



EFFEct and BRIDGE Horizon Projects: How can we strengthen equity, quality and transitions in European education?

Across Europe, education systems are expected to provide high-quality learning opportunities, ensure equitable access for all students, and equip citizens with the skills needed to navigate contemporary technological, economic, and societal change. Yet many systems continue to face persistent challenges, including declining learning outcomes, high dropout rates, teacher shortages, and widening inequalities linked to socio-economic background.

Against this background, the EFFEct (2024-2028) and BRIDGE (2025-2029) Horizon Europe projects were developed to generate robust, evidence-based insights that can support more effective, inclusive, and resilient education systems across Europe. Each project has a particular focus, but they are strongly complementary in their objectives and jointly contribute to a deeper understanding of how education systems can better serve individuals and societies. Both projects are coordinated by KU Leuven and the LEER¹ research group in the Faculty of Economics and Business, which has a long-standing research interest in the economics of education and a recognition of the urgent need for policy-relevant evidence.

The EFFEct project (responding to call [HORIZON-CL2-2023-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-05](#)) focuses on improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of education and training policies across the entire educational lifecycle. A central pillar of the project is to investigate why educational quality has stagnated or declined in several European countries, while inequalities have remained persistent. It will examine the root causes of low equity and suboptimal educational outcomes, with a view to identifying the systemic, institutional, and socio-economic factors that shape students' learning opportunities and trajectories. A distinctive feature of the project is its strong emphasis on causal evaluation methods, including randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs. These methods allow us to rigorously assess which policies and interventions are most effective, for whom, and under which conditions.

¹ Leuven Economics of Education Research Centre

While EFFEct project focuses primarily on educational quality and policy effectiveness and efficiency, the BRIDGE project (responding to call [HORIZON-CL2-2024-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-10](#)) explores how to improve educational participation, successful transitions, and completion rates in secondary and tertiary education. Despite significant progress, early school leaving remains a major concern in Europe, with around one in ten young adults not completing secondary education. Moreover, inequalities in access to and success within education systems persist, often reflecting socio-economic disparities. The BRIDGE project's goal is to understand why students struggle to navigate educational pathways and how these processes can be improved. The project examines a wide range of factors influencing these transitions, including institutional characteristics such as tracking systems and school allocation mechanisms, environmental influences such as family background and peer effects, and individual traits such as skills, expectations, and preferences. It also considers how unexpected events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, affect educational choices and outcomes.

KU Leuven's coordinating role in both projects has been to ensure scientific coherence, foster collaboration among partners, and maintain a strong connection between research and policy. Managing two large-scale European projects creates important opportunities for synergy. Insights from EFFEct on policy effectiveness, for example, directly inform the analysis of educational transitions in BRIDGE, while findings from BRIDGE on student decision-making enrich our understanding of how education systems can be designed more effectively.

Participating in and coordinating Horizon Europe projects such as EFFEct and BRIDGE has been a highly valuable experience for the research group. It allows us to contribute to addressing some of the most pressing societal challenges while advancing academic knowledge.

More info

EFFEct (CORDIS): <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101129146>

EFFEct project website: <http://www.effect-project.eu/>

BRIDGE (CORDIS): <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101059288>

BRIDGE project website: <https://www.bridge-horizoneurope.eu/>