

# Outcomes and Causal Inference in International Comparative Assessments

The *European Training Network (ETN) Outcomes and Causal Inference in International Comparative Assessments (OCCAM)* investigates how educational policies influence educational outcomes worldwide. One of the most salient findings in the field of education is that there are huge national differences in student achievement in international comparative studies. The shockingly large gap between the highest performing countries (most of which are in East Asia) and many European countries corresponds to a difference in attainment of two years of schooling. Although this finding has been replicated in several studies, at present, the reasons for and consequences of such differences are not well understood.

Variations in many features of educational policies and institutions can only be observed across countries on the system level (e.g., the existence of central exams). Since the start of the new millennium, a new generation of international comparative studies has been launched: studies like PISA and TIMSS are repeated every few years and thus have a longitudinal component at the system level. Unlike cross-sectional designs, these trend designs allow the causal effects of changes in educational policies at the system level to be estimated. Applying this approach to the accumulated data from the comparative studies will provide insights into the determinants of educational outcomes worldwide.

