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**Reducing early school leaving**

*Accompanying document to the*

Proposal for a

**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**on policies to reduce early school leaving**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1. Early school leaving (ESL) has been increasingly recognised as one of the main challenges faced by European societies. For the majority of young people, leaving education and training prematurely is both a result of educational, psychological and social problems and a cause of continuous social insecurity. European education and training systems lose hundreds of thousands of young people each year, who are then equipped with inadequate skills for later life.

2. Reducing ESL to less than 10 % by 2020 is a headline target for achieving a number of key objectives in the Europe 2020 strategy and one of the five benchmarks of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)<sup>1</sup>. Europe 2020 highlights three mutually reinforcing priorities: 'smart growth' based on knowledge and innovation, 'sustainable growth' promoting a greener economy and 'inclusive growth' fostering high employment and social cohesion. High rates of ESL are detrimental to the objective of making lifelong learning a reality and a constraint to smart and inclusive growth in Europe. They increase the risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. ESL represents a waste of individual life opportunities and a waste of social and economic potential.

3. While the number of low qualified jobs is shrinking, European economies are more and more in need of highly skilled employees. Skill mismatches are of growing concern in most Member States and risk damaging Europe's future competitiveness. The European Agenda for New Skills and Jobs<sup>2</sup> underlines the need to raise overall skill levels and to give priority to the education and training of those at the risk of economic and social exclusion, in particular early school leavers.

4. This document provides basic data on ESL across Member States, outlines the main factors causing ESL, and presents examples of policies and measures to prevent or reduce it. It highlights strategies against ESL that are based on evidence consist of prevention, intervention and compensation measures, and involve all relevant actors and stakeholders. Most of the policy examples in this document are drawn from the work of the Cluster 'Access and Social Inclusion in Lifelong Learning', created in 2006 within the framework of the Education and Training Programme 2010.<sup>3</sup> Others were presented by Member States separately. The document aims to help policy makers in Member States understand the phenomenon of ESL and the factors leading to it. It provides a 'tool kit' that supports the development of consistent and comprehensive policy for reducing early school leaving.

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<sup>1</sup> Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (OJ C119, 28.5.2009); Commission Communication "Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" - COM(2010) 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 15 November 2007 on the new skills for new jobs (OJ C 290, 4.12.2007).

<sup>3</sup> More information on <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningClusters/clusterDetails.cfm?id=15>

## **2. UNDERSTANDING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING**

### **2.1. Definition of early school leaving**

5. ESL can be defined as a failure to complete upper secondary school, a failure to complete compulsory schooling or a failure to gain qualifications or school leaving certificates. At EU level ESL rates are defined by the proportion of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training.<sup>4</sup> Early school leavers are therefore those who have only achieved pre-primary, primary, lower secondary or a short upper secondary education of less than 2 years (ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c short<sup>5</sup>), and include those who have only a pre-vocational or vocational education which did not lead to an upper secondary certification. This is the working definition adopted for this document. While the term "early school leaving" includes all forms of leaving education and training before completing upper secondary education or equivalents in vocational education and training, the term "school drop-out" is used with a much more restricted meaning: it refers to discontinuing an ongoing course in general or vocational education and training.

### **2.2. The situation in Europe**

6. The Education Council set itself in 2003 a benchmark to reduce the EU average rate of early school leaving to not more than 10% by 2010. In 2009, the ESL rate stood at 14.4%, an 18% reduction compared to the year 2000.<sup>6</sup> With a drop of 3.2 percentage points in nine years, progress has been significant: the number of early school leavers has been reduced by almost one and a half million. Nevertheless, progress has been insufficient to reach the 10% target by 2010. The Council has therefore renewed its commitment to the 10% benchmark, with a new target date of 2020. To reach this target the reduction rate of ESL needs to accelerate significantly.

7. The EU average rate masks large differences between Member States. Seven Member States have already achieved the 10% benchmark (Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia), while three Member States have rates higher than 30% (Malta, Portugal and Spain). Looking at the relative performance of Member States, there are reasons for optimism. All but three (Finland, Spain, Sweden) have reduced their rates of ESL since 2000. A number of countries with high ESL rates have also achieved significant reductions: Romania, Malta, Italy, Cyprus and Portugal. Considerable progress has also been achieved by countries which already had low rates of ESL at the beginning of the decade, such as Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Poland. The strong progress of some Member States in reducing ESL shows that achieving the benchmark is possible, but that reinforced efforts are needed.

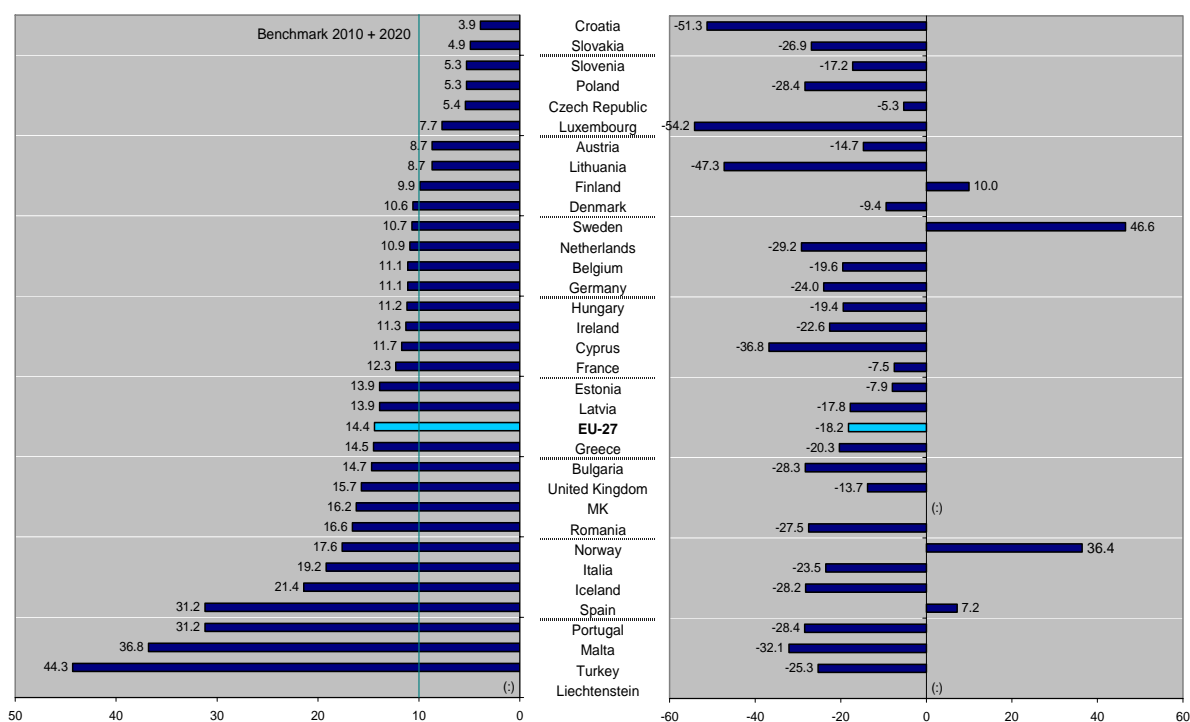
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<sup>4</sup> Council conclusions on "Reference levels of European Average Performance in Education and Training (Benchmarks)", May 2003. The OECD defines early school leavers as 20-24 year olds with education below upper secondary level.

<sup>5</sup> International Standard Classification of Education, UNESCO 1997. ISCED 3 describes the level of upper secondary education.

<sup>6</sup> Commission staff working document "Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and training. Indicators and Benchmarks 2009" - SEC(2009)1616.

**Chart 1: Percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and not in education or training (2009) and evolution 2000-2009 (% relative change)<sup>7</sup>**



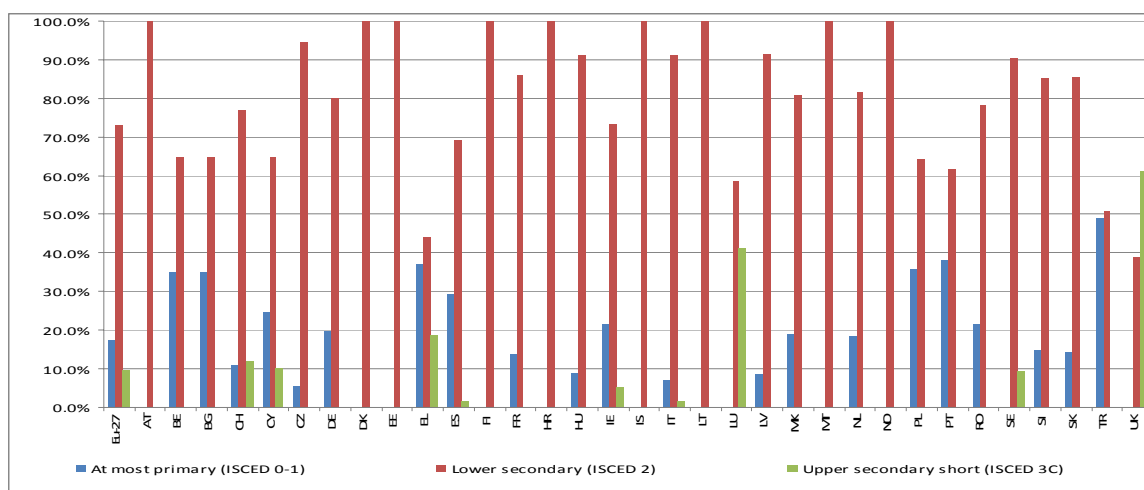
8. The profile of early school leavers varies considerably within the EU according to the highest education level achieved, to their status on the labour market and to their ethnic origin. Moreover, deconstruction of national averages often reveals significant regional differences.

9. Over 70% of early school leavers in the EU complete only lower secondary education. A very worrying fact is that 18% of early leavers in the EU have completed only primary education. This trend is especially strong in Bulgaria (38%) and Portugal (40%). Some countries offer ISCED 3C short courses, including some vocational or pre-vocational training, such as in Cyprus, Greece, Luxembourg and the UK. ESL as defined in this document occurs often after achieving this level of education.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat (Labour Force Survey), MK= former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Students living abroad for more than one year or more or conscripts on compulsory military service are not covered by the EU Labour Force Survey, which may imply higher rates than those available at national level. This is especially relevant for Cyprus. data for Slovenia and Croatia lack reliability due to a small sample size; Bulgaria, Poland and Slovenia: evolution refers to the period 2001-2009, Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Slovakia and Croatia: evolution refers to the period 2002-2009. In FI, the educational attainment level is measured at the beginning of the year (register data). This implies overestimation of the indicator in the country. More information available on [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/structural\\_indicators/indicators/social\\_cohesion](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/structural_indicators/indicators/social_cohesion)

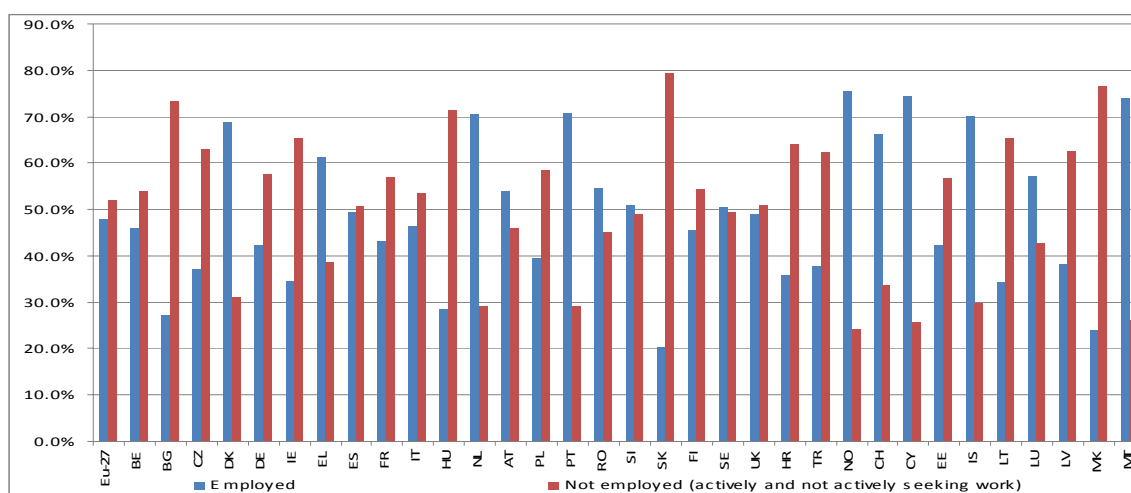
<sup>8</sup> SEC(2009) 1616, p. 77.

**Chart 3: Early leavers from education and training by highest educational level completed, 2009 (%)**<sup>9</sup>



10. In 2009, only 48% of early school leavers in the EU were employed, while 52% were either unemployed or outside the labour market. The percentage of employed early leavers was highest in Malta, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Cyprus. At the other end of the spectrum, large numbers of early school leavers were either unemployed or inactive in Slovakia (80%), in Bulgaria (73%) and in Hungary (71%).<sup>10</sup>

**Chart 4: Early leavers from education and training by employment status, 2009 (%)**<sup>11</sup>



11. For migrant first generation youth, the EU average rate of ESL in 2009 is double that for natives (26.4% vs. 13.1%). In Greece, Spain and Italy more than 40% of migrants are early school leavers. In most other countries, ESL is three times higher among first

<sup>9</sup> Data source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey), 2009; Notes: For ISCED 1 CZ, SI, SK, LV, MK lack reliability due to small sample size; for ISCED 2 HR, SI, LU; and for ISCED 3C IE, CY and LU.

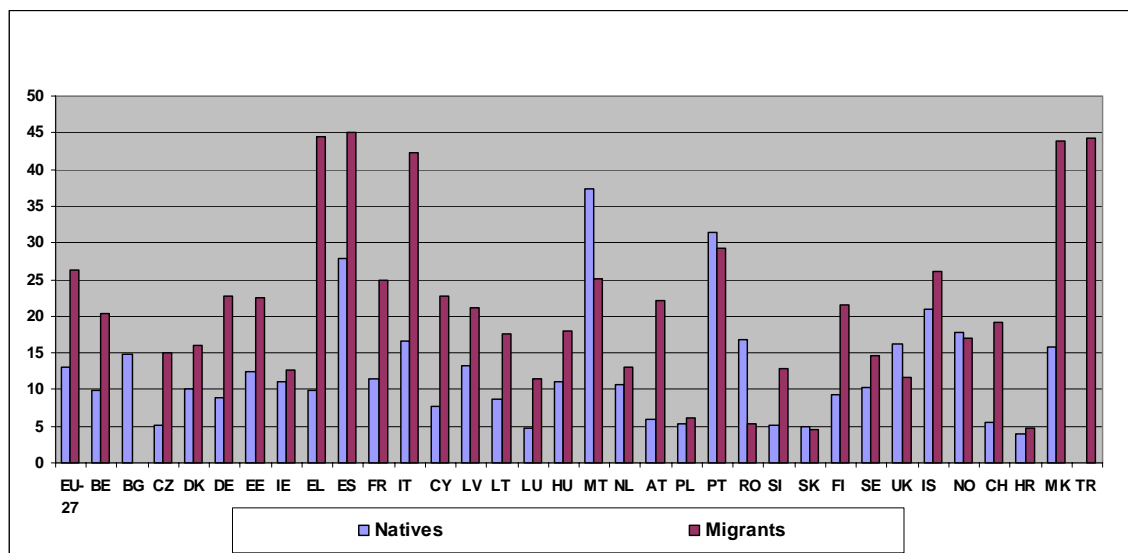
<sup>10</sup> Data source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey), 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Data source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey), 2009 Notes: Data from SI, HR, EE, LU are unreliable for both categories and for LT and MK for employed only.



generation youth migrants than among nationals. By contrast, a few countries such as Portugal, the UK and Norway show lower rates of ESL among migrants compared to nationals.<sup>12</sup> 12. The general trend holds also for disadvantaged ethnic minorities: ESL among Roma population is running even higher in a number of Member States.

**Chart 5: Early leavers from education and training by migrant status, 2009 (rates)<sup>13</sup>**



### 2.3. Factors leading to early school leaving

13. The reasons for early school leaving are highly individual. However, as a social phenomenon, ESL follows certain patterns. These differ from one country or region to another, and it is impossible to establish a single 'profile' of early school leavers or a comprehensive list of causes leading to ESL.

14. Nevertheless, while some early school leavers might not have any of the following characteristics and, conversely, some young people with them might be successful in education, early school leavers are in general more likely to:

- come from poor, socially disadvantaged and or low education backgrounds;
- come from disadvantaged minorities (such as Roma or other minority ethnic groups) or migrant backgrounds;
- belong to vulnerable groups, such as youth from a public care background, teenage mothers and persons with physical and mental disabilities or other special educational needs (SEN);<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> In countries with high recent migration a considerable proportion of migrant early school leavers have not attended school education in these countries. They have no or only little experiences with education and training in the country and have not been 'produced' by it. They need specific measures in order to gain qualifications - SEC(2009) 1616, p. 95.

<sup>13</sup> Data source: Eurostat (LFS). Data for the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Iceland, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia lacks reliability due to small sample size. Migrants include non-nationals and those born abroad.

- have to contribute to the family income or take adult responsibilities, such as parenthood or caring for family members;
- have had a history of disengagement from school, long-term absenteeism, truancy or expulsion;
- have achieved poorly in school and lack sufficient educational resilience<sup>15</sup>;
- have often changed their place of residence or schools.<sup>16</sup>

15. Children of parents who left education and training prematurely have a higher risk of becoming early school leavers themselves.<sup>17</sup> The risk is also increased in the case of household mobility, dysfunctional family dynamics, limited family support for remaining in school and home-school conflict.

16. ESL has also a gender dimension: In the EU, 16.3% of boys are early school leavers, compared to 12.5% of girls<sup>18</sup>. During compulsory education, boys tend to experience more difficulties than girls in adapting to the school environment and generally have lower achievement levels. They are over-represented among pupils with disabilities (61%) and are more likely to show emotional and behavioural problems, or specific learning difficulties (65%).<sup>19</sup>

17. In some Member States ESL is a predominantly rural phenomenon, has high incidence in remote areas and can be linked to insufficient access to education. In others it mostly affects disadvantaged areas in big cities. Some countries experience high levels of early school leaving in certain vocational tracks, while others register lower early school leaving in, for instance, apprenticeship tracks.<sup>20</sup>

18. ESL is often concentrated in schools:

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<sup>14</sup> See also: Active inclusion of young people with disabilities or health problems. Background paper, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> 'Educational resilience' refers to 'the maintenance of positive adaptation by individuals despite experiences of significant adversity'; it enables learners to deal with difficulties and drawbacks in their learning. It can be built and enhanced by emphasising also feelings of confidence, for instance, as well as addressing academic competence. Luthar, S.S., Cichetti, D. and Becker, B. (2000), The construction of resilience. A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work, in: Child development, 71, p543, cited by NESSE (2009).

<sup>16</sup> GHK (2005), p.9, NESSE (2009), Early School Leaving – Lessons from research to policy makers, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Anna Christina d'Addio: Intergenerational transmission of Disadvantage: Mobility or Immobility across Generations? A Review for OECD countries, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Papers 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Eurostat, LFS 2010. Only in a few countries (Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic) there are approximately the same proportions of boys and girls leaving school early. Turkey stands out from the pattern as having much higher numbers of early school leavers, with girls representing the majority of these. Eurydice, Gender differences in educational outcomes, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> SEC(2009) 1616, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> GHK (2005), Study on Early School Leavers, Final Report, p.77, Sally Kendal, Kay Kinder (2005), Reclaiming those disengaged from education and learning – a European Perspective, p. 15.

- which have a high intake of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and which lack targeted support for these pupils;
- in which the school environment is characterised by violence, disruptive behaviour of pupils, and high levels of absenteeism;
- with low levels of achievement, lack of subjective relevance of curriculum, low degree of trust towards teachers and low educational expectations of teachers, parents and community;<sup>21</sup>
- which have only weak cooperation between schools and families.

19. On the level of the education system, the following aspects have been identified as having a negative influence on ESL:

- limited or poor quality provision of early childhood education;
- systematic use of class repetition and limited support to those who fall behind at school;
- difficult transitions between levels of education, from primary to secondary or from lower secondary to upper secondary school;
- potential dead ends in secondary education, not leading to upper secondary graduation or not providing credible career perspectives;
- absence of suitable provisions for groups such as migrants and minorities, and
- lack of educational second chances.<sup>22</sup>

20. There is an obvious relationship between socio-economic status and the risk of ESL, but the mechanisms linking various kinds of disadvantage to ESL are not clearly recognised; ESL is a result of the *interaction* between home/family/community based factors, school-based and systemic factors.

21. Looking more closely at the motivations of young people, some early school leavers regard their decision as a 'positive' choice. They feel undervalued and disrespected at school and underachieve academically. School education appears to them to be irrelevant to their lives and they believe that they could achieve more outside formal education and training.<sup>23</sup> Some of them seek to obtain qualifications later and might even fully re-enrol in education or training either a very short time after dropping out of school, or many years afterwards.<sup>24</sup> The different reasons for leaving education and training prematurely, and the different careers of early school leavers in later life, illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon. Different measures need to be implemented in parallel in order to reduce the different risk factors leading to ESL.

22. ESL is a process rather than a one-off event; it can be prevented best if the first signs of this process are recognised and effective measures to support the pupil in continuing education and training are taken.

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<sup>21</sup> NESSE (2009), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> OECD (2007), No more failures: ten steps to equity in education, p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> Dwyer and PRC, 1996, cited by NESSE (2009), p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Dekkers and Driesen, 1997, cited by NESSE (2009), p. 13.

## 2.4. Impacts on individuals, society and economy

23. ESL has serious individual, social and economic consequences. It also impacts on countries with very low ESL rates, since ESL tends to be concentrated among the weakest groups in societies.

- Early school leavers are more likely to be unemployed than those who have completed upper secondary education. They are also more likely to be unemployed in the long-term.
- If employed, early school leavers are more likely to work in jobs with less employment security or to work part-time.
- They earn less, but the size of the 'income penalty' for ESL varies from country to country.<sup>25</sup>
- They face a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. At the level of the EU in 2008, the risk-of-poverty rate for those with less than upper secondary education was 23.5%, compared to 13% for those with upper secondary or post-secondary education and 6.6% for those with tertiary education.<sup>26</sup>
- Early school leavers participate less in further learning or adult education and thus, participate less in re-training.<sup>27</sup> Given future skills requirements, non-participation in further learning will increasingly handicap them on the labour market.
- Due to their disadvantage on the labour market, early school leavers are more dependent on social support throughout their lives.
- Early school leavers tend to participate less in elections or other democratic processes.<sup>28</sup>

24. The economic consequences of ESL are likely to get worse. It is the forecast that by 2020 85% of all jobs will require high or medium qualifications. The share of jobs available for low skilled people will decrease from 20% to less than 15%.<sup>29</sup> High rates of ESL, in combination with demographic change, risk increasing the shortage of skilled labour and restricting 'smart growth' in the EU.

25. There are only few studies which calculate the costs of early school leaving, but their estimates, projected over a lifetime, sum up to several hundred thousand EUR per early leaver.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> GHK (2005), p. 90.

<sup>26</sup> Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2008, Eurostat.

<sup>27</sup> The EU average rate of participation in lifelong learning was only 18% for adults with less than upper secondary education, compared to 36.3% for adults with upper secondary education - SEC(2009) 1616, p. 82.

<sup>28</sup> NESSE (2009), p.31, see also Shell Jugendstudie 2010 (2010).

<sup>29</sup> CEDEFOP, 2010: Skills supply and demand in Europe: medium-term forecast up to 2020, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> See for example Canadian Council of Learning, No "drop" in the bucket, the high costs of dropping out, p.4. See also Dropout Strategie. Grundlagen zur Prävention und Reintegration von Dropouts in Ausbildung und Beschäftigung. Projektbericht des IHS Wien November 2007.

- The National Audit Office of Finland has calculated the costs of ESL based on 2006/2007 data. They conclude that the costs per year per person are 27,500 EUR. Over the course of adult life (40 years) this amounts to 1.1 million EUR per person.<sup>31</sup>
- A Dutch study estimates that the costs of ESL amount to 1.8 million EUR per person over the course of his/her lifetime.<sup>32</sup>

26. These estimations have to be treated with caution and they provide only partial information, but they show that ESL creates long-term costs for societies and, at a high rate, has major economic impacts. A comparison of these costs with the costs generated by measures against ESL concluded that the total costs created by ESL, including social costs, costs related to criminality and loss of productivity, exceed by far the costs for most of the measures aiming to reduce ESL.<sup>33</sup>

27. The social consequences, however, go far beyond the strictly economic ones. Education generates wider social benefits in terms of higher social cohesion or civic participation. Both the social and economic benefits for society at large greatly surpass the short-term costs of putting in place effective policies and measures against ESL, not to mention the personal, social and economic benefits for individuals.

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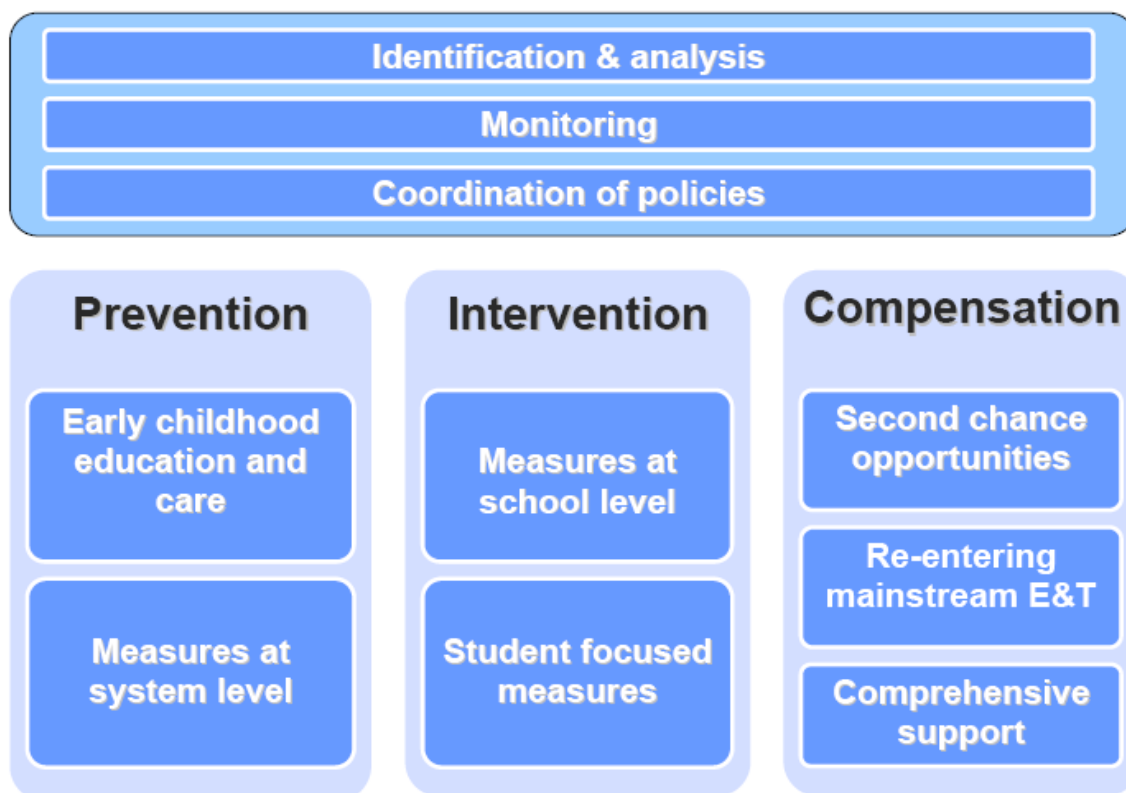
<sup>31</sup> Nuoret miehet työelämään. Mitä palveluja ja toimenpiteitä tarvitaan TE-toimistoissa. Työja elinkeinoministerion julkaisuja. Työ ja yrittäjyys 34/2009.

<sup>32</sup> CEDEFOP (2010) Guiding at-risk youth through learning to work, p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> The study analyses only the situation in the Netherlands. Roel in t'Veld et.al. Kosten en Baten van Voortijdig Schoolverlaten, May 2006, p.18.

### 3. TACKLING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

28. ESL is a social phenomenon and its causes are not purely educational. But the quality of school education has a strong impact on its incidence. Improving the quality of education in individual schools and at system level helps all students at the same time as reducing the risk of dropping-out. The following chart summarises the basic aspects of comprehensive strategies in ESL described within this chapter.



29. Measures often fulfill preventative functions and intervene in processes at the same time; they compensate for missed learning and are also relevant for pupils in compulsory education. The categorization of measures is not always unambiguous and there are clear overlaps between the different measures. ESL needs to be treated in a comprehensive way and the framework described in this chapter supports the identification of imbalances and gaps in strategies against ESL.

#### 3.1. Identification, monitoring and coordination of policies

30. The factors triggering ESL range from the individual to the social and from the immediate sphere of the pupil (family, peers) to the wider society. Those linked to the education system itself can also extend from the individual school to the overall structure of the education system and the opportunities that it offers. Strategies for combating early school leaving have to take as a starting point an analysis of the national, regional and local specificities of the phenomenon.

31. It is therefore advisable to collect and up-date regional and national level data and information on ESL, on school absenteeism and on school avoiding behaviour as

reported by schools. Data collection can allow for identifying groups of pupils, regions, municipalities or schools which are especially affected by ESL. Strong disparities in rates of early school leaving might indicate specific structural problems in certain geographical areas or educational tracks.

32. Policy design needs to be based on precise information in order better to target measures; a system to monitor developments in ESL can help to constantly adapt them. Accompanying analysis can provide additional information such as individuals' reasons for leaving education and training early.

### **Unique Pupil Number (UK)**

Since 1997, every child in the UK has a unique pupil number. It holds, in an anonymous format, details of learner's background as well as educational achievements. It allows to assess progress and to log results in school education against the unique pupil numbers. Educational interventions can be measured for different types of learners and especially measures to support low achievers in education or pupils at risk of dropping out can be better evaluated.<sup>34</sup>

### **Education number: better registration, better analysis (Netherlands)**

With the introduction of the so-called 'Education Number' the Netherlands moved to a system that offers complete and reliable figures on drop-out rates nationally, regionally and at the municipal and school levels. Data are linked to socio-economic data (including demographics, ratio of native Dutch citizens and ethnic minorities, unemployment rate, social benefits) per region, city and district. This created a wealth of information at hand for implementing policy and adjusting it when necessary. Results are monitored and the system helps to exchange proven good practices between the regions. In addition, an interactive tool, the School Drop-out Explorer provides quantitative data on ESL at national, regional, local and school level. It can compare ESL figures between regions or educational institutions and show multiple school years side by side. This makes it possible to detect trends in ESL. It also gives background information, including performance agreements, educational programmes, project examples and the regional and national contact persons.<sup>35</sup>

33. Combating ESL can only be effective as a coordinated strategy across levels of government and different policy areas. Regions or municipalities face different patterns of early school leaving and strategies need to be adapted to their specific situation. At the same time, a strong vertical coordination mechanism linking local, regional and the national government is normally needed to ensure consistent implementation.

34. In addition, all policies relevant to children and young people should contribute to the strategy against ESL. This concerns especially social policies and support services, employment, youth and integration policies. Every new policy or measure aimed at children, young people, parents or professionals working with children and young

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/ims/datamanagement/UPN/>

<sup>35</sup> The approach to school drop-out: Policy in the Netherlands and the results of the 2007-2008 performance agreements, [http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/userfiles/file/Engelse\\_atlas.pdf](http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/userfiles/file/Engelse_atlas.pdf)

people, irrespective whether it is related to the formal education system or not, should therefore be tested against its contribution to reducing ESL.

35. One effective way of approaching cooperation and mainstreaming is to recognise that ESL can be seen as a result of a *cumulative* process. A valuable strategic response may lie in designing policies to *interrupt* the processes that could culminate in ESL. This chapter looks at three key stages in that strategy: prevention, intervention and compensation.

### 3.2. Prevention

36. Preventative strategies seek to tackle the problem even before the first symptoms of it are visible. They look at pre-conditions for successful schooling and the design of education and training systems. The aim is to remove systematic obstacles. Preventive strategies centre on early childhood education and care and structural features within education and training systems.

#### 3.2.1. Early childhood education and care

37. Good quality early childhood education and care can be a particularly successful preventive measure for children at risk. It can enhance physical well-being, social and emotional development, language development and cognitive skills. Early childhood education and care offers children from disadvantaged backgrounds a better start in compulsory education.<sup>36</sup>

38. This is well documented by PISA data from 2003<sup>37</sup>: children who have participated in early education programmes score significantly higher in mathematics at age 15 even after accounting for socio-economic status. The provision of a universally available, full-time, play-based education programme closes the gap in achievement in social development, numeracy and literacy achievement between children from socially advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>38</sup> However, children from disadvantaged backgrounds face particular barriers in accessing affordable high quality pre-school education.

#### **High quality preschool education for all (Sweden)**

In Sweden, the provision of high-quality preschool education for all, well connected to school education, is regarded as a meaningful way of preparing for lifelong learning and fostering social cohesion. The Swedish early childhood education and care system is based on:

- Adequate resourcing, with high levels of investment in preschool education

<sup>36</sup> UNESCO (2008) Education for All, p. 111; Commission Communication on Equity and Efficiency in Education and Training - COM(2006) 481, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an internationally standardised assessment of 15-year-olds in schools. Three assessments have so far been carried out. See <http://www.pisa.oecd.org>.

<sup>38</sup> Bennet 2008, UNICEF Innocenti Working Paper "Early Childhood Services in the OECD Countries: Review of the Literature and current policy in the Early Childhood field". See also Alissa Goodman and Paul Gregg (2010) 'Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)



- Appropriate design, focused on preparing the transition to formal schooling, unitary settings for 1 to 5 or 6 year olds, and on the crucial role of inspection to improve pedagogic practice
- Adapted content and organisation for preschool education. Special attention is given to the integration of education and care, to staff qualifications, and to the guidance role within the curriculum. Social competences receive emphasis as well as different ways of approaching language development for children with a migrant background.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.2.2. Structural strategies

39. The structures of education and training systems influence the rate of ESL. Research suggests that flexible education and training systems with a variety of recognised learning pathways and combined with individual and school-level support offer more educational opportunities and therefore better chances of diminishing the risk of ESL. For example limiting repetition of school years and replacing it with flexible individual support has been associated with lower ESL.<sup>40</sup>

#### 3.2.2.1. Prolongation of compulsory education

40. Extending the duration of compulsory education has been a measure of choice in a number of countries such as the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, and Italy. Introducing a legal requirement to attend a form of education until an older age can influence the behaviour of families and young people. However, the extension of compulsory education does not necessarily lead to successful graduation, better qualifications or a better transition from school to work. It relates only to the expansion of educational opportunities and needs to be accompanied by measures to improve the educational offer and the variety of educational pathways, especially for pupils at risk. Nevertheless, evidence shows that lengthening the duration of compulsory education leads to a decrease in the number of early school leavers.<sup>41</sup> There is also a recent trend of extending compulsory education to include at least one year of pre-school provision.<sup>42</sup>

41. Alternatively, several countries recently introduced education and training guarantees for young people who are no longer subject to compulsory education, but failed to achieve an upper secondary qualification. Guarantees give young people the statutory right to upper secondary education and require educational authorities to provide

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<sup>39</sup> PLA in Sweden, Preschool education in Sweden and the connection between pre-schooling, school-age childcare and compulsory school in the light of lifelong learning, Final Report, <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=88>

<sup>40</sup> European Commission: Improving competences for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - SEC(2008) 2177, p. 32 -, see also Sally Kendall, Kay Kinder (2005) Reclaiming those disengaged from education and learning: a European Perspective, p.9, IRIS (2009) Thematic Study on Policy Measures concerning disadvantaged youth, p.67. Eurydice (forthcoming), Grade progression during compulsory schooling in Europe: Regulations and statistics 2009/2010.

<sup>41</sup> GHK Consulting Ltd (2005) Study on Access to Education and Training, Basic Skills and Early School Leavers; Oreopoulos (2009) "Would More Compulsory Schooling Help Disadvantaged Youth?" in Gruber (ed, 2009) – The Problems of Disadvantaged Youth, NBER.

<sup>42</sup> Eurydice (2009) Key Data on Education in Europe.

adequate education and training courses for them. Such measures, particularly combining education or training with employment, are also used to target youth unemployment.<sup>43</sup>

### **Prolongation of compulsory education in Poland**

Poland gradually expanded over the last 10 years the duration of compulsory education. In 1999, compulsory education was extended from the age of 14 to 16, in parallel with the introduction of a comprehensive school system and the postponement of student tracking. Poland also introduced an obligatory 0 grade aimed at preparing for primary school and lowered the age of beginning of the compulsory education from 7 to 6. According to the legislation adopted in 2009, compulsory pre-primary education will start at the age of 5 as of 2011, and compulsory primary education at the age of 6 as of 2012.<sup>44</sup>

### **Prolongation of compulsory education in Italy**

In 2007, Italy raised the length of compulsory education from 8 to 10 years (to 16 years), and established a right and a duty to obtain an upper secondary school qualification or a vocational qualification requiring at least three years, by the age of 18. Previously, compulsory education had lasted only until the age of 14 and upper secondary education and vocational training were voluntary. The reform was implemented in parallel with the expansion and diversification of initial VET tracks and the introduction of a new apprenticeship track.<sup>45</sup>

#### 3.2.2.2. Desegregation policies

42. The accumulation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in certain schools has been identified as a systemic cause for consistent high ratios of educational failure and ESL. 'Compositional effects' vary across different countries.<sup>46</sup> However, socio-economic background is the main segregation factor in European school systems. It often interplays with other socio-cultural factors such as migrant background or minority status. Multiple disadvantages can result in particularly severe forms of segregation, to the point of referral to special education, which in turn increases the risk of ESL.<sup>47</sup>

43. Desegregation policies aim to change the social composition of 'disadvantaged' schools and to provide better access for children from low socio-economic backgrounds

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<sup>43</sup> IRIS, p.67; Kendall, Kinder (2005) mention the legal obligation for county authorities in Norway to provide a follow-up service for young people aged 16 to 19 and not in education, training or employment. In addition everyone between 14 and 19 has the statutory right 3 years upper secondary education.

<sup>44</sup> The impact of the 1999 Education Reform in Poland, OECD Education Working Paper No. 49.

<sup>45</sup> Summary Report of the PLA on 'Measures targeted at disadvantaged youth' in Naples, Italy, in 2009; <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=94>

<sup>46</sup> PISA data show, for instance, that the impact of the socio-economic status (SES) of individual pupils is not the same in the different EU Member States. The same goes for the impact of the aggregated socio-economic status of schools.

<sup>47</sup> Careful attention needs to be given to whether separate schooling is in the best interest of the pupils involved. Biased assessments of pupils with disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds may lead to a significant overrepresentation in special education. Multicultural diversity and Special Needs Education, Summary Report, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2009.

to schools with higher socio-economic composition. A more balanced social composition of schools can improve the educational attainment of children from socially disadvantaged and low-education backgrounds without lowering attainment levels of the class as a whole. It also reduces the level of behavioural problems which are often concentrated in disadvantaged schools.<sup>48</sup> This entails controlling the conditions of entrance to individual schools as a mean of ensuring a broader socio-economic 'balance' in their population.

44. Desegregation policies are often contested by parents, who fear decreasing academic performance levels and want to ensure that their children attend schools with high socio-economic status. This can result in a so-called “white flight”, i.e. the tendency of parents with higher socio-economic status to transfer their children to other schools when they perceive the proportion of pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds to be too high. Attempts to increase the social mixity of schools therefore need the firm political commitment of the relevant educational authorities, combined with measures to ensure school quality.

#### **Active desegregation policy (Hungary)**

Hungary has a large Roma minority with worrying education indicators. 15% of the Roma pupils do not attend school beyond primary level and only 2% attend higher education. ESL and repetition rates are very high. Many Roma pupils attend segregated schools or segregated streams within schools and therefore education results remain low. In order to change the situation, the government, in co-operation with the Hungarian Institute of Educational Research and Development and the Roma Education Fund, promotes the development of “integrated education” through grants and technical assistance. Schools benefitting from this programme must ensure that their school population reflects the socio-economic balance and composition of their district. They take a fixed quota of multiply-disadvantaged students and foster school quality by e.g. extracurricular activities.

As from September 2007 schools also have to prioritise enrolment based on residence criteria. EU Structural Funds support additional equity measures and Hungarian authorities introduced the condition that projects funded within state programmes are required to contribute to the desegregation of the school system.<sup>49</sup>

#### **School desegregation (Bulgaria)**

Roma grassroots organizations in nine towns and one mainstream school in Blagoevgrad initiated school desegregation actions.<sup>50</sup> 3.500 Roma children from Roma-only schools were integrated into mainstream schools following a model developed in 2000 with the

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<sup>48</sup> Alex Hugh David, The 'collateral impact' of pupil behaviour and geographically concentrated socio-economic disadvantage, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 31, p.261-276.

<sup>49</sup> PLA in Hungary, (De)segregation in Education, Final Report, <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=21>

<sup>50</sup> The towns were Berkovitsa, Montana, Pazardjik, Pleven, Plovdiv, Sliven, Sofia, Stara Zagora, and Vidin. Six of the school desegregation projects were supported by the Open Society Institute's Roma Participation Programme in the period 2000-2005 and by the Roma Education Fund from 2005 till now.

launch of the first desegregation project in the town of Vidin. The model includes motivational campaigns among Roma parents to enrol their children into mainstream schools outside the Roma neighbourhoods, planned enrolment of Roma children in mainstream schools to avoid re-segregation in the new schools, provision of academic support for Roma children who need to catch up with their peers, extra curriculum activities involving Roma and non-Roma students, and school bus transportation for Roma students who live far away from their new schools.

Evaluations show that Roma children in integrated classes achieved better results in school education than their peers from segregated schools. At the same time school achievements of non-Roma pupils' remained stable. Socializing Roma children with non-Roma peers at this early stage of their lives is also of great importance for their social inclusion.

### 3.2.2.3. Positive discrimination measures

45. Many Member States have introduced measures of positive discrimination, mainly by allocating additional resources to schools with a more disadvantaged pupil population. These schools can improve their educational offer, provide additional support to their pupils and create innovative learning environments adapted to their specific needs. However, the application of this principle raises questions. One is how to identify and quantify socio-economic disadvantage within the pupil population. Measuring the per capita income of the area where the school is located is a pragmatic but imprecise approach. Children can attend schools outside their area of residence and disadvantaged schools in prosperous neighbourhoods do not benefit from this measurement. Indicators which focus on the personal situation of each pupil – family income, ethnic origins, and lone parent-families - are more precise, but complexity of measurement is much greater.<sup>51</sup>

#### **Zones of Educational Priority (Cyprus)**

Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) are formed by a network of schools in disadvantaged areas characterised by low socio-economic and educative level, high rates of school failure, drop-out, functional illiteracy and a high percentage of non-Cypriot students. The networks are composed of high schools, primary schools and kindergartens. ZEPs aim to create democratic schools that support social inclusion of all children, respect diversity, improve literacy and reduce early school leaving and school failure. ZEPs receive additional funding and posts for coordinating tasks.

Actions taken by ZEPs include the reduction of the number of children per classroom, the employment of teachers speaking the mother tongue of migrant pupils, free meals, and afternoon activities (groups, clubs).

#### **The *Ambition réussite* programme (France)**

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<sup>51</sup> See also Summary Report of the PLA in Belgium on School integration of immigrant children, positive discrimination measures, support to school drop-outs in 2006; <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=20>

The programme *Ambition réussite* (Ambition to succeed), reformed in 2006, is a comprehensive programme that provides additional resources through networking of schools, partnerships between stakeholders, supervision and monitoring. It focuses on eliminating inequalities in achievement between schools in deprived districts and schools in more prosperous neighbourhoods.

Funding is not allocated to single schools, but to networks of schools (249 networks across the country). They propose projects e.g. focussing on an improved organisation of timetables, on bridging actions in transition years, and on innovative pedagogies. The programme allows allocation of additional staff and organisation of a range of extra support (evening classes, vocational guidance and grants for pupils).<sup>52</sup>

### **PROA - Reinforcement, Guidance and Support Programme (Spain)**

The “*Programas de Refuerzo, Orientación y Apoyo*” is a territorial cooperation project between the Ministry of Education and the Autonomous Communities, supported by European Social Funds. It provides extra resources to education establishments to address inequalities in education and to prevent social exclusion. It offers extra support for pupils facing difficulties in primary and secondary education, as well as targeted support for secondary schools hosting large numbers of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. These measures include career counselling and guidance, support for pupils with behavioural problems or learning difficulties, etc. The numbers of schools with available targeted programmes has been extended from 143 in 2005 to 3.343 in 2010.<sup>53</sup>

#### 3.2.2.4. Systematic language support

46. Language acquisition is a vital factor in the educational success of children from a migrant background or from disadvantaged minorities, such as the Roma. Systematic support through policies for language development is one of the main policy levers for improving the academic performance of children with a different mother tongue.<sup>54</sup>

47. While early immersion in the language of instruction is important for the acquisition of communicative language, a systematic provision of continued support throughout education is essential for the acquisition of the academic level of the language of instruction. This requires the provision of a clear and consistent language curriculum across levels of education, supported by assessment tools and integrated into mainstream core curriculum, as well as an adequate number of qualified teachers of the language of instruction as a second language. At the same time, positively valuing multilingualism in schools and offering possibilities for supporting and validating knowledge of the mother tongue can offer children from migrant or minority background self confidence and identification with school and enrich learning across the whole school.

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<sup>52</sup> Summary Report of the PLA in France on 'Fight against failure in school and inequality in education' in 2007; <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=23>

<sup>53</sup> Summary Report of the PLA in Spain on 'Schools as learning Communities' in 2008; <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=87>

<sup>54</sup> NESSE (2008) – Education and Migration: Strategies for integrating migrant children in European schools and societies.

### **Structured system for language development (Sweden)**

Sweden has a structured curriculum for Swedish as a Second Language, which can be taken as a subject throughout primary and secondary education. Assessment in Swedish and Swedish as a Second Language are equivalent for promotion to higher education levels, including tertiary admissions. There are specific teacher training programmes for Swedish as a Second Language, which can be chosen as a specialisation in initial teacher education, as well as in-service training available in this subject. Children from a migrant background are also entitled to support both for Swedish and for the mother tongue during early childhood education and care and can choose their mother tongue as a school subject in primary and secondary education, equivalent to other school subjects. Moreover, individualised study support and guidance can be provided in the students' mother tongue.<sup>55</sup>

#### 3.2.2.5. Increasing permeability of educational pathways

48. Overly rigid education systems and too strong an emphasis on academic prerequisites for accessing advanced education levels can discourage students with lower academic performance from remaining in education and training. In order to motivate students to continue education and training, alternatives to ESL must offer credible perspectives and allow students to continue education and training also at later stages of their career. This means a high degree of permeability of educational pathways which avoids educational tracks leading to 'dead-ends' offering no opportunities for further progression. Several Member States have developed flexible approaches to combine general education, vocational training and first practical work experience. They target students who want to start working as early as possible and allow them at the same time to continue education.

### **Lower cycle of vocational secondary education (Luxembourg)**

In Luxembourg more flexible education conditions have been promoted under the programme *Projet cycle inférieur de l'enseignement secondaire technique (PROCI)* to allow students in a 'preparatory system' to access a lower cycle of 'vocational secondary education' and to subsequently enter vocational training. The lower cycle of 'vocational secondary education' offers general instruction in the first 3 years of secondary education (ages 12 – 14). Students are then able to choose the learning pathway (vocational or professional training) which best suits their abilities and interests. This enables students both to expand their knowledge and to positively orientate themselves in the education system. Career guidance is also strengthened.<sup>56</sup>

### **Diversified, flexible pathways (Italy)**

In 2006 Italy introduced a didactic methodology called "alternanza scuola lavoro" that allows students aged 16 to 18 to continue education, alternating school and work periods. It can be applied both in lyceums and in technical and vocational schools. The aim is to

<sup>55</sup> OECD (2010) – OECD Review of Migrant Education: Sweden;  
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/40/44862803.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Projet pilote cycle inférieur PROCI 2003 – 2007. Rapport d'évaluation.  
[http://www.men.public.lu/publications/postprimaire/rapport\\_evaluation/070321\\_rapport\\_proci/070321\\_rapport\\_evaluation\\_proci.pdf](http://www.men.public.lu/publications/postprimaire/rapport_evaluation/070321_rapport_proci/070321_rapport_evaluation_proci.pdf)

increase flexibility and the permeability of pathways and to address the educational and vocational needs of students. Moreover it encourages guidance and motivates the development of personal talents and interests. This approach is based on agreements between public and private institutions and in particular between schools and other regional actors.<sup>57</sup>

### **Production schools (Denmark)**

The production schools in Denmark combine compulsory schooling with VET. They are independent institutions with statutes approved by the local authority; the social partners are represented on the school board. The objective is to strengthen the personal development of the pupils and improve their chances in the education system and on the labour market. Young people can obtain qualifications that enable them to complete an education on upper secondary level leading up to a professional qualification. The pedagogical theory and practice of the production schools is built around activities in various workshops combined with instructions in theory. The professional standard at the workshop is used as an educational tool to develop personal and social competencies. In addition, the school offers teaching in general subjects in order to prepare the participants to commence a regular youth education programme.<sup>58</sup>

#### 3.2.2.6. Strengthening vocational pathways

49. Enhancement of vocational pathways as an alternative to general upper secondary education is a discernable trend. Reforms in this direction are on-going in many Member States, and they address both the quality of vocational education and training (VET) and its links to the general education system.

50. VET can respond to several of the factors leading to ESL. It can increase the motivation to learn and can offer students more flexibility and a more appropriate pedagogy. It can also address the labour market aspirations of young people, in particular when it is combined with company training. However, the limited evidence available indicates that ESL is more frequent in VET than in general education in several countries. Reasons include the structure of VET provision, its image and social status, but also the generally weaker socio-economic background of VET students and their often weaker academic performance.<sup>59</sup> Structural strategies to reduce ESL in VET should analyse the specific factors leading to drop-out, the needs of VET students, their motivation and their future perspectives.

51. The degree of flexibility and the variety of vocational training is identified as a key factor in helping young people find appropriate education and training opportunities. In order to be successful in reducing ESL, VET must be of high quality and high status, and lead to recognisable qualifications. Based on strong quality assurance mechanisms, it should offer extended and meaningful work experience and match labour market opportunities.

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<sup>57</sup> PLA in Italy, Measures targeted to disadvantaged youth, Final Report, <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=94>

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.eng.uvm.dk/Uddannelse/Upper%20Secondary%20Education/Production%20Schools.aspx>

<sup>59</sup> Kendall, Kinder (2005), p. 9.

### **Providing attractive alternatives to ESL (Spain)**

The national ESL rate of 31% during the last years masks significant regional differences in Spain. Many early school leavers drop out from VET, which is often associated with school failure, has a low prestige and only few links with the rest of the educational system.

In the Basque Country, however, ESL stood at 14.3% in 2007 (less than the EU average), and VET constitutes a strong feature. Significant efforts including the support of European Social Funds have improved its labour market relevance by establishing close co-operation between enterprises and training providers. Large investments were also made in order to improve the technical equipment of training centres and to align it with the equipment used in enterprises.

Providers of initial training offer also continuous training – which has a positive effect on the morale and motivation of trainees. The employment rate of VET graduates is constantly monitored; quality is constantly evaluated, and strict quality standards are applied in most training centres. VET in the Basque Country displays very low drop-out rates.<sup>60</sup>

### **3.3. Intervention**

52. Intervention aims to avoid ESL by improving the quality of education and training and providing targeted support to pupils or groups of pupils at risk. **School-wide strategies** address all pupils, but are especially beneficial to those at risk of dropping-out. They look at school development in general, early warning systems and networks with outside actors to support the work of the school. **Student-focused strategies** build on early detection of support needed for learning and motivation and take a multi-professional and holistic approach in addressing them, and provide individual guidance and support. The following chapter outlines examples of both school-wide and student-focused strategies.

#### *3.3.1. School-wide strategies*

53. School-wide strategies focus on improving the overall school climate and making schools places where young people feel comfortable, respected and responsible. They seek to maintain the motivation of all people to engage in learning by offering various activities, opening up schools to local community, working closely with parents and involving both students and their parents to decisions concerning school. Such structures are able to react to the first indications of problems that could lead to ESL.

##### *3.3.1.1. Schools as Learning Communities*

54. Schools that ensure the well-being of all students and that are physically inspiring and comfortable places for learning are more likely to motivate pupils to continue education and training and to address risk factors early and effectively. Similarly, schools that meet the different learning styles by proving activities such as team work or drama and the use of new technologies can effectively help pupils who prefer 'learning by doing'

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<sup>60</sup> Summary Report of the PLA in Spain.



and get motivated by active forms of learning. Practicing school democracy in daily decisions of school life may help overcome problems of disaffection.

55. A promising concept in this context is the one of 'schools as learning communities'. Schools striving for 'learning communities' agree on a common vision, basic values and objectives of school development. This common vision shared by teachers, parents and other stakeholders increases commitment and supports the development of school level curricula, the organisation of teaching and learning, assessment and evaluation.

56. 'Learning communities' use the diverse expertise and knowledge within the school; the traditional roles of teachers and students may be reversed. For instance, students with good ICT skills can share their expertise with their peers and teachers. The ethos of learning communities is based on openness, dialogue, inquiry, risk-taking, trust and professionalism. Teachers have the resources and encouragement to try out new and innovative teaching strategies, to make learning more effective and to ensure high motivation of each student to carry on learning. 'Learning communities' build on leadership that supports this process; school leaders that assume a 'developmental mind-set', inspire teachers and students to seek improvement and support them in taking ownership of a goal-oriented learning process.

#### **Learning Communities (Spain)**

The Learning Communities are a flagship initiative implemented in several Spanish regions, aiming to ensure school success for all by mobilising all key actors around an educational project. The initiative started in the Basque country in 2000 where it is implemented in 28 centres. In Spain around 100 centres are carrying out projects based on the "learning communities" concept.

It is based on projects adapted to the specific needs of each school, involving a selection of methodologies. Learning communities usually centre on pedagogic innovation, e.g. dialogic learning or a pedagogy aiming at promoting respectful and open exchange and solidarity between the students and school staff. Pupils, teachers and school leaders, parents, community stakeholders and education authorities are all involved in defining and building a project for the school, and are actively engaged in learning from each other.

The implementation of the initiative comprises several phases. The first step is reflection and an open brainstorming on the motivation for change. In order to continue, the project must be approved by the most relevant actors (teachers, the headteacher, families and administration). Once a school decides to adhere to the project, all the stakeholders together need to decide what to improve, both in academic and non-academic ways. A mixed committee in which all relevant stakeholders are represented follows up the implementation of the different steps of the transformation of the school into a learning community.<sup>61</sup>

#### **Rural education project (Romania)**

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<sup>61</sup> Summary Report of the PLA in Spain.

The rural education project is a nation-wide project aiming at increasing the quality of education in rural areas, raising completion rates of compulsory education and facilitating transitions towards upper secondary and higher education. This large scale intervention integrated four components for closing the achievement gap between rural and urban areas: Firstly, a school-based teacher professional development model, based on open distance learning and supported by a teacher mentorship scheme was developed to suit the needs of remote communities. Secondly, an investment in school infrastructure and teaching and learning materials aimed at making the school environment in deprived schools more pupil-friendly. Thirdly, a school-community grants programme aimed to empower schools and communities, build local project management capacity, supporting school development programmes and the establishment of Local Educational Councils. Fourthly, the establishment of a National Education Database for monitoring school achievements, an essential part for evidence-based policymaking. The project was successful in increasing transition rates towards upper secondary education and in narrowing the gap in achievement scores between urban and rural schools.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.3.1.2. Early warning systems

57. There are several warning signs which help to identify pupils at risk of ESL. The most obvious is truancy or absenteeism. Long periods of absenteeism lead to growing alienation from school and make it difficult for students to return to the class room. Others signs are sudden decline in performance, frequent change of schools (either due to school problems or due to family reasons), family problems, regular misconduct, aggressive behaviour or being affected by bullying or violence. While truancy often starts only during lower secondary, the underlying problems might have developed already during primary school.<sup>63</sup> Early warning systems within the school can help to identify pupils at risk before they start to become alienated from school, play truant or drop-out.

#### **Digital absence portal (Netherlands)**

Schools in the Netherlands report absences to a single digital portal, which will then notify the relevant local authorities automatically. Schools do not have to find out which local authority or supervisor they are obliged to contact for an individual pupil. In addition, all notifications follow a fixed procedure and after notification, the relevant officer treats the absence in consultation with the school. The portal makes it easy to report absences and gives schools and teachers more time to react and prevent young people from dropping out of school.<sup>64</sup>

### 3.3.1.3. Enhancing the involvement of parents

58. If key actors such as parents are disengaged, it deeply undermines the success of school education and means that warning signs are more easily missed. Cooperation between families and school is indispensable especially for pupils at risk of ESL. However, parents from socio-economically disadvantaged and low-education

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<sup>62</sup> Forthcoming World Bank implementation report.

<sup>63</sup> Kendall, Kinder (2005); Irene Hofmann-Lun et.al (2007), Schulabbrueche und Ausbildungslosigkeit, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> [http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/actueel\\_vervolg.php?id=262](http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/actueel_vervolg.php?id=262). The approach to school drop-out: Policy in the Netherlands and the results of the 2007-2008 performance agreements, [http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/userfiles/file/Engelse\\_atlas.pdf](http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/userfiles/file/Engelse_atlas.pdf)

backgrounds are often reluctant to contact the school. They might believe themselves to be unwelcome, have their own experiences of school failure or might not expect appropriate support from the school. Sometimes, schools may find it difficult to reach out to families because of a real or perceived attitude of non-cooperation among some families. Building trusting relationships between parents and schools is a crucial and challenging task in reducing ESL. Innovative approaches which support communication with parents, which create partnerships between parents and schools and which enhance mutual understanding do exist, but are not yet sufficiently widespread.

59. A number of countries have successfully introduced school mediators or teaching assistants who often provide the missing link between the school and the parents. This is a successful approach particularly for communities with a distrust of school authorities, or for parents who do not speak the language of instruction. School mediators often have a role in facilitating access to education, including early childhood education and care, and in the reinsertion of students who have dropped out.

#### **The Home-School Community Liaison (Ireland)**

The initiative aims to establish collaboration between parents and teachers for children's learning, targeting, in particular, families from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or neighbourhoods. In order to overcome parents' own negative experiences with school, the initiative tries to recover trust by recognising parents as belonging to the school (e.g. parents' rooms), offering adult education courses, involving parents in teaching mathematics and reading for primary school children, and involving parents of children with special needs in helping their own child in class. Parents thus gain knowledge and understanding of learning and can better support their children at home.

Another key feature of the programme is the 'home-school coordinator', who acts as a mediator and contact person. The coordinator regularly visits families and can intervene in particular in crisis situations, after absences from school or in cases of disruptive behaviour.<sup>65</sup>

#### 3.3.1.4. Networking with actors outside school

60. Difficulties at school often have their roots outside. Solving problems at school cannot be done effectively without tackling the range of problems that put children in difficulty, which can include drug or alcohol use, sleep deficits, physical abuse and trauma. Some of the most successful measures have been those which provide a holistic solution by networking different actors and so support the whole person. Partnerships at the local level seem to be highly effective ways of doing this.

#### **The School Completion Programme (Ireland)**

This measure of ESL prevention favours strongly cross-community and cross-sectoral approaches based on the development of local strategies. Schools are grouped into clusters of secondary and primary schools. Each cluster has a local management committee composed of principals, voluntary and statutory agencies including County Development Boards, Local Drug Task Forces, Area Partnerships (local organisations

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<sup>65</sup> Summary Report PLA Ireland.

focussing on social inclusion), the local programme coordinator, parents, community interests, etc. The committee develops and oversees the implementation of an integrated plan to tackle early school leaving.

The clusters of schools receive extra-funding to organise activities such as academic and non-academic support for pupils on a continuous basis. In order to avoid the stigmatisation effect of singling out individual pupils for support activities, most activities target the whole class or school.<sup>66</sup>

### **Regions take action (Netherlands)**

The Ministry of Education made agreements with municipalities and schools in 39 regions for the period 2008-2011 in order to reduce early school leaving. Municipalities, schools and care institutions can decide themselves on the measures to be implemented. It is the result that counts. Any school that manages to reduce its drop-out rate will receive €2.000 for each drop-out less than the number it had in the reference year (2005-2006). Furthermore, additional funds are available for educational programmes aimed at reducing drop-out rates.

Funds provided under the agreements are allocated to the schools. Via the local governments, schools can also call on the services of care institutions, the police and judicial authorities. At the end of this programme, it will be analysed which of the measures had the greatest impact on early school leaving.<sup>67</sup>

#### 3.3.1.5. Teacher education, empowerment and motivation

61. Any strategy to decrease ESL should include a well-prepared and motivated teaching force. However, teachers are often discouraged when constantly faced with difficult teaching and working conditions. Schools in socially disadvantaged areas or with a disadvantaged intake often experience high teacher turnover; this has a highly disruptive effect on the educational offer, the quality of teaching and on the reputation of the school.

62. While these schools usually rely on a handful of dedicated and committed teachers who choose to stay despite the difficulties, it is essential that teacher education prepares future teachers to deal with diversity in the classroom, with pupils from disadvantaged social backgrounds and with difficult teaching situations. It is also essential to improve school climate and working conditions - especially in disadvantaged areas - in order to have a more stable teaching force.

### **Comenius Project: THE GOLDEN 5**

The project aimed at helping teachers turn difficult classroom situations – typically in mixed-ability secondary classes – into empowerment, by successfully addressing diversity, lack of motivation and social and personal development drawbacks. It concentrated on improving teachers’ competences step-by-step and developing new strategies for classroom management, building relationships, social climate, personalised

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<sup>66</sup> Summary Report of the PLA in Ireland, Preventive and compensatory measures to reduce early school leaving, <http://www.kslll.net/PeerLearningActivities/PlaDetails.cfm?id=22>

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/english.php>

learning and family-school relationship. Resources on the project's website support and motivate the teachers and bring them into contact with colleagues elsewhere. Materials in five languages have been in use since 2004 and are available via an international on-line network allowing registered teachers access and the opportunity to contribute to continued improvements. ([www.golden5.org](http://www.golden5.org))

### **We need all Youngsters - Courses on diversity for VET teachers (Denmark)**

Within this initiative, in-service courses for 'contact teachers' at VET colleges have been developed, the aim being that the contact teachers acquire knowledge about and pedagogical tools to handle immigrant students. The course focuses on the students' social lives at the colleges and on their social and personal backgrounds. Other in-service courses address all VET teachers to help them capitalise on the diversities within immigrant groups. They provide methods to address students with various learning styles and clarify the connection between language learning, culture and identity, including language acquisition, communicative competence and second language pedagogy.

The courses are optional and typically take place during working hours. An evaluation showed that the development of courses led to innovative programmes with well functioning tools and methods, which have been adopted by educational institutions.<sup>68</sup>

#### 3.3.1.6. Extra-curricular activities

63. Activities after and outside school can raise self-esteem, improve motivation and support learning processes. The aim of such activities is on the one hand to keep children off the street, and on the other hand to provide them with the support (supervision of homework, recreational activities etc.) that more fortunate children receive from their families. The importance of non-formal and also non-academic education for reducing ESL is uncontested; after-school activities need to find the right balance between supporting homework and bringing learning into spaces such as sports and community centres.

64. In certain areas, schools might be the only institution available with facilities that allow for non-formal education activities outside school hours. Opening the school to educators other than teachers can also help to overcome reluctance towards education as well as developing better cognitive and emotional abilities and a sense of belonging. Also art projects, either as part of the curricula or in addition, have been shown to have positive impacts on pupils' motivation and learning.<sup>69</sup>

### **Open Schools in Naples (Italy)**

In the region of Campania, a flagship social inclusion scheme called Open Schools (*Scuole Aperte*) aims to tackle disengagement of pupils. Over 40% of schools in the region take part, and 250 projects were funded in the school year 2008-09. The projects can be implemented by all schools, from pre-schools to upper secondary.

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<sup>68</sup> [http://www.brugforalleunge.dk/fileadmin/bruger\\_upload/Billeder/Publikationer/English\\_Summary\\_evaluation\\_BFAU\\_final-version.pdf](http://www.brugforalleunge.dk/fileadmin/bruger_upload/Billeder/Publikationer/English_Summary_evaluation_BFAU_final-version.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation: Serious Play. An evaluation of arts activities in Pupil Referral Units and Learning Support Units.

Three-quarters of Open School projects are run by schools in association with local civil society; many co-operate with local authorities or universities. In 2008-09, the scheme enabled the organisation of 1,350 on-going after-school classes in disadvantaged areas. The most popular ones are theatre and music workshops, ICT courses and workshops that promote intercultural co-operation or active citizenship. Such activities are run by schools, NGOs or religious organisations. The workshops are organised outside school hours and are open for all children, including those who have already abandoned mainstream education. They provide a way to re-engage them and also many children who were at risk of dropping out in learning.<sup>70</sup>

### **Tanoda centres (Hungary)**

In Hungary, the European Social Fund supported the creation of a network of centres ("Tanoda") aimed at providing children from disadvantaged backgrounds, mainly but not exclusively Roma, with the extra support. The Centres help children with homework, and also organises art and sport activities. For academic support, courses are provided by local school teachers, who can identify difficulties at school and provide pupils with an extra support in the afternoon. School performance and attendance have dramatically risen since the Centres started to work. Key success factors are the direct involvement of representatives of the Roma community and of parents, as well as a culture of respect towards children and young people.<sup>71</sup>

#### *3.3.2. Student-focused strategies*

65. Together with the development of school-wide strategies, education systems need to provide individual support to young people who are at risk of dropping out. Redressing difficulties, which can be of social, cognitive or emotional nature, is of paramount importance. And they need to be adapted to the individual needs. Academic performance does not necessarily have to determine later school careers; however, without sufficient 'educational resilience', the capacity to cope with difficulties and drawbacks, there is a high chance that negative experiences will cumulate and result in ESL. Traditional 'academic support' measures aim to help pupils with academic difficulties to 'catch up' with their peers. Resilience-building puts more emphasis on feelings of confidence, for instance, as well as addressing academic competence.

66. Building resilience, offering mentoring and tutoring to students at risk, strengthening personalised learning approaches, and providing maintenance allowances are some of the measures which address the specific needs of individual pupils and go beyond school-wide strategies.

##### *3.3.2.1. Mentoring and tutoring*

67. A key feature of several effective ESL prevention programmes is mentoring. Some programmes are based solely on this measure, with key personnel working directly with pupils at risk. Besides school education staff, they often involve also other community members, including businesses and community volunteers. They can be regarded as 'impartial outsiders' by pupils who are disengaged from the school environment.

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<sup>70</sup> Summary Report PLA Italy.

<sup>71</sup> Summary Report PLA Hungary.

'Mentoring', however, can mean different things in different contexts and support offered can range from academic help to social work. What characterises a student-focused support programme as 'mentoring' is the one-to-one approach.

68. Mentoring programmes are in general expensive, time- and space-consuming. For this reason, tutoring in small groups is often a preferred alternative. Tutoring can be done by teachers, but also by out-side persons with appropriate background or training. They support pupils with low achievement levels and help them to cope with their difficulties in school. They can also help students in transitional periods.

#### **Care and Advisory Teams (The Netherlands)**

Every child who needs mentoring should receive it. This entails good cooperation between all partners in the care sector. Schools play a central role in this: they are the place where dropping out occurs and the place where it can be combated. For this reason, Care and Advisory Teams are already in place at many schools (95 % of secondary schools, 82 % of vocational institutions). These teams are made up of professionals who identify dangers early and take appropriate action. They get into direct contact with Youth Services, social workers, the police and judicial authorities and organise the necessary help to prevent young people from dropping out. They try to make sure that mentoring is available when needed.

#### **Tutoring programmes (French-speaking Community of Belgium)**

The tutoring programme supports pupils in upper-secondary education to reduce year repetition and facilitate transition to higher education. This programme was created in 1989 and aims at schools with a large population with socio-economic disadvantage and immigrant backgrounds. The tutors are university or college students who offer support to groups of 3 to 8 students in a specific course. Even if the programme is not a one-to-one, the additional support has proved to be very useful for the pupils.<sup>72</sup>

#### 3.3.2.2. Personalised learning

69. For a diversity of social, emotional and cultural reasons, adjusting to the demands of formal education can be difficult for pupils. Personalised learning programmes that include agreement of objectives and goals, specific programmes, division of labour and responsibilities can help to overcome the barriers that would normally prevent progression in learning. Personalised learning brings benefits for all pupils, not just those at risk of dropping out, as individual strengths can be better exploited and weaknesses addressed in a more targeted way. Evidence shows that it should however be properly resourced and integrated into flexible individual learning pathways. For students at risk, it could even be the preferred approach.

#### **Personalised programmes for educational success (France)**

In France, primary level students with severe and persistent learning difficulties are identified by their teacher, who implements a personalised programme for educational success (*programme personnalisé de réussite éducative* - PPRE). Within the PPRE the

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<sup>72</sup> Summary Report PLA Belgium.

school agrees a 'contract' with the pupil and his or her family, which includes a help and support programme during and outside school hours, defines objectives, means and resources attributed to the pupil and to his or her family. The objective is to avoid school-year repetition or to benefit from an unavoidable repetition.

#### **The *Mission Générale d'Insertion* (France)**

The 'General mission of integration' is a cross-cutting pattern of interventions targeting pupils who have been identified as at high risk of leaving school without a diploma and without minimum qualifications. The programme tries to prevent drop-out by offering personalized guidance, tailored to the specific needs of each individual student and provided by a team of teachers and educational staff ("*group of insertion help*").

But the programme also prepares pupils who have left the school system without a diploma less than a year before to undertake specific training courses for access to qualifications. "Re-motivation actions" follow individualised methods, and provide active guidance and apprenticeship possibilities. These are the actions which receive the biggest number of pupils (more than 30 000 in 2005/06) and after which 72% of the beneficiaries go back to education or training.

#### 3.3.2.3. Improving guidance

70. The growing variety of learning pathways reinforces the need for transparent and timely information on learning and career opportunities. Young people often find it difficult to make the right choice or they lack a clear idea of what a certain occupation involves. The systematic provision of career and academic guidance can have a positive effect on school completion, especially in vocational pathways. It can prevent young people from taking wrong decisions regarding their future career developments. Besides schools, public employment services try to provide services with multi-channelling, self-service options, personalised support and up-skilling schemes.

71. Pupils at risk often have less access to high quality guidance. Moreover, once ESL occurs, the links to school-based guidance services are severed. Evidence shows that guidance services should enhance their contribution to reducing ESL by helping students to overcome learning difficulties, developing individual action plans or intervention strategies in collaboration with families. Guidance services have a key support role and it is important that they remain accessible even after an individual has dropped out.<sup>73</sup>

#### **Career Orientation and Guidance (The Netherlands)**

A number of good practice examples in career orientation and guidance in the Netherlands have been investigated to determine success factors.

LOEKS puts pupils in pre-vocational secondary education in touch with professionals in various secondary vocational sectors by offering them fieldwork simulations. Instructors in secondary vocational and mentors in prevocational secondary education cooperate. While the instructors run the fieldwork simulations, mentors are responsible for

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<sup>73</sup> See also CEDEFOP (2010) Guiding at-risk youth through learning and work, OECD/EU (2004) Career Guidance. Handbook for policy makers.



preparatory and follow-up activities. They also guide and observe the pupils during their visits. CHAMPS ON STAGE is a work placement and mentoring project that helps youngsters to choose the right study course. The programme mediates between schools and organizations acting as match-maker. Pupils receive training in applying for jobs and attend work placements. Instructors and mentors cooperate closely.

### **Easy access to labour market data (Czech Republic)**

The National Institution of Technical and Vocational Education has developed an on-line labour market information system for teaching staff, advisors and graduates to support them in making informed career choices or in giving career advice. In addition, the Institute has developed learning facilities on issues like how to write a CV, how to behave in a job interview etc. E-learning tools have been made available to train educational counsellors and teachers.

### **Improving guidance and recognition (Luxembourg)**

The vocational guidance services (Orientation Professionnelle – O.P.) which act under the authority of the employment services, automatically take in charge unqualified young people leaving school. These young people attend an individual guidance and information interview where they are informed about the possibilities of entering a vocational training program or continuing their studies.<sup>74</sup>

#### 3.3.2.4. Financial support

72. Policies against ESL need to take account of the financial difficulties that cause many young people to leave school early. Some Nordic countries have traditionally provided study allowances as part of a policy of 'citizen entitlement'. Financial incentives can also be conditional, e.g. based on regular school attendance.

73. Another form of financial stimulus for young people to stay on at school is to make their families' social benefits dependent on their doing so.<sup>75</sup> Though there are positive experiences with this measure in some countries, it should be noted that conditional cash transfers on their own do not necessarily ensure positive learning outcomes or an intrinsic motivation to stay in education and training. They should therefore be accompanied by targeted measures to support pupils at risk in their learning. Moreover, when such conditional cash transfers take place in highly unequal educational settings, they tend to reinforce the patterns of exclusion.

### **Scholarships in Latvia**

To help vocational education students to stay at school in the economically difficult conditions, Latvia implements a major ESF project (ESF ~ €31 million) that provides

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<sup>74</sup> <http://www.adem.public.lu/adem/missions/op/index.html>

<sup>75</sup> Since 2009, for instance, social benefits for children at compulsory school age in Slovakia are based on the condition that the children attend school regularly. Minimum Income Scheme in Slovakia, First Report 2009, April 2009.

scholarships, as a financial incentive, to students. 26,038 students were supported in the framework of the project in 2009.<sup>76</sup>

### **Educational Maintenance Allowance (United Kingdom)**

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is a conditional cash transfer, the aim of which is to decrease dropout rates in the transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education in the UK. As such, it is targeted at individuals who have completed their general certificate of secondary education (GCSE). If they choose to undertake any academic or vocational course that involves at least 12 hours of guided learning per week, and if their household income is below £30,000 per year, they are eligible for the programme. The payments consist of a weekly allowance. It has been on offer nationwide since September 2004.

In England the scheme was tested in various forms by 56 of the 150 local education authorities. It showed that EMA motivated young people to stay in education and training. It had fewer effects on those who already left education and training.<sup>77</sup>

### **3.4. Compensation**

74. Compensatory strategies create opportunities for those who left education and training prematurely, but want to gain the qualifications they missed at a later stage in their life. The aim is also to reintegrate young adults in danger of social exclusion by offering a range of tailor-made education and training opportunities.

75. While avoiding drop-out altogether is the better outcome, the second chance route is an important option offers an essential opportunity to continue education and training for those who have left mainstream education early. Nevertheless early school leavers often face barriers to continue learning; many of their difficulties are linked to previous bad experiences at school and lack of confidence in own ability to learn.<sup>78</sup> In second and further educational chances dropout becomes more likely. .

#### *3.4.1. Second chance programmes*

76. Whether young adults can benefit from a second chance in education depends on why they dropped out of the 'first chance system'. It depends on their previous learning experiences, on their social or learning difficulties, on their living conditions and on the set-up of the programme. Targeted measures often follow a 360-degree approach and look at academic performance, wellbeing and psychological recovery of the young adults concerned.

77. Second chance schools need to provide a different learning environment which responds to the specific needs of their learners, such as smaller learning groups, more teachers per student, more personalised and innovative teaching, flexible and multiple

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<sup>76</sup> ESF Funding – Operational Programme 'human Resource Development', Ministry of Finance August 2009, [http://www.esfondi.lv/upload/04-kohezijas\\_politikas\\_nakotne/op/1\\_DP\\_2009-08-04\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.esfondi.lv/upload/04-kohezijas_politikas_nakotne/op/1_DP_2009-08-04_ENG.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> For more information <http://ema.direct.gov.uk/>; the Institute for Fiscal Studies (UK) evaluated the scheme, <http://www.ifs.org.uk/projects/98>.

<sup>78</sup> GHK (2005), p. 107

pathways and more elements of vocational training. Second chance programmes have to be relevant to their students, have to be able to provide sufficient incentives to maintain learning and need to be flexible to students' varied needs. And they need to pass the crucial test of providing successful students with accreditation which is recognised on the labour market and allows them to continue education and training within mainstream education and training system.

#### **Belvárosi Tanoda Alapítvány Foundation (Hungary)**

Hungary's Belvárosi Tanoda Secondary School is part of the network of Tanoda centres which aim at providing children from disadvantaged backgrounds with the extra support in education. The Belvárosi Tanoda is a second chance school for students who have dropped out of upper secondary education. It focuses on teaching adapted to the students' personalities and abilities and helps students to finish upper-secondary and pass their final exams. The school offers no full-year classes, but organises small study groups per subject. One-to-one teaching is used when necessary and possible; every student pairs with a teacher for help both in learning and in other aspects of life. The student signs a contract with personal objectives for the school year and learns according to a personal timetable.

The facilities, which do not resemble typical school buildings, create a family atmosphere and ensure a safe and accepting environment for the young adults. Rooms are used in a flexible manner, including leisure, cultural and sports activities as well as personal and team discussions. One of the main objectives is to create a rich social climate with various opportunities to learn social roles and develop self-esteem.

In 2007, the school had 100 full-time and 35 part-time students in general upper secondary education and employed 18 full-time and 13 part-time teachers and 6 additional staff members.<sup>79</sup>

#### *3.4.2. Support to re-enter mainstream education*

78. For reintegrating young early school leavers into the mainstream education system, a period of transition between the previous (and failed) school experience and a more successful one is often determinant. Seldom does a pupil return to school if he or she has not received any help. Transition programmes aim to bridge this gap and to avoid the risk of not being in employment, education or training in this crucial period of life.

#### **Project Learning for Young Adults (Slovenia)**

The 'Project Learning for Young Adults' (PLYA) is a long-standing programme that focuses on vulnerable young adults who have dropped out of school. The programme is voluntary, and lasts from at least three months up to one year, depending on the expectations and motivation of its participants. The programme is free of charge and co-financed by the European Social Fund, the Ministry of Social Affairs and by interested local communities.

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<sup>79</sup> László Limbacher, A Second Chance School in Hungary, OECD 2008, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/3/55/41533212.pdf>

Due to the complex multi-faceted problems faced by the target group, alternative pedagogical and counselling methods are employed to re-integrate them into education, training or employment. The success of the programme lies in the provision of an individualised, supportive learning environment and a flexible approach tailored to fit local circumstances and the needs of each young person. The role of the mentor is crucial in supporting the individual through this transition. Mentors act as role models, demonstrating what individuals can achieve and supporting them in dealing with the wide range of problems they face. The mutual trust and respect between mentors and students is an effective way of ensuring the young person's engagement.

The voluntary aspect of this programme contributes to building self-discipline and motivation but there is also a need for compulsory elements to help maintain the young person's engagement (e.g. individual agreements). The main strength of the PLYA is the comprehensive and person-centred approach that supports the participants in all aspects of their reintegration journey.<sup>80</sup>

### **Transition classes (France)**

Transition classes give an opportunity to pupils at risk to gradually regain confidence, catch up on missed learning and be reintegrated in regular classes enabling them to rejoin their year groups as smoothly as possible and without losing any time.

A transition class consists of few students who receive intensive tuition from a substantial number of teachers over a period of three months to one year. The educational project is developed by staff and teachers under the supervision of the head of the transition centre. The centre is established outside school, but it is closely monitored by the inspectorate. Transition classes have shown high success rates: between 75% and 80% of pupils return to regular school. The critical success factor seems to be the underlying concept combined with the high level of motivation and skills of teachers and other pedagogical staff engaged in the programme.<sup>81</sup>

With the school year 2010, France introduced a comparable scheme, the 'micro-lycées', which support young people in re-entering mainstream education and achieve the baccalaureate. They are linked to the national education system, but provide a more targeted support.

### **Sas transition centres (Belgium)**

*Sas* is a programme of school reinsertion targeting 13 to 17-year-olds who have dropped-out from school. Some *Sas* centres work in more direct cooperation with schools or even run within schools, others operate on school-independent level within the framework of a formalised partnership between the centre, students and their parents.

The basic principle is to offer a sabbatical period of maximum one year to allow pupils to explore other fields of activity (e.g. art-related), providing them with an experience, which may reinforce self esteem and may equip them to face the challenges of school more easily.

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<sup>80</sup> <http://www.guidance-europe.org/english/slovenia/guidanceyoung/practice/plya/>  
<sup>81</sup> Summary Report PLA in France.

Even though the pupils are not registered as school leavers, the period spent in Sas centres is not recognised as a year of education. Pupils have to restart at the same point they left. The idea behind this approach is to avoid stigmatisation linked to the attendance of second chance schools. The main objective is to bring pupils back to mainstream school: academic education should take place within the school.<sup>82</sup>

#### 3.4.3. *Recognition and validation of prior learning*

79. The recognition and validation of prior learning and especially of informal or non-formal learning outcomes is a measure strongly linked to guidance and coaching. It can play an important role in motivating young adults to maintain education and training or to re-enter it. It often leads to increased self-confidence as it contradicts the experience of learning difficulties and failure. It is relevant for planning further learning: validating prior learning helps learners to think about what they have achieved so far and to identify their strengths and skills. This helps them to identify their long-term goals and what they need to do to achieve them.<sup>83</sup> Advice and guidance during this process can help to ensure that the recognition of learning outcomes develops into a starting point for new learning. But what is equally important is the availability of learning opportunities and a clear perspective how to use the recognition of learning outcomes in later careers.

#### **New Opportunities Initiative (Portugal)**

The aim of the New Opportunities Initiative is to involve by 2010 over 650.000 young adults in courses of double certification at the upper secondary education level. Those at risk of leaving school without a qualification shall be integrated in occupational paths. The initiative also focuses on the recognition of existing competences and learning outcomes, using the National Qualification Catalogue as a tool.

The initiative has a decentralised approach, implemented by a network of public and private teaching and training providers. A panel of national and international experts has been appointed to perform external monitoring and validation of the initiative. And first successes are already visible: Changing education and training paths at the upper secondary level has already allowed reversing students' losses, reducing failures and preventing early drop-outs. The young adults enrolled in double certification courses (2007-08) at the upper secondary education level is 40% of the total at this level, an amount near the 50% of the OECD countries and the initiative goal by 2010.

#### 3.4.4. *Targeted individual support*

80. ESL can be part of a situation of serious social, academic and/or emotional distress. These young adults face high risk of completely dropping out of education, training or employment. Contrary to popular belief, they come from all social classes, although socio-economic disadvantage is still strongly represented among them. They may need special and integral support in order to return to education or training. It is crucial for many young people with turbulent relationships with schooling to recognise their abilities, see them as partners in the education process and support their active involvement.

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<sup>82</sup> Summary Report PLA in Belgium.

<sup>83</sup> CEDEFO (2009) European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, p. 51.

81. Existing programmes operate outside and within mainstream schooling. They provide a learning experience which reinforces self esteem and equips pupils with the necessary skills to face the challenges of school more easily. They offer learning alternatives that centre on the needs and life situation of the early school leavers. The appropriateness and efficacy of the different programmes depends very much on the context.

### **Youthreach centres (Ireland)**

Youthreach provides second-chance education for unemployed early school leavers aged 15-20. It is administered in out-of-school centres, operating full time on a year-round basis. They are small in size, with about 50 pupils each. The duration of stay in Youthreach is an average of 18 months.

The intervention of the Centre is holistic. Bringing pupils back to mainstream school happens but is not the main aim of the project. Youthreach provides formal education with the main objective of supporting pupils to pass the leaving certificate. In addition, Youthreach provides medical treatments, psychological and family support; self-development activities helping young adults handle emotions and frustration, assertiveness, nutrition; and sport and leisure opportunities.<sup>84</sup>

### **Action Locale pour Jeunes (Luxembourg)**

'Action Locale pour Jeunes' is a public institution acting under the authority of the "Vocational Training Service" (Ministry of Education). The ALJ supports young people during their transition from school to work, but also provides counselling for young drop-outs. They contact them individually and interview them about their reasons of leaving school and their current personal situation. The ALJ proposes them training opportunities, transfer to another school or training institution (including institutions abroad) or supports them in finding work. Since September 2005, a special task force assesses the competences of migrant pupils in order to offer them the most appropriate education or training opportunities.<sup>85</sup>

### **PLUS programmes (the Netherlands)**

The programme is intended for young people aged 12 to 23 who are cognitively capable of obtaining a basic qualification but who face an accumulation of personal problems which prevents them from completing their education in a regular study programme. These young people need comprehensive assistance to a degree which is beyond the capacity of the education sector. The PLUS programme initiates a process intended to redress problems and help them to focus again on their education and gain basic qualifications. Local authorities are closely involved in the programme; they ensure sustainability and continuation. Also various local budgets may be used in addition to the education budget.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> PLA Ireland, Final Report.

<sup>85</sup> Ministère de l'éducation nationale Luxembourg: Le décrochage scolaire au Luxembourg, 2009, p.26; <http://www.alj.lu>.

<sup>86</sup> [http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/vervolg.php?h\\_id=10&s\\_id=57&v\\_id=64&titel=Plusvoorzieningen](http://www.aanvalopschooluitval.nl/vervolg.php?h_id=10&s_id=57&v_id=64&titel=Plusvoorzieningen)