resilient community schools, facilitates knowledge sharing, and implements targeted strategies to counter social inequalities. By involving a diverse consortium of academic institutions, NGOs, and private entities, the project emphasizes collaboration and the dissemination of effective practices across local, regional, and transnational communities. Events such as workshops, international conferences, and awareness-raising events are organized to foster experimentation and innovation, encouraging stakeholders to share their experiences and develop best practices.

To achieve its objectives, Inclusion4Schools undertakes a range of activities, including a series of community-building events and open school classes to support school-community partnerships, summer and winter schools and online training for teachers on professional self-evaluation, and preparing a methodological handbook on participative methods for the research on educational inequalities. The project also develops a communication platform to share good practices in transformative education and uses this platform to share knowledge and link various stakeholders. Additionally, it assesses the quality of statistical data provision across Europe through a series of think tank events to formulate recommendations for coherent and reliable data collection processes in the EU. The project promotes cooperation between teacher training institutes and schools, organizes focus group discussions, to prepare policy recommendations, and enhances stakeholder involvement in policy design. Through these efforts, Inclusion4Schools aspires to foster cohesion among educational and societal stakeholders, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable European society.



## 2. Milestones towards evidence-based proposals

The culmination of our policy recommendation journey reflects a meticulous process, drawing from a rich tapestry of research methodologies and scientific endeavours. Our approach was multifaceted, encompassing a diverse array of techniques in order to ensure the robustness and holism of the framework.



### Delphi survey

Using the Delphi method, we consulted sociological and statistical societies, leading higher education institutions, relevant local and central authorities, and anti-segregation NGOs to identify desired changes in data collection and provision. We also inquired about their views on potential data extensions and whether they perceived data requests or provisions by other actors as potentially conflicting with their values or interests.

In early 2022, a Delphi survey was conducted to explore core issues in educational inequalities across Europe, gathering expert opinions through an online questionnaire. The purposive sample, selected using roster and snowball methods, included 65 participants from over 20 countries, primarily academics from universities and research institutions, as well as practitioners from administrative and financial sectors. Despite limitations in sample size, the survey employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, uncovering three main clusters of perspectives: one focused on sociocultural factors like family background, another on children's efforts and family support, and the third on the role of schools and teachers. These clusters were further analysed using IBM-SPSS Optimal Scaling, revealing regional and professional differences. Nordic experts, for instance, were closely associated with sociocultural emphasis, while participants from post-Soviet regions leaned towards individual achievement. The survey also identified three distinct policy attitude clusters: one generally supportive of current political practices, and two critical, particularly concerning data availability on family and non-family contexts. The findings highlight regional

disparities in educational infrastructure and the varied focus on micro, meso, and macro-level factors across Europe.

In conclusion, the study provided a nuanced understanding of educational inequalities in Europe, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions that address the diverse factors at play. These results served as the foundation for developing discussion points for our upcoming think tank events.

### Think Tank events

The Inclusion4Schools project organized a series of think tank events from April 2022 to January 2023, designed to gain a comprehensive understanding of data needs related to educational inequalities across Europe. We asked researchers for information on what the data reporting system and the administration’s ability to support / hinder the collection of research data was like in their countries. Our main aim was to map out the available information - kinds of data - that is needed to look at educational inequalities at a structural level. Cross-sectoral think tanks were established in each participating country and those involved in parallel research and innovation action projects (RIAs). These events aimed to engage a wide array of stakeholders, including researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners, to present specific cases of segregation and assess how well existing statistics reflected their local realities. The project emphasized the need for a holistic approach to data collection and analysis, recognizing that tailored interventions must consider the diverse socio-cultural contexts across Europe.

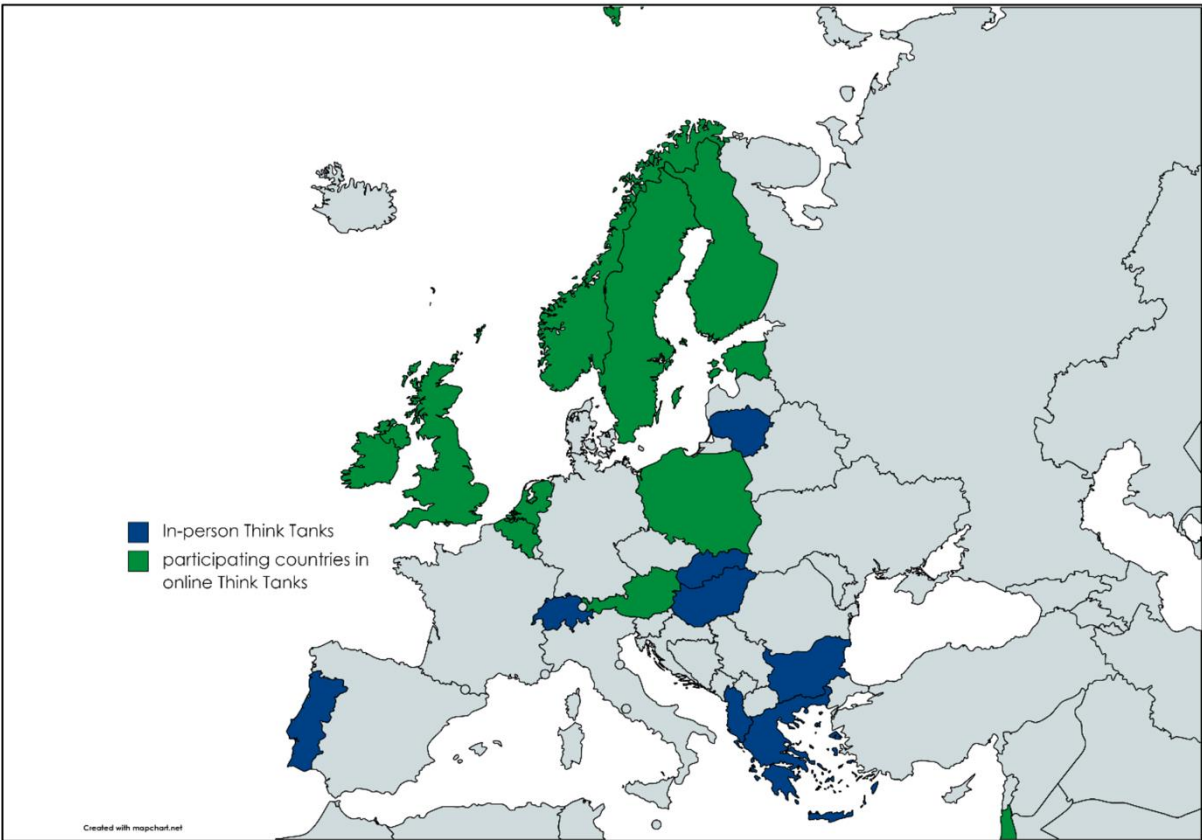


Figure 1: Countries participating in think tank events

Over the course of 12 events—four held online and eight in person across Hungary, Slovakia, Albania, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Portugal, Lithuania, and Greece—the project reached out to over 4,000 experts, with 195 actively participating. These think tanks employed direct engagement workshops to delve into critical issues such as data harmonization, comparability, and the challenges of data access under GDPR regulations. Discussions revealed that despite efforts to standardize data across Europe, significant disparities remain, particularly regarding what constitutes ‘sensitive data’ in different countries. This highlighted the urgent need for more consistent data collection practices to facilitate meaningful comparative research on educational inequalities.

The thematic analysis of the transcripts of the think tank discussion was instrumental in identifying key areas where data collection and policy could be improved. Participants discussed the importance of involving marginalized communities in data collection processes, particularly in regions with a history of segregation. The events also underscored the necessity for local actors, such as NGOs and educational authorities, to collaborate closely in addressing these issues. Overall, the think tanks succeeded in mapping out the types of data needed to tackle educational inequalities structurally and formed the basis for developing a set of policy recommendations aimed at fostering equitable educational opportunities across Europe.

The Think Tank events together with the results of the Delphi survey served as a basis for preparing the first set of recommendations in mid-2023.

## Policy Lab

On September 16, 2023, the Inclusion4Schools project hosted a Policy Lab event designed to present the initial draft of policy recommendations to a panel of experts. The event began with a roundtable discussion that facilitated in-depth analysis of the proposed recommendations. Following this, a Hybrid World Café workshop was conducted, providing an interactive environment where participants could engage with key questions related to the recommendations. This method allowed for dynamic and collaborative dialogue, encouraging participants to share insights and perspectives that would refine and enhance the recommendations further. The use of the Hybrid World Café methodology was particularly effective in fostering co-creation among stakeholders, ensuring that a diverse array of voices and expertise were included in the process.

The World Café discussions delved into critical aspects of educational inequalities, such as the challenges of data collection and the need for standardized, comparable tools across European countries. Participants highlighted the importance of increasing trust and participation among vulnerable groups in socio-economic status surveys, as well as the necessity of empowering communities throughout the research process. The event’s outcomes emphasized the significance of transparent communication and the inclusion of local communities in data collection efforts. The collaborative nature of the workshop not only enriched the recommendations but also underscored the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement in addressing complex educational inequalities across Europe.

### **3. Policy recommendations for measuring and tackling social differences in education**

The research findings on educational inequalities and territorial disparities within European countries have provided a robust basis for a series of comprehensive recommendations aimed at addressing these pressing issues. The recommendations are derived from a range of methodologies and scientific endeavours and seek to address the gaps identified in the research, paving the way for more equitable and inclusive educational systems. These recommendations have been formulated in response to the critical insights gleaned from the studies, advocating for a unified approach to measuring social background, early intervention through talent development programmes, and the broadening of inclusive education initiatives. Furthermore, they emphasise the importance of fostering open public discourse, resilience research, and long-term tracking of educational inequalities. The recommendations promote collaboration, transparency, and data accessibility as a means of creating a more just and equitable educational landscape across Europe.

#### **1. Standardised protocols for measuring social background:**

It is recommended that the European Union (EU) establish standardised protocols for measuring children's social background in all member states. It is recommended that these protocols should avoid the use of combined family background indices, in order to ensure accurate and effective comparisons of competences across diverse socio-economic backgrounds. By implementing uniform measurement methods, the EU can more effectively identify and address educational inequalities resulting from socio-economic disparities.

#### **2. Early Talent Development Programs and Comprehensive Support Systems:**

The EU should initiate talent development programs from early childhood, starting as early as 4-5 years old, independently of formal schooling. These programs should be complemented by a comprehensive support system that nurtures individual children's growth and disseminates best practices. By investing in early talent development and providing robust support structures, the EU can empower children from all backgrounds to reach their full potential and mitigate the impact of socio-economic inequalities on educational outcomes.

#### **3. Broadening and Endorsing Inclusive Education Initiatives:**

The EU should broaden and endorse inclusive education initiatives, ensuring a clear understanding of the distinction between integration and inclusion. These initiatives should be consistently implemented throughout member states, fostering environments that embrace diversity and provide equitable access to education for all students. By promoting inclusive education practices, the EU can create learning environments that celebrate differences and support the academic success of every student.

#### **4. Promotion of Open Public Discourse:**

The EU should foster open public discourse on educational inequalities, both within and beyond political spheres. This discourse should provide a platform for openly discussing and addressing diverse perspectives, interests, and objectives related to educational inequalities. By promoting dialogue and collaboration, the EU can cultivate a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities in education, leading to more informed policy decisions and effective interventions.

#### **5. Support for Resilience Research:**

The EU should provide financial and logistical support for resilience research, which should explore various psychological and sociological techniques for building resilience among students. Collaborative endeavours among member states should be facilitated to gather comprehensive insights into effective resilience-building strategies. By investing in resilience research, the EU can equip students with the skills and resources needed to overcome adversity and thrive in educational settings.

#### **6. Facilitation of Long-Term Research on Educational Inequalities:**

The EU should facilitate long-term research initiatives to gauge and track educational inequalities over time. These initiatives should emphasise thorough analysis and comparability across various intersections, supported by a dedicated agency. By monitoring trends and patterns in educational inequalities, the EU can develop targeted interventions and policies to address systemic barriers and promote equitable access to education.

#### **7. The promotion and coordination of qualitative research as a key objective.**

It is recommended that the EU should promote, coordinate and support qualitative research at meso- and micro-levels, with the objective of ensuring an in-depth understanding of localised phenomena. It is recommended that collaboration between educational institutions and local communities be enhanced, with a view to fostering synergistic approaches to addressing educational disparities. By investing in qualitative research, the EU can identify the underlying causes of educational inequalities and develop contextually relevant solutions that are tailored to specific communities.

#### **8. The enhancement of data accessibility and transparency as a crucial aspect of this endeavour.**

It is recommended that the EU's dedicated agency analyse, define and make supplementary data sources and databases, such as census data, accessible to researchers. It is imperative that standardised data protection protocols are rigorously enforced in order to safeguard the privacy of individuals and to ensure the integrity of the data. It is recommended that advisory

support be provided to facilitate researchers' access to data and promote transparency in data collection and dissemination.

## **9. The reinforcement of trust and transparency with data providers as a crucial aspect of any data-driven initiative.**

It is recommended that the EU reinforce trust and transparency with data providers by emphasising data protection and establishing unified protocols for data production and access in accordance with legally standardised protocols. By fostering a culture of trust and transparency, the EU can enhance collaboration with data providers and promote ethical data practices that uphold privacy and integrity.

## **10. The improvement of access to census and sectoral statistical data as a key objective.**

It is recommended that the EU should improve access to European census data and sectoral statistical data. This should be done by monitoring and enhancing personal accessibility on a regular basis, while addressing limitations imposed by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). It is recommended that a dedicated agency be established to oversee the implementation and compliance assessments, ensuring that data accessibility efforts are aligned with legal requirements and best practices.

## **11. Establishment of civil monitoring systems for educational inequalities.**

It would be beneficial for the EU to consider supporting the establishment of a civil monitoring system designed to gather and examine reported incidents of educational inequalities. A system of this nature would be based on standardised procedures and pre-emptive interventions, which would provide valuable insights into the prevalence and impact of educational inequalities. This would inform targeted interventions and policy decisions.