

Peer-learning workshop #1 on the Use of Evidence in Education Policies, Turin, 29 May - 31 May 2024

Key take-aways

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Objectives, participation and working modalities

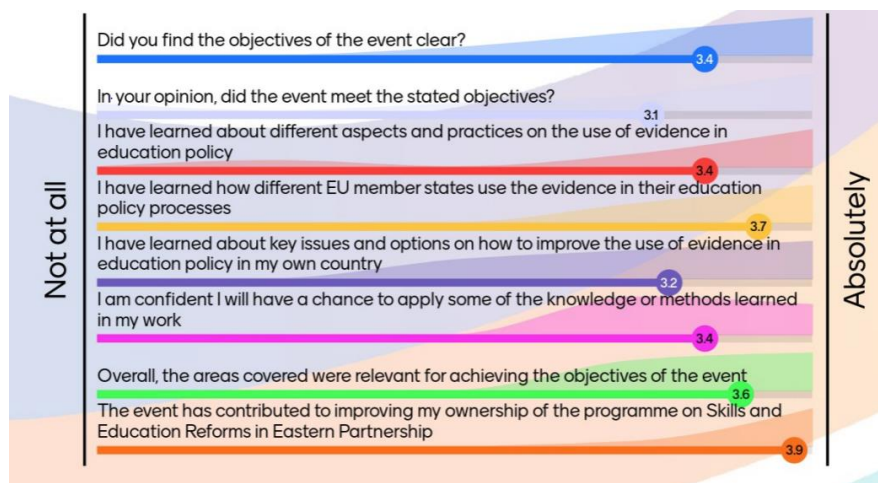
Objectives. For the record, the main objectives of this first peer learning workshop were the following:

- To promote the exchange of experiences among Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries regarding the use of evidence in the design and monitoring of education policies, and in the effective management of their education systems;
- To familiarise partner countries with EU member states' practices related to the use of evidence and data management within the education sector;
- To identify key issues and actions in improving the use of evidence in education policies in EaP countries

Participants. The workshop gathered:

- **15 representatives from partner countries** (4 from **Armenia**, 5 from **Georgia**, 5 from **Moldova** and 1 from **Ukraine**), from strategic planning, general education and VET departments as well as institutions in charge of EMIS in particular;
- **3 practitioners from Ministries of Education of the EU Member States (Finland, France, Poland)**, dealing with education data management systems or data analytics in their daily job;
- **3 education programme officers from EU delegations to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova**
- 3 representatives from the European Commission's DGNEAR
- as well as ETF staff and consultants involved in the SER programme.

Working modalities. A detailed preparatory questionnaire was sent to the partner country participants ahead of the workshop, in order to capture main views on the state of play in their country. Building on these respective self-assessments of strengths, weaknesses, challenges, participants had the opportunity to engage in thematic discussions and delve deeper into various practices regarding the use of evidence in the education sector, in neighbouring countries as well as in selected EU member states, namely Finland, France and Poland. Main outputs of these discussions, framed and facilitated by the ETF expert team, have been reintegrated into the global facilitation PowerPoint. As the feedback received in the final session confirmed, this collaborative approach has enabled partner countries to gain practical insights for improving their practices and to learn from and take advantage of practices and/or tools shared by EU Member States, as well as from the expertise provided by the ETF.



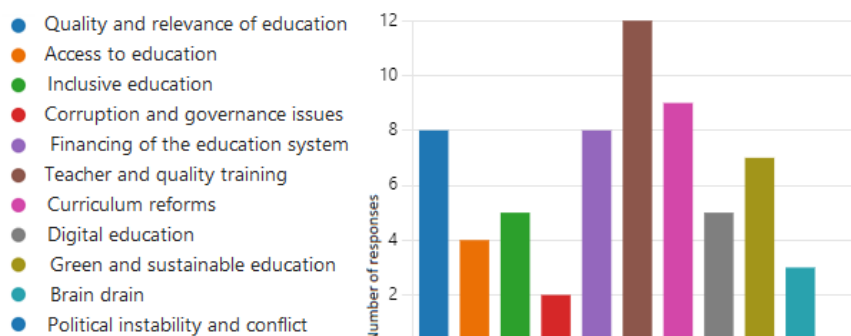
Achievements: shared Issues, European practices and Recommendations

For two full days, participants exchanged and learned about a number of interlinked topics, covering both regular system operations and aspects of policy formulation, planning, and monitoring:

- the rationale and modalities related to the **use of evidence throughout an education policy cycle**;
- the **difference between evidence and data**, and the need to process data into well-chosen and clearly defined **indicators** in order to produce useable analysis serving policy decisions;
- the key success factors of fully functional **education management information systems**;
- the need to embed the use of evidence into institutionalised consultation and coordination mechanisms, as an essential element of good **data education governance**.

Main issues

As per the responses to the questionnaire, the following **education-related challenges** were identified as requiring more evidence:



While evidence is still too often understood as quantitative data only, issues with the latter (data) were similar in the various countries, including:

1. Lack of Standardization:

- **Inconsistent Data Formats:** Schools in different regions use varied formats for recording student grades—some use percentages, others use letter grades, and a few use a 4-point GPA scale, making it difficult to aggregate and compare data at the national level.
- **Non-Uniform Data Collection Methods:** Some schools collect attendance data daily through electronic systems, while others rely on manual attendance sheets filled out weekly, leading to inconsistent data availability and quality.

2. Inadequate Infrastructure:

- **Outdated Technology:** Rural schools are using old computers and software that are not compatible with newer, more efficient data management systems implemented in urban areas.
- **Insufficient Bandwidth:** Schools in remote areas suffer from slow internet connections, making it challenging to upload and access centralized databases in real-time.

3. Data Quality Issues:

- **Incomplete Data Entry:** Teachers in some schools only enter grades for core subjects into the system, leaving out extracurricular achievements and elective course grades.
- **Errors in Data Entry:** Manual entry of student attendance records often results in errors such as incorrect dates or student IDs, leading to inaccurate attendance tracking.

4. Security and Privacy Concerns:

- **Weak Security Protocols:** Some schools store sensitive student data in unencrypted formats on local servers, making it vulnerable to unauthorized access and breaches.
- **Privacy Compliance Issues:** Lack of awareness and training on data privacy laws like GDPR or FERPA results in schools inadvertently sharing student data with third parties without proper consent.

5. Integration Challenges:

- **Fragmented Systems:** Different schools use separate systems for student information, learning management, and attendance tracking, resulting in fragmented data that is difficult to consolidate for comprehensive analysis.

- **Lack of Interoperability:** A school's SIS cannot communicate with the national education department's database due to different software standards, hindering data exchange and reporting.
6. **Capacity and Training Gaps:**
 - **Lack of Skilled Personnel:** Many schools lack data analysts or IT staff who are capable of managing and interpreting educational data effectively.
 - **Inadequate Training Programs:** Teachers and administrative staff have limited access to professional development opportunities focused on data management tools and best practices.
 7. **Policy and Governance Issues:**
 - **Weak Data Governance:** There are no clear guidelines or policies on how schools should collect, store, and manage student data, leading to inconsistent practices.
 - **Inconsistent Implementation:** Even when data management policies exist, they are not uniformly implemented across all regions and schools, causing disparities in data quality and availability.
 8. **Funding Constraints:**
 - **Limited Financial Resources:** Many schools lack the budget to invest in modern data management systems, resulting in reliance on outdated and inefficient methods.
 - **Prioritization Issues:** Education departments may prioritize immediate classroom needs over long-term investments in data infrastructure, delaying necessary upgrades to data management systems.
 9. **Stakeholder Engagement:**
 - **Low Buy-In:** Teachers and parents may not see the immediate benefits of data management initiatives, leading to low engagement and resistance to new data collection processes.
 - **Communication Gaps:** Poor communication between school administrators and policymakers results in a lack of alignment on data management goals and practices, affecting the implementation of data-driven decisions.

Experiences from Finland, France and Poland

Following ETF's suggestions, the colleagues from the 3 EU member states delivered keynote speeches on complementary topics deemed relevant for the colleagues from EaP partner countries.

Finland (Johannes Peltola) presented the concrete, transparent and inspiring modalities of *evidence use by the Finnish administration*, related to different purposes namely:

- **Public information service** to the various constituencies (incl. citizens, media, members of parliament or other stakeholders) "*we publish all we collect*"
- **Operational use** for managing the system (for funding and foresight for example), which also creates an **incentive for good practice**. The attention was drawn to the **importance of explaining to education providers the rationale and meaning of data collection**, in order to ensure quality of their inputs.
- **Support to strategic decision making**, including through a data room for real-time data availability.

France (Robert Rakocevic) focused on the *sensitive question of indicators in France*, which the French ministry of education considers as important elements for monitoring trends, assessing policy impact as well as for benchmarking with other European countries. The main issues raised by indicators include their **comprehensiveness** (and the need to identify the right set(s) of indicators),

validity (which supposes to make clarity on the ‘intention’ behind each indicator: what is it expected to measure?), **relevance** (and e.g., the absence of a teacher-related indicator at EU level), **sensitiveness** (the example of the “added value indicator” for school level raising much interest) or **fairness** (e.g. the ‘social position index’ is an attempt to measure the relationship between the socio-economic situation of parents and the children school results).

Poland (Marcin Nowak) explained the functioning of the *Polish education management information system*, which first became operational back in 2005. Initially designed by an external company for cost-effectiveness reasons, it relies on a web-based application accessible from mobile devices, ensuring easy and friendly use. It is fully integrated with other data management systems (database interoperability), allowing **one unique data source** for all school/education-related data. It offers a **real-time collection** and is based on **individual data inputs**, both for students and teachers, who all have a **unique identifier**. Key messages from this experience included the importance of **centralising the responsibility of data collection** within only one source (before 2005, ministry of education, national statistics and ministry of finance were collecting various data related to the sector) and the need for a **clear legislation on EMIS** clarifying the roles of the different institutions and levels.

EU Accession process evidence: DG NEAR (Simone Rave) presented the indicator frameworks monitored by the EU and the key elements of the Chapter 26 for candidate countries, recalling that these are linked to a “Soft Acquis”.

Recommendations

In order to improve the use of evidence in education policies, in line with the international research, recommendations included to:

- **Promote a Culture** of Evidence-Based Decision Making
- **Ensure Access** to High-Quality Data and Research
- **Integrate** Research with Practice
- **Support** Capacity Building
- **Institutionalize** Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms
- **Promote** the Use of **Mixed Methods**
- **Address Barriers** to Effective Use of Data
- Ensure **Research Relevance and Timeliness**
- **Foster a Collaborative** Research Environment

In order to improve the functioning of education management systems, ten key recommendations were shared. They are wrapped-up into the below multi-hexagonal figure.



In a nutshell, as illustrated above, the achievements of the peer learning workshop combined some content hints from experience and research, as well as methodological guidance for further thinking and planning of roadmaps that could contribute to the improvement of the use of evidence in education policies in each partner country.

Links to the key presentations displayed during the workshop

- [ETF global presentation](#)
- [Inception report presentation](#)
- [Finland presentation](#)
- [France presentation](#)
- [Poland presentation](#)
- [DGNEAR presentation](#)

Link to Rapid education sector diagnosis methodology

- [Rapid education sector diagnosis methodology | ETF \(europa.eu\)](#)

Annex 1: Bibliographic suggestions for further reference

Biesta, G. (2007). [Why 'What Works' won't work: Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research.](#)

Brown, C. (2016). [Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice in Education.](#)

European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Böhm, F., Delhaxhe, A., Riiheläinen, J. (2017). [Support mechanisms for evidence-based policy-making in education](#)

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European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency. (2023). [Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe](#)

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European Parliament. (2021). [Evidence for policy-making: Foresight-based scientific advice](#)

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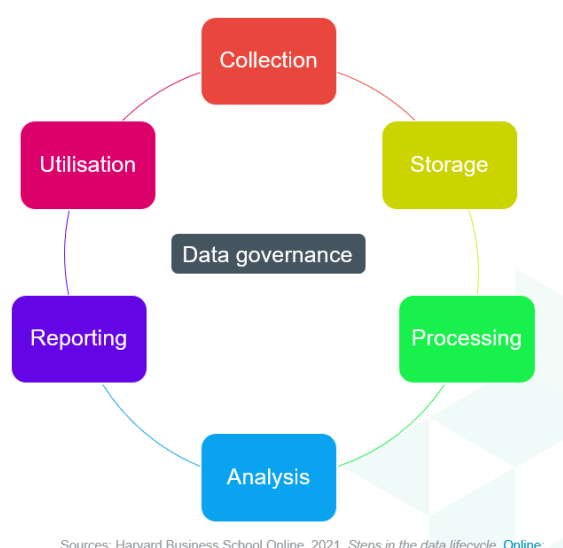
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UNESCO. (2023). [Global education monitoring report, 2023: technology in education.](#)

UNESCO. (2024). [Improving the use of evidence for education policy, planning and implementation: strategic review.](#)

World Bank. (2018). [LEARNING to Realize Education's Promise.](#)

World Bank. (2023). [Cost-effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning.](#)



Sources: Harvard Business School Online, 2021. [Steps in the data lifecycle.](#) [Online.](#)

Annex 2: Final Agenda

DAY 1 Wednesday 29 May 2024 at SERMIG

Time	Session	Agenda Item
Launch Session – The programme in motion		
Moderated by Simona Rinaldi, ETF		
09:30 – 10:00	Opening and introduction	Opening and Introduction by Dr Pilvi Torsti, ETF Director Christophe Masson, Team Leader, the European Commission (DG NEAR)
10:00 – 10:50	Unveiling Insights to Programme Inception and Horizon in 2026	Plenary
10:50 - 11:20	<i>Coffee Break & Networking</i>	
11:20 - 12:40	Empowering Education Reforms - the importance of policy dialogue	Panel discussions Introduction by Iwona Ganko Moderator: Georgios Zisimos, Head of Unit, Policy Advice and EU Programming
12.40 – 13.00	Formal Launch of the Programme and Celebration	Timo Kuusela
13:00 - 14:00	<i>Networking lunch</i>	
Session 1 – Setting the frame: the use of evidence throughout the policy cycle		
Moderated by Marie Dorléans		
14:00 – 14:30	1.1 Introduction to the peer learning workshop	Plenary Participants' expectations from the workshop Objectives and agenda logic
14:30 – 15:30	1.2 Evidence for policy making in education: state of play	Plenary Keynote speech by EU member state representative, Johannes Peltola, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland Questions and discussion
15:30 – 15:45	<i>Comfort Break</i>	
15:45 – 16:00	<i>Awareness-raising on SERMIG</i>	
16:00 – 16:55	1.3 Partner country reflections on challenges and gaps in the use of evidence	Country group discussion on the difficulties with the use of evidence in the education policy Plenary for sharing experiences and identifying commonalities
16:55 – 17:00	Closing of Day 1	
19:30 – 21:30	<i>Official Dinner</i>	La Conca, Via Assietta 4

DAY 2 Thursday 30 May 2024 at SERMIG

Time	Session	Agenda Item
Session 2 – From evidence to data and indicators Moderated by Marie Dorléans		
09:15 – 10:15	2.1 Types and sources of evidence	Key takeaways from day 1 and new inquiries Interactive plenary: Types and sources of evidence for education policies
10:15 – 11:15	2.2: Issues at stake with data	Thematic Group Work: Advantages and difficulties of various data sources Missing links or bottlenecks in the data chain
11:15 – 11:45	<i>Coffee break</i>	
11:45 – 13:00	2.3 Indicators	Keynote speech by EU member state representative, Robert Rakocevic, Ministry of National Education and Youth, France Clarification questions (Q&A) Interactive plenary: the smart secret of good indicators Wrap-up
13:00 – 14:00	<i>Networking lunch</i>	
Session 3 – Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) in practice		
14:00 – 15:30	3.1 The example of (quality) teacher shortages as a common education policy issue	Thematic group discussion for sharing views and experiences across countries (<i>the idealists, the engineers and the mediators</i>) Consolidation and wrap up
15:30 - 15:45	<i>Comfort Break</i>	
15:45 – 16:15	3.2 An EU Member State's perspective on EMIS	Keynote speech by EU member state representative, Marcin Nowak, Ministry of National Education, Poland
16:15 – 16:55	3.3 International and EU standards for education indicators and the challenges for the EU candidate countries	EU accession process and Chapter 26 requirements by Simone Rave, DG NEAR Q&A, discussion: challenges by partner countries
16:55 – 17:00	Closing of Day 2	Wrap-up
17:30 – 18:30	<i>Guided sightseeing walking tour</i>	
19:30 – 21:00	<i>Dinner</i>	Fradiavola, via Sant'Anselmo 2/G

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