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## OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	13961/22
Subject:	Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving

Delegations will find attached the abovementioned Council Recommendation, adopted by the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) at its meeting on 28-29 November 2022.

**Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation  
of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving**

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 165 and 166 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

1. The European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>1</sup> emphasises in its first and eleventh principles the importance of guaranteeing a quality and inclusive education for all, from a young age. The effective implementation of those principles depends on the resolve and action of Member States. EU-level actions can complement national actions and the Commission presented its contribution in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan<sup>2</sup>.
2. On 30 September 2020, the European Commission published a communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, with inclusiveness as one of its six dimensions<sup>3</sup>. On 18 February 2021, the Council approved the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)<sup>4</sup>, with the aim of improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education and training as its first strategic priority.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> COM(2021) 102 final.

<sup>3</sup> COM(2020) 625 final.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 66, 26.2.2021, p. 1.

3. The European Year of Youth 2022<sup>5</sup> aims to engage and empower young people to shape their future and the future of Europe, offering them increased opportunities to be involved in decisions that affect their lives.
4. In the report on the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe, citizens call on the European Union and its Member States to establish by 2025 an inclusive European Education Area within which all citizens have equal access to quality education and lifelong learning, including those in rural and remote areas<sup>6</sup>. The 2020 Commission communication identifies inclusion and gender equality as a key dimension of the European Education Area to be achieved by 2025, and calls for education outcomes to be decoupled from socio-economic status. The Council has agreed that, by 2030, the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15 % and has committed to reducing the share of early leavers from education and training to less than 9 %.
5. Even though the rate of early leavers has significantly improved at EU level, decreasing by 3.9 percentage points in the period 2010-2021, many learners continue to leave education prematurely. The share of early leavers from education and training was 9.7 % in 2021 across the EU on average, just below the EU-level ET 2020 target of 10 % set for 2020. Still, more than 3.2 million young people in the EU (18-24 years old) are early leavers from education and training. Considerable differences still exist across and within countries, with persisting inequalities among specific groups (e.g. migrants, young men, ethnic minorities such as Roma, and young people in rural and remote areas perform less well).

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<sup>5</sup> Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022), OJ L 462, 28.12.2021, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Conference on the Future of Europe – Report on the Final Outcome*, May 2022, Proposal 46 (p. 88).

6. The results of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 reveal a deteriorating trend in the number of low achievers in basic skills over the period 2009-2018 in many countries. Today, one in five 15-year-old Europeans still lack adequate reading, maths or science competences. Moreover, the results of the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) 2018 show that a fifth of young people in the EU do not possess basic digital skills, and also reveal severe performance discrepancies in terms of socio-economic status which threaten to deepen the digital divide<sup>7</sup>.
7. Data confirm that socio-economic background is the strongest predictor of educational outcomes. In most EU countries, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are overrepresented among those who leave education and training without an upper secondary qualification. PISA 2018 revealed that in most EU countries the proportion of underachievers in reading is much larger in the bottom quarter of the economic, social and cultural status index (ESCS) than it is in the top quarter; up to more than 40 percentage points in some EU countries. Academic literature confirms that pupils from a socio-economically disadvantaged background tend to experience more difficulties in developing academic and linguistic skills. They display learning-related behavioural problems more often, show lower motivation towards learning, leave education and training earlier, and leave with lower qualifications and insufficient competences for full participation in society.

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<sup>7</sup> While digital skills are to be considered amongst the basic skills, they are not explicitly addressed by the current Recommendation, as they are already at the centre of other initiatives such as the Digital Education Action Plan.

8. Over the last years, Member States have integrated high numbers of third-country migrants (including refugees<sup>8</sup>) of school age into their education and training systems, including some arriving with a very low level of basic skills. Further challenges arise in the context of people fleeing the war in Ukraine, a large proportion of whom are children of school age requiring targeted learning support (including acquisition of the language of schooling) and psycho-social support.
9. PISA 2015 and 2018 also shed light on pupils' declining sense of belonging at school and widespread and increasing bullying/cyberbullying. Research highlights the importance of emotional, social and physical well-being in schools to enhance children and young people's chances of succeeding in education and in life. It confirms that mental health issues, as well as violence and bullying, racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance and discrimination, have devastating effects on children's and young people's emotional well-being and educational outcomes. Research also shows that disadvantaged groups are more at risk of being bullied, and learners from schools located in socio-economically disadvantaged environments feel a weaker sense of belonging than their more affluent peers.
10. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more important to address these challenges. Several studies suggest that the crisis may have increased the likelihood that learners at risk of disconnecting from school will actually drop out and has had detrimental effects on learners' mental health and well-being in general<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> In the current document the term 'refugee' is used in a broad political sense rather than as defined in the Geneva Convention and the EU asylum acquis.

<sup>9</sup> See for example: Koehler, C., Psacharopoulos, G., and Van der Graaf, L., *The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof*, NESET-EENEE report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022; European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Impacts of COVID-19 on school education*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022; Blaskó, Z., da Costa, P., and Schnepf, S. V., *Learning Loss and Educational Inequalities in Europe: Mapping the Potential Consequences of the COVID-19 Crisis*, IZA Discussion Paper 14298, Bonn, 2021.

11. In 2011, the Council adopted a Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving<sup>10</sup>. Extensive work has been carried out at European and national level to implement the Recommendation, in particular through peer learning and exchanges of good practices between Member States within the ET 2020 framework for European policy cooperation. A wide range of resources, examples of successful measures and resource material are available online through the European Toolkit for Schools and Cedefop's vocational education and training (VET) toolkit for tackling early leaving. An independent assessment of the implementation of the Recommendation, published in 2019<sup>11</sup>, gives a strong indication that the Recommendation and the accompanying set of EU policy tools have encouraged transformations within education and training institutions and policies and supported the reduction of early leaving from education and training. It also highlights areas in which further work is needed.
12. The Erasmus+ programme has supported several transnational projects on inclusion in various educational sectors, addressing underachievement and early leaving from education and training. Inclusion is one of the overarching priorities of Erasmus+ for the 2021-2027 period. The programme also includes the specific policy priority of tackling learning disadvantage, early school leaving and low proficiency in basic skills, allowing stakeholders to Erasmus+ funding to implement policy recommendations.

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<sup>10</sup> OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Donlevy, V., Day, L., Andriescu, M., Downes, P., *Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving: final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019.

13. The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2014-2020 have mobilised significant investments to tackle early leaving from education and training, supporting numerous large-scale projects in alignment with the 2011 Council Recommendation. The European Social Fund Plus supports individuals, regions and Member States facing distinct challenges, from recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic to meeting the EU's targets for climate, employment, social inclusion and education. The use of ESIF and the 2021-2027 cohesion policy funds is informed by, among other things, the country-specific recommendations issued in the framework of the European Semester.
14. The Technical Support Instrument offers Member States the possibility to receive, upon request, support for tailor-made reforms in a variety of areas, such as improving educational outcomes for children, improving early childhood education and care (ECEC), setting national strategies and action plans to address and prevent early leaving from education and training, developing tools to support teacher recruitment and professional development, or preparing and rolling out curriculum reform. The Technical Support Instrument and its predecessor, the Structural Reform Support Programme, have been used by several Member States to support reforms in relation to preventing early leaving from education and training, especially as regards children from vulnerable backgrounds.
15. Children and adolescents need a balanced set of cognitive, social and emotional competences to achieve positive outcomes in school and in life. The Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning<sup>12</sup> defines 'personal, social and learning to learn competence'. It includes the ability to cope with uncertainty and complexity, support one's physical and emotional well-being, maintain physical and mental health, develop collaborative and positive relationships, lead a health-conscious, future-oriented life, and manage conflict in an inclusive and supportive context.

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<sup>12</sup> OJ C 189, 4.6.2018, p. 1.

16. The Council conclusions on equity and inclusion in education and training in order to promote educational success for all<sup>13</sup> invite Member States to implement educational policy measures and pursue, as appropriate, reforms in education and training systems, looking at the whole spectrum of education and training and in a whole-institution approach, to enhance equal opportunities and inclusion and promote educational success at all levels and types of education and training.
17. The Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future<sup>14</sup> recognise that teachers, trainers and school leaders are an indispensable driving force of education and training and emphasise the need to further develop and update their competences. The European Education Area communication and Council Resolution acknowledged the critical role of teachers and trainers.
18. The Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems<sup>15</sup> underlines that access to quality early childhood education and care services for all children contributes to their healthy development and educational success, helps reducing social inequalities and narrows the competence gap between children with different socio-economic backgrounds.
19. The Council Recommendation of 29 November 2021 on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education<sup>16</sup> promotes blended learning approaches that combine school-site and distance-learning environments, as well as digital and non-digital learning tools, with a view to building more resilient and inclusive education and training systems. Such practices allow for diversified and differentiated approaches and tools, to better support all pupils – and especially pupils with specific needs or from disadvantaged groups – and enhance their learning motivation.

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<sup>13</sup> OJ C 221, 10.6.2021, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> OJ C 193, 9.6.2020, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 21.



20. The European Skills Agenda<sup>17</sup> defines actions to strengthen sustainable competitiveness, build resilience to react to crises and help individuals and businesses develop a relevant set of skills, based on the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience<sup>18</sup> proposes a renewed EU policy vision for VET, which has a key role in preventing and counteracting early leaving from education and training and promoting equality of opportunities.
21. The Digital Education Action Plan<sup>19</sup> sets out actions to enhance digital skills and competences for the digital transformation, to ensure that no learners are left behind and that graduates have the competences needed on the labour market. It foresees the development of common guidelines for teachers and educational staff to foster digital literacy and tackle disinformation, an update of the European Digital Competence Framework and a proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training. The action plan also encourages efforts to close the gender gap in STEM.
22. The Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee<sup>20</sup> invites the Member States to guarantee effective and free access to education and school-based activities for children in need (i.e. at risk of poverty or social exclusion, particularly Roma). The EU strategy on the rights of the child<sup>21</sup> calls for the building of inclusive and quality education. The new European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+)<sup>22</sup> calls for the building of a digital environment where children are protected, empowered and respected and highlights that children in vulnerable situations should have equal chances to harness the opportunities of the digital decade.

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<sup>17</sup> COM(2020) 274 final.

<sup>18</sup> OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> COM(2020) 624 final.

<sup>20</sup> OJ L 223, 22.6.2021, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> COM(2021) 142 final.

<sup>22</sup> COM(2022) 212 final.

23. The new generation of EU equality strategies and inclusion policy frameworks adopted in 2020 and 2021<sup>23</sup> put a strong focus on promoting equity and inclusion and fighting discrimination in education, with targeted support for the most disadvantaged and those most at risk of discrimination.
24. The Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee<sup>24</sup> recommends helping young people back into education and training by diversifying the continued education offer, ensuring, where appropriate, the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In addition, the ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) initiative helps disadvantaged young people aged 18-30 who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) find their way to the job market in their home country by combining support for education, vocational training or employment with a work placement in another EU Member State, in order to improve their skills, knowledge and experience.
25. Lessons learnt from the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation, new insights from research, and stakeholder consultations call for a broader, more inclusive and systemic approach to school success, addressing simultaneously the EU-level target for basic skills and the one for early leaving from education and training, and fully embedding the well-being dimension. Such an approach should ensure the development of the competences necessary to thrive in education and life, and lead to a meaningful learning experience, engagement, wider participation in the community and a transition to a stable adulthood and active citizenship.

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<sup>23</sup> Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (2020), EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025 (2020), EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation (2020) and related Council Recommendation (2021), LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (2020), Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 (2020), Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (2021), EU Strategy on Combatting Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life 2021-2030 (2021).

<sup>24</sup> OJ C 372, 4.11.2020, p. 1.

26. The objective of reducing underachievement and early leaving from education and training and promoting school success needs to be systematically addressed by Member States across the EU. At system level, consistency of policy measures, coordination with other relevant policy areas (such as youth, health, culture, social services, employment, housing, justice, migration and integration), and effective cooperation between different actors at all levels (national, regional, local, school) are needed in order to provide coordinated support to children, young people and their families. In parallel, at school level, whole-school approaches should be promoted, in accordance with national circumstances, incorporating all areas of activity (teaching and learning, planning and governance, etc.) and engaging all key actors (learners, school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and families, and local and wider communities)<sup>25</sup>.
27. This Council Recommendation fully respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

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<sup>25</sup> See definition in Commission Staff Working Document SWD(2022) 176 final.

## HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. By 2025, develop or, where appropriate, further strengthen an **integrated and comprehensive strategy<sup>26</sup> towards school success**, at the appropriate level, in accordance with the structure of their education and training system, with a view to minimising the effects of socio-economic status on education and training outcomes, promoting inclusion in education and training and further reducing early leaving from education and training and underachievement in basic skills, taking into consideration the various measures outlined in the policy framework in the Annex. Special attention should be paid to well-being at school as a key component of school success. Such a strategy should include **prevention, intervention and compensation** measures (including measures offered as part of the reinforced Youth Guarantee<sup>27</sup>), be **evidence-based** and **combine universal measures with targeted and/or individualised provisions** for learners requiring additional attention and support in inclusive settings (such as learners from a socio-economically disadvantaged, migrant, refugee or Roma background, those with visible and non-visible disabilities, those with special educational needs or mental health issues, and those living in isolated, insular or remote areas, such as the EU outermost regions, according to national circumstances). Such a strategy should also be based on structured **cooperation** between actors representing different policy areas, levels of governance and education and training levels, benefit from adequate **funding** and be accompanied by a clear **implementation and evaluation** plan.

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<sup>26</sup> Such a strategy can be included in relevant national strategic documents.

<sup>27</sup> Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee, OJ C 372, 4.11.2020, p. 1.

2. Develop or, where appropriate, further strengthen **data collection and monitoring systems** at national, regional and local level which allow for the systematic collection of quantitative and qualitative information on learners, as well as on factors that affect learning outcomes, especially socio-economic background. These systems must be in compliance with protection of personal data and national legislation. They should, to the extent possible, ensure that disaggregated data and information on a wide range of aspects (including views of the learners themselves) are available at different policy levels and used (in anonymised form as appropriate) for analysis, prevention and early intervention, policy design, and for steering, monitoring and evaluating the above strategies.
3. In the context of an integrated and comprehensive strategy and in accordance with national circumstances, combine prevention, intervention and compensation measures, such as those proposed in the policy framework in the annex, to support:
  - 3.1 **learners**, by combining in a systemic way various measures which put the learners' interests and needs in the centre and taking into account their opinions;
  - 3.2 **school leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff, including in ECEC**, by helping them to acquire knowledge, skills and competences and providing support for continuous professional development, as well as adequate time, space and support to work effectively with all learners, including those at risk of exclusion, underachievement and early leaving. Recognition and appreciation (including financial) of their work should be taken into account;
  - 3.3 **schools** in developing a 'whole-school approach' to school success, in which all members of the school community (school leaders, teachers, trainers and other educational staff, learners, parents and families and the local community), as well as a wide range of stakeholders, engage actively and in a collaborative way to promote educational success for all learners;

- 3.4 **system-level** measures and an inter-sectoral approach to improve equity and inclusion in education and training and promote educational success for all learners, including by addressing structures and mechanisms which may have a particularly detrimental impact on learners belonging to more disadvantaged groups.
4. Optimise, according to national, regional and local needs, the use of national and EU **resources** for investment in infrastructure, training, tools and resources to increase inclusion, equality and well-being in education, including EU funds and expertise for reforms and investment in infrastructure, tools, pedagogy and the creation of healthy learning environments, in particular Erasmus+, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the Digital Europe programme, Horizon Europe, the Technical Support Instrument, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, etc., and make sure that the use of the funds is aligned with the overall strategy.
5. Report on their strategy, the measures taken, relevant monitoring and evaluation arrangements and the budget allocated within the existing reporting arrangements of the European Education Area (including within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (2021-2030)) and of the European Semester.
6. Actively involve young people in the implementation of the Council Recommendation, inter alia through the EU Youth Dialogue, to ensure that the opinions, views and needs of young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are heard and taken into account.

## HEREBY INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

1. Support the implementation of the Council Recommendation, as well as related initiatives such as the European Child Guarantee and the reinforced Youth Guarantee, by facilitating mutual learning and exchanges among Member States and all relevant stakeholders on educational success for all by:
  - 1.1 implementing the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), where reducing early leaving from education and training, enhancing proficiency in basic skills and promoting the well-being of learners, teachers and trainers are key priority areas;
  - 1.2 setting up and promoting the activities of the expert group on strategies for creating supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and for supporting well-being at school, which will take forward the work on identifying good practice in respect of developing supportive and healthy learning environments, promoting mental health, healthy lifestyles, and physical and emotional well-being (including by addressing post-traumatic stress), and preventing bullying and violence at school, as well as proposals for effective uptake of successful practices in schools and recommendations for awareness-raising activities at EU and national level;
  - 1.3 identifying and sharing successful practices (including peer learning and peer mentoring), guidelines and practical tools to support the design, implementation and evaluation of national, regional and local policies and practices, including those targeting learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, using the EU collaborative tools, online platforms and communities for education and training, including eTwinning, the new European School Education Platform, Erasmus+ Alumni, Cedefop's ambassadors for tackling early leaving, and the Learning Corner for multilingual learning materials on the EU;

- 1.4 raising awareness and encouraging the use of opportunities to promote, support and enable inclusion, equity and well-being in education and training within EU funds, such as Erasmus+, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the Digital Europe programme, Horizon Europe, the Technical Support Instrument, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, etc.;
  - 1.5 supporting EU-wide research and surveys; encouraging the creation of research networks and supporting dialogue between research and policy, as well as between research and practitioners;
  - 1.6 taking into account the outcomes of the structured dialogue on digital education and skills.
2. Support the development and dissemination of guidance material and resources on educational success for all learners (including on integration of migrants and language learning), in cooperation with Member States and for their voluntary use, including by further developing and promoting the European Toolkit for Schools on promoting inclusive education and tackling early school leaving, the compendium of inspiring practices on inclusive and citizenship education, and Cedefop's VET toolkit for tackling early leaving.
  3. Support professional development opportunities for educational staff and other stakeholders by:
    - 3.1 sharing good practices from Erasmus+ staff exchanges, projects and networks, including through the eTwinning online community, the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies and the Centres of Vocational Excellence;



- 3.2 making available massive open online courses (MOOCs) and educational opportunities (including micro-credentials) for continuous professional development for teachers, trainers, school leaders and teacher educators, through the new European School Education Platform, and promoting widespread use of these courses.
4. Monitor and report on the implementation of the Council Recommendation within the existing arrangements of the European Education Area (including within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training) and of the European Semester (including the revised Social Scoreboard).
5. Monitor and report periodically on progress towards the EU-level targets within the framework of reports on the European Education Area; in close cooperation with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, consider how monitoring at EU level can be enhanced, in particular by assessing existing EU-level indicators and, if appropriate and necessary, proposing new ones, in particular on inclusion and equity.

The Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving shall be replaced by this Recommendation.

Done at Brussels,

*For the Council*

*The President*

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### **A policy framework for school success**

This Annex proposes a policy framework which serves as a reference tool for national, regional and local policy makers and practitioners in education and training which can inspire a systemic policy response to ensure better educational outcomes for all learners.

This policy framework describes a systemic approach for improving success at school for all learners, irrespective of their personal characteristics as well as family, cultural and socio-economic background. It identifies key conditions and measures aimed at reducing early school leaving and underachievement in basic skills, based on evidence and good practices identified in the EU Member States and state-of-the-art research. It is based on a broad and inclusive approach to school success, which is not only about academic results but also takes into account elements such as personal, social and emotional development and learners' well-being at school. It is structured around some overarching conditions (points 1 and 2) and a set of possible actions to be promoted at school and at system level in accordance with respective national education systems.

1. Pursuing success at school for all learners, regardless of personal characteristics as well as family, cultural and socio-economic background, requires an **integrated and comprehensive strategy towards success at school** at the appropriate policy level (national, regional, local), according to national circumstances and the structure of the education and training system. Such a strategy should entail, for example:
  - a) ensuring coordination with other policy areas (such as youth, health, culture, social services, employment, housing, justice, inclusion of refugees and other migrants and non-discrimination) and creating sustained cooperation between different levels of governance of the education and training system, as well as systematic dialogue with all relevant stakeholders (including learners, parents and families and those representing the views of more marginalised groups) from the design phase all the way through to implementation and evaluation;

- b) having a balanced, coherent and coordinated set of policy measures, combining prevention, intervention and compensation, with a strong focus on preventive and intervention actions;
- c) integrating national, regional and local strategic approaches (as appropriate) to preventing early leaving from education and training with those aimed at promoting basic skills, addressing bullying and cyberbullying (including gender-based bullying and sexual harassment) and supporting well-being;
- d) systematically combining, in inclusive settings, universal school-wide measures for all learners with targeted actions for some learners or groups of learners sharing similar needs or at moderate risk, and more individualised ones for those with complex or chronic needs and at highest risk;
- e) paying specific attention to children and young people at risk of disadvantage or discrimination, ensuring an intersectional approach and including appropriate measures for groups at risk, such as children from a socio-economically disadvantaged, migrant or Roma background, refugees, those with visible and non-visible disabilities, including long-term or short-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, and those with special educational needs or mental health issues, in collaboration with social and health experts;
- f) paying attention to identifying gender disparities in education and training, including through reinforced monitoring of the performance of boys and girls, and putting in place specific actions as appropriate;
- g) considering the importance of non-formal and informal educational processes for learning success and involvement of all relevant partners;

- h) taking an evidence-based approach, informed by solid data collection and monitoring systems (see point 2 below) and supported by the latest quantitative and qualitative research, considering the practices and tools which have demonstrable success in helping to achieve educational success for all learners. This includes taking inspiration from resources provided at European level, such as the European Toolkit for Schools, the Compendium of inspiring practices on inclusive and citizenship education and Cedefop's VET toolkit for tackling early leaving and Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices;
- i) allocating proportionate resources, including the use of national and EU funds, as well as other support for reforms and investment in educational tools, infrastructure and pedagogy (in particular Erasmus+, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the Digital Europe programme, Horizon Europe, the Technical Support Instrument, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the funding scheme Connecting European Facilities (CEF2));
- j) providing for an implementation plan with clear targets and milestones, a monitoring and evaluation plan and the creation of a coordination mechanism or structure, at the level appropriate to national circumstances, in order to facilitate cooperation, support implementation and allow monitoring, evaluation and policy review.

2. To be effective, an integrated strategy should be based on robust **data collection and monitoring systems** in the Member States, at the level appropriate to national circumstances, and should not impose an unnecessary additional administrative burden on educational institutions. These systems should, for example:
- a) allow analysis, at all policy levels (national, regional and local), of the scope and incidence of and possible reasons for underachievement and early leaving from education and training, including by collecting the views of marginalised learners and families;
  - b) be used to design and steer policy development, monitor implementation and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the measures adopted;
  - c) allow early detection and identification of learners at risk of leaving education and training early and those who have done so, in order to provide timely and appropriate support, without labelling or stigmatising such learners;
  - d) provide a basis for developing effective guidance and support for schools.

Data and information should ideally cover all levels (ECEC, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary) and types of education and training (including VET) and be available at different policy levels, and must comply with legislation on the protection of personal data. Quantitative and qualitative information should be collected, according to national circumstances, with a high level of disaggregation (for example on gender, socio-economic background, migrant background, regional differences, etc.), as well as on a broad range of factors which have a negative or positive effect on learning outcomes (such as participation in ECEC, attendance, engagement in learning processes, achievement in basic skills, well-being at school, mental health, sense of belonging, behavioural issues, experience of discrimination, etc.).

3. To support **learners**, the following good practices have been identified, the successful implementation of which depends crucially on the commitment of all relevant actors (school leaders, teachers, trainers or other relevant staff, families and the learners themselves), at national, regional, local and school level, in accordance with national circumstances and the structure of the education and training system:

*Prevention measures*

- a) Ensure early identification of risk factors such as learning difficulties, developmental problems, language competences and special educational needs, including social and emotional difficulties, as well as early detection of learners at risk of underachievement and dropping out, whilst avoiding labelling and stigmatisation.
- b) Develop curricula that are learner-centred and based on inclusive and relational pedagogies, and allow for diversified and personalised forms of teaching and learning. Active involvement of children and young people in the creation of learning materials should be considered, as appropriate, in particular as regards resources for bullying prevention, social and emotional education, conflict resolution and overcoming prejudice.
- c) Include social and emotional education, bullying prevention and mental and physical health in curricula, from ECEC to upper-secondary education and training.
- d) Strengthen competence in the language(s) of schooling, while valuing and supporting the linguistic diversity of learners as a pedagogical resource for further learning and educational achievement. This may include, for example, assessment of prior language knowledge, strong support in the learner's mother tongue (first language) and language of schooling, access to home language instruction, and mechanisms to support the transition between reception and mainstream classes at different levels of education, where applicable.

- e) In particular, support the acquisition of the language of schooling by refugees and newly arrived migrants through early immersion within mainstream classes and curricula, with additional one-to-one support provided at an appropriate level to accelerate social and academic learning. Continued access to linguistic and academic support, career guidance across all levels of education and training and intercultural education, along with parental engagement, can also play a key role.
- f) Promote pedagogical approaches that are interactive and experiential as well as culturally and linguistically responsive, in order to build learners' autonomy and responsibility in their learning and to empower them to actively engage in their competence development. Such approaches may include opportunities for blended learning (including digital resources and access to libraries, laboratories, museums, other cultural institutions such as music or art schools, community centres and nature), taking into consideration the needs of learners with disabilities or special educational needs, flexible and heterogeneous organisation of learning time and environments, transdisciplinary teaching and learning, cooperative learning and peer support, as well as the use of assistive technologies for learners with disabilities.
- g) Promote assessment practices that reflect and support personal learning needs and paths, in particular by making extensive use of formative and continuous assessment and by combining multiple digital and non-digital forms and tools (e.g. portfolios, peer assessment and self-assessment) that are inclusive, culturally responsive and participatory.

### *Intervention measures*

- h) Provide frameworks in schools offering targeted support to all learners facing learning difficulties or at risk of underachievement, through a multi-disciplinary and team-based approach (e.g. parental engagement programmes through a whole-school approach, mentoring schemes, including peer mentoring, mobilisation of support staff, extra learning time during the school year and/or holiday periods, access to additional learning environments).
- i) Within inclusive and accessible settings, offer enhanced individualised support for learners with multifaceted complex needs, including social, emotional and mental health needs (e.g. personal tutoring, individual learning plans, interventions by specialist in emotional counselling, psychotherapeutic interventions, multi-disciplinary teams, family support).
- j) Provide solutions at school level or in partnership with other actors for learners who have difficulties in satisfying basic needs due to their socio-economic background (e.g. lack of educational material, difficulties related to transportation, hunger, nutrition and sleep deficits).
- k) Provide targeted financial and/or non-financial support schemes for disadvantaged learners to facilitate their progression to secondary and tertiary levels of education and training and their successful completion of upper-secondary level studies leading to relevant qualifications.
- l) Provide funding arrangements for refugees and newly arrived migrant learners to ensure access to tuition or preparatory classes, where needed, and a smooth entry into the education and training system at all levels.



### *Combined intervention/compensation measures*

- m) Provide social, emotional and psychological support to learners, especially those experiencing adverse childhood experiences, trauma, or serious social or emotional distress hindering their school engagement. This could include strengthening the role of adviser and mentor figures among staff, facilitating pupils' access to mental health professionals and services in and around schools, and early intervention for victims and perpetrators of bullying. Create peer and community support to prevent bullying/cyberbullying and address any forms of discrimination.
- n) Ensure access to equitable, responsive and adequate support for refugees and newly arrived migrants, including social, emotional and psychological support, helping them overcome challenges related to post-traumatic stress and the migration or integration experience. This support should be embedded in a broader and cross-sectoral scheme to take into account all their specific needs, in collaboration with social and health services, mental health agencies and all other relevant services and agencies, and closely involving learners and their families or carers.
- o) Facilitate access to extracurricular and out-of-school activities (sport, arts, volunteering or youth work, etc.) and improve the documentation and validation of their learning outcomes.
- p) Strengthen education guidance, career guidance and counselling and career education to support acquisition of career management skills and competences. This should include curricular and non-curricular activities such as work-based learning, workplace visits, job shadowing, career games or taster courses.

4. **School leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff, including in ECEC**, play a pivotal role in the strategy. For this challenging responsibility, they need support and be equipped to understand and tackle educational inequality, underachievement and disengagement. Together with helping them acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences, this also requires appropriate working conditions in terms of time, space and means. The following good practices have been identified:

*Prevention measures*

- a) Embed inclusion, equity and diversity, understanding underachievement and disengagement, and addressing well-being, mental health and bullying in all statutory initial teacher education (ITE) programmes.
- b) Make sure that high-quality and research-based initial teacher education and continuous professional development (CPD) prepare school leaders, teachers, trainers and other educational staff to:
  - understand risk and protective factors that might have an impact on academic performance, disengagement or early leaving from education and training, as well as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties;
  - understand well-being, disability and mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress, and support the development of social and emotional competences of learners;
  - develop competences to teach in multilingual and multicultural settings;

- recognise and challenge gender stereotypes in teaching and learning (including low expectations regarding boys’ achievement and the gender gap in STEM) and develop gender-sensitive teaching practices that are more conducive to motivating and engaging boys and girls;
  - recognise and address different types of learning difficulties;
  - use collaborative practices and work in multi-disciplinary teams in school as well as with external partners;
  - use a variety of learning approaches, tools and environments, as appropriate, and actively implement blended learning, combining indoor and outdoor activities, individualised and group teaching and learning, digital and non-digital resources, etc.;
  - use formative assessment methods and tools in teaching and learning;
  - promote a positive learning climate, using class management, bullying prevention and conflict resolution strategies, and build relationships of trust with learners, parents, families and carers, in particular with those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.
- c) Provide incentives to teachers, trainers, school leaders and other educational staff to work in schools with a high share of pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Encourage student teachers to do work placements in such schools.
- d) Ensure that all staff engaged in career education and in learning or career guidance are trained and qualified and have access to initial and continuing training.

- e) Support the well-being of teachers, trainers, school leaders and other school staff and improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession, including by ensuring adequate working conditions, professional autonomy and active involvement of teachers and trainers in school management, high-quality initial education and continuous professional development, access to support and mental health professionals and services, collaboration and peer support.

#### *Intervention measures*

- f) Facilitate staff exchanges, peer learning and peer support among teachers, trainers and other educational staff and professionals, through networking, job shadowing, seminars and multi-professional learning communities, as well as access to centres of expertise and to appropriate resources that can help adjust teaching and learning to the specific needs of all learners. Ensure, in particular, access to specialist resource centres or advisory teams that can provide the necessary tools and pedagogies for supporting refugees and newly arrived migrant learners and working across multiple localities and schools.
  - g) Explore, where possible, how alternative entry routes to the teaching profession can favour a greater diversity among educational staff and open up the teaching profession to individuals from different backgrounds, including candidates who have themselves experienced socio-economic disadvantage.
5. To promote educational success for all learners, ‘**whole-school approaches**’, in which all members of the school community (school leaders, teachers, trainers and other educational staff, learners, parents and families), as well as a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. social and health services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, specialist emotional counsellors/therapists, nurses, speech and language therapists, guidance specialists, youth workers, local authorities, NGOs, businesses, unions, volunteers, etc.) and the community at large, engage actively and in a collaborative way, have proven to be particularly effective. Successful policies may include:

### *Prevention measures*

- a) Allow a sufficient level of autonomy for decision-making by school leaders and governance boards, coupled with strong accountability.
- b) Promote the embedding of school success for all and well-being (including bullying prevention, anti-discrimination, gender sensitivity and health issues) in school planning and governance processes (school development plans, mission statements, annual or multi-annual pedagogical plans, etc.) and encourage schools to design, monitor and evaluate specific inclusion and well-being plans.
- c) Promote school success for all learners and well-being at school as part of internal and external quality-assurance mechanisms and the inclusion of targets and indicators also on issues such as learning climate, bullying and well-being. Ensure that external evaluation/inspection provides advice and support to inspected schools, supports school self-evaluation and promotes a culture of self-reflection and improvement on inclusion and well-being strategies and practices.
- d) Provide professional development opportunities and guidance to support school leaders in managing organisational change and promoting inclusive practices.
- e) Encourage a participatory and democratic school environment that involves learners in school and classroom decision-making and makes use of participatory methods adapted to children and young people, including those from marginalised backgrounds.
- f) Promote a school culture which values diversity, fosters the well-being of learners, promotes their sense of belonging, and creates a safe environment for dialogue on controversial issues.

### *Combined prevention and intervention measures*

- g) Encourage collaborative and multi-disciplinary practices in school and partnerships with local services, youth workers, social and health professionals, businesses and the community at large.
- h) Promote schools as community lifelong learning centres where education, training and social life are closely intertwined with the neighbourhood and where the community takes joint responsibility for the school as a learning space.
- i) Promote networking between schools, as well as multi-professional learning communities at local, regional, national and international level to promote mutual learning. Encourage schools to use the resources available in the European Toolkit for Schools, in the Compendium of inspiring practices on inclusive and citizenship education and in Cedefop's VET toolkit for tackling early leaving.
- j) Promote 'language awareness' in and around school, encouraging all actors to reflect on norms, values and attitudes towards language and cultural diversity, including by identifying and taking into consideration all the languages spoken within the school community, involving parents and families, carers and the wider community in language education, creating libraries with resources in various languages and facilitating after-school language activities.
- k) Support schools to embed effective practices at each stage of the 'language learning process' of newly arrived migrants (including refugees), including reception and assessment (e.g. through a comprehensive and multi-dimensional assessment of literacy, language and other key competences), placement and admission (e.g. by providing time-limited initial preparatory classes, where necessary and where applicable, and putting in place welfare and academic supports to facilitate a smooth transition into mainstream education), and monitoring (to prevent the geographical segregation of migrant learners through school entry and admissions criteria).

- l) Encourage effective communication and cooperation with parents, legal guardians and families on their children's educational progress and well-being, including with the help of cultural mediators from the local community. Involve parents, families and legal guardians in curricular and non-curricular activities (such as volunteering in the classroom, reading and homework clubs, tutoring in school libraries, and after-school programmes, as well as job clubs, job fairs, workplace exposure, visits to career centres, etc.).
- m) Promote active engagement of parents and families in school decision-making, including on the curriculum, planning and evaluation, well-being and mental health programmes, social and emotional education and career guidance, and promote and support participation of parents from marginalised socio-economic backgrounds.
- n) Support parents' involvement in their children's early reading and maths skills, such as through the provision of home books schemes, family literacy initiatives, etc. Increase opportunities for family learning and parents' education, in particular for those with low levels of education and at risk of poverty, in partnership with local services and NGOs.
- o) Provide additional support for schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, with high numbers of pupils from marginalised backgrounds. This could include reduced pupil-teacher ratios for such schools, where needed, as well as targeted resourcing of materials, equipment and infrastructure.

6. To promote educational success for all learners it is essential to intervene on system-level features that can affect equity and inclusion in education and training in different ways and to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation. The following structural measures can be considered when developing an integrated and comprehensive strategy:
- a) Ensure equitable access to affordable, high-quality and adequately staffed early childhood education and care for all, which can enhance children's well-being and cognitive and wider social and emotional development, providing them with the necessary foundations to thrive in education and in life.
  - b) Strengthen high-quality, attractive and flexible vocational education and training which combine the acquisition of vocational skills with key competences.
  - c) Promote active anti-segregation policies, in particular by adopting admission rules that allow for a heterogeneous school composition and policies focused on the quality of learning, and raise awareness of the benefits of diversity in the classroom for enhancing educational outcomes for all learners.
  - d) Support the inclusion of learners with disabilities and/or special educational needs in mainstream schools, with effective support provided by trained educators and other educational staff/counsellors, or health professionals. This should be accompanied by the removal of physical obstacles in the school environment, the provision of learning materials in appropriate formats, and the use of diversified and individualised teaching and learning approaches.



- e) Avoid grade repetition to the maximum extent and promote instruments that monitor and flag, at an early stage, the learning needs and difficulties of children and young people, offering targeted and more individualised support, as appropriate.
  - f) Consider alternatives to early tracking in order to promote positive interactions between learners of different ability levels in heterogeneous groups and reduce the impact of socio-economic background on learners' performance through academic segregation.
  - g) Increase the flexibility and permeability of educational pathways, for example by modularising courses, offering vocationally oriented courses or promoting flexibility as regards duration and entry points. Facilitate transitions between levels and types of education and training and between school and future employment, including through recognition and validation arrangements, career guidance delivered by qualified practitioners, and active collaboration with stakeholders, including businesses.
  - h) Offer routes back into mainstream education and training and ensure free access to quality second chance programmes for all those who have left education and training prematurely, which could also be proposed as part of the reinforced Youth Guarantee.
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