



Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support

Final Report of the Thematic Working Group
on Early School Leaving

November 2013

This report draws on the work of the Thematic Working Group on 'Early School Leaving', which comprised experts nominated by 31 European countries, and stakeholder organisations. The group worked from December 2011 to November 2013 and was assisted by the Commission's consultants, Ms Anne-Marie Hall and Ms Ilona Murphy. More information can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/leaving_en.htm

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Key Policy Messages

Early school leaving (ESL) is a multi-faceted and complex problem caused by a cumulative process of disengagement. It is a result of personal, social, economic, education or family-related reasons. Schools play an important role in addressing ESL but they cannot and should not work in isolation. Comprehensive approaches that focus on the root causes of ESL are required to reduce ESL. Reducing ESL can help towards the integration of young people into the labour market, and contribute to breaking the cycle of deprivation that leads to the social exclusion of too many young people.

Based on the work of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, the following key policy messages identify the critical conditions for successful policies against ESL.

1. Ensure long-term political and financial commitment to reducing ESL and keep it high on the political agenda.
2. Ensure children and young people are at the centre of all policies aimed at reducing ESL. Ensure their voices are taken into account when developing and implementing such policies.
3. Develop and implement a sustainable national strategy to reduce ESL. This strategy should address all levels of education and training and encompass the right mixture of preventative, intervention and compensation measures.
4. Invest in the knowledge base of ESL, through regular and timely collection of accurate data and information. Ensure that data and information on ESL is accessible and used effectively in policy development. Ensure that the monitoring and evaluation of ESL measures steers policy development.
5. Ensure policy development and implementation is based on strong, long-term cooperation between national, regional/ local authorities and stakeholders, as well as between different policies, through for example establishing a coordinating body.
6. Remove obstacles within the school education system that may hinder young people in completing upper secondary education. Ensure smooth transition between different levels of education. Ensure access to high quality education throughout life (including early childhood education and care), and the provision of high quality Vocational Education and Training (VET).
7. Support schools to develop conducive and supportive learning environments that focus on the needs of individual pupils. Promote a curriculum that is relevant and engaging.
8. Promote and support multi-professional teams in schools to address ESL.
9. Support cooperation between schools, local communities, parents and pupils in school development and in initiatives to reduce ESL. Promote strong commitment from all stakeholders in efforts to reduce ESL at local levels, including local businesses.
10. Promote a better understanding of ESL in initial education and continuous professional development for all school staff, especially teachers. Enable staff to provide differentiated learning support for pupils in an inclusive and individualised way.

11. Strengthen guidance to ensure young people are aware of the different study options and employment prospects available to them. Ensure counselling systems provide young people with both emotional and practical support.
12. Reinforce accessibility to second chance schemes for all young people. Make second chance schemes distinctive and ensure they provide a positive learning experience. Support teachers who work in second chance schemes in their specific role.

1 Introduction

Reducing the average European rate of early school leavers to less than 10% by 2020 is one of the education headline targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy¹. Investment in the educational achievement of young people is essential for the employment prospects of every young person. It is important for the growth of our economy and for social cohesion, especially at a time when the current financial and economic crisis is having a serious impact on young people and their families. Investing in education helps to break the cycle of deprivation and poverty leading to the social exclusion of too many young people across Europe².

In June 2011, the Education Council adopted a Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving (ESL).³ It highlights the need for evidence-based and comprehensive policies to reduce ESL. In order to be effective, policies against ESL need to address all levels of education. They should be cross-sectoral and involve stakeholders from different policy areas such as youth, social/welfare, employment and health. They should focus on prevention, intervention and compensation:

- Prevention seeks to avoid the conditions from arising where processes leading to ESL can start.
- Intervention addresses emerging difficulties at an early stage and seeks to prevent them from leading to ESL.
- Compensation measures offer opportunities for education and training for those who have dropped out.

This approach requires a shift from implementing individual ESL measures to introducing comprehensive policies. In December 2011, a Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving was established to help European countries implement such comprehensive policies.

The Thematic Working Group (TWG) consisted of policy makers, practitioners and experts from 27 EU Member States. Representatives from Norway, Iceland, Turkey, and from key European stakeholder organisations were also members of the group⁴. The objective of the TWG was to support Member States design and develop comprehensive policies on ESL. To this end, the TWG collected and exchanged information on effective policies to reduce ESL. Activities included peer-learning visits to the Netherlands and France and a peer review event in Brussels in March 2013⁵.

¹ Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM (2010)2020; more information on http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

² Commission recommendation of 20.2.2013, Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage (http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf).

³ Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, OJ C 191/2011 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:191:0001:0006:en:PDF>).

⁴ The following countries and organisations participated in the TWG: BE, BG, CZ, DE (Berlin), DK, EE, IE, IT, GR, ES, FR, CY, LV, LT, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, SE, UK, IS, NO, HR, TR, Eurydice, CEDEFOP, COFACE, EPA, ETUCE, OBESSU, OECD, EVTA

⁵ Reports from the Peer Learning in the Netherlands and in France as well as additional reports produced by the TWG can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/twg_en.htm. A report of the Peer Review on policies to reduce early school leaving can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/peer_en.htm.

This report presents the main conclusions and lessons learnt by the TWG. It aims to inspire and generate the development of a comprehensive approach to ESL. The report includes a checklist (see annex 1) as a tool for self-assessment. The checklist is for countries, regions or local authorities who are developing or implementing policies to reduce ESL. They could use it to evaluate current policies and to help identify areas for further improvement.

This report is not an exhaustive presentation of all aspects of ESL. A number of important topics, which the group identified in its initial discussions could not be addressed during the timeframe of the group and will require further consideration. Topics not addressed include supporting teachers in their role, greater parental involvement in their children's education, a whole school approach to ESL, the role of vocational education and training (VET) in reducing ESL, and measures to prevent ESL from VET.

The structure of this report is as follows:

- Chapter 2 starts with a discussion on the definition of ESL. It summarises the challenge of defining ESL. It provides a brief overview of the current situation in Europe. It also presents the key challenges, the scale of the problem and main factors leading to ESL across Europe.
- Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 further develop the concept of 'comprehensive policies' to reduce ESL and present a discussion on the key characteristics of successful policies.
- Annex 1 presents a checklist on comprehensive policies as a self-assessment tool.
- Annex 2 provides 2012 ESL rates in the EU based on Eurostat data.
- Annex 3 presents practice examples from European countries represented in the TWG.

2 Early School leaving in Europe

2.1 Definitions

The definition of 'early school leaving' used at EU level refers to 'those young people who leave education and training with only lower secondary education or less, and who are no longer in education and training'. In statistical terms, European ESL rates are measured as the percentage of 18-24 year olds with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training⁶.

Many Member States define and measure ESL differently. ESL can mean leaving education and training systems before the end of compulsory schooling; before reaching a minimum qualification or before completing upper secondary education. Whilst the term ESL may include all forms of leaving education and training prematurely, the term 'school drop-out' often refers to discontinuing an on-going course, e.g. dropping out in the middle of the school term. Drop-out from education can occur at any time and can be experienced by different age groups.

The way ESL is defined plays a crucial role in the development of policies to prevent or reduce it. Focussing on school drop-out emphasises the need to prevent drop-out from occurring. It also emphasises the need to intervene as early as possible. Concentrating on the number of young people who have not completed upper secondary education may shift attention to measures helping them to re-enter education and training systems and to complete their education. The European definition of ESL supports the latter perspective. It refers to young people beyond compulsory schooling age who have not completed upper secondary education. However, most of them may have discontinued their education years before. European data is not available in relation to the number of young people aged 14, 15 or 16 years of age who have dropped out of education each year. As such, more direct attention and action is required for this age group.

In this report, the term 'early school leaving' describes all forms of leaving education and training before completing upper secondary. It includes those who have never enrolled and those who have dropped-out of education and training. It also includes those who do not continue education and training after finishing lower secondary education or those who failed final exams at the end of upper secondary education.

2.2 Early school leaving in Europe in 2012

In 2012, 12.7% of all 18 to 24 years olds had not completed upper secondary education and were no longer in education and training⁷. This represents some 5.5 million young people. Data show that some groups of young people are more at risk of ESL than others. In most countries, boys are more likely to leave school prematurely than girls. Young people from a migrant background often display a higher than average rate of ESL, and the risk of ESL is especially high for disadvantaged minorities, including Roma⁸. ESL is higher in VET than in general education although

⁶ Early school leavers are defined as persons aged 18 to 24 fulfilling the following two conditions: (1) the highest level of education or training attained is ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c short, (2) no education or training has been received in the four weeks preceding the survey. The reference group to calculate the early school leaving rate consists of the total population of the same age group (18 to 24). All measurements come from the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS).

⁷ Labour Force Survey 2012:

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc410&plugin=1>

⁸ Education and Training Monitor 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/progress_en.htm. See also: An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, COM(2011) 173, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm

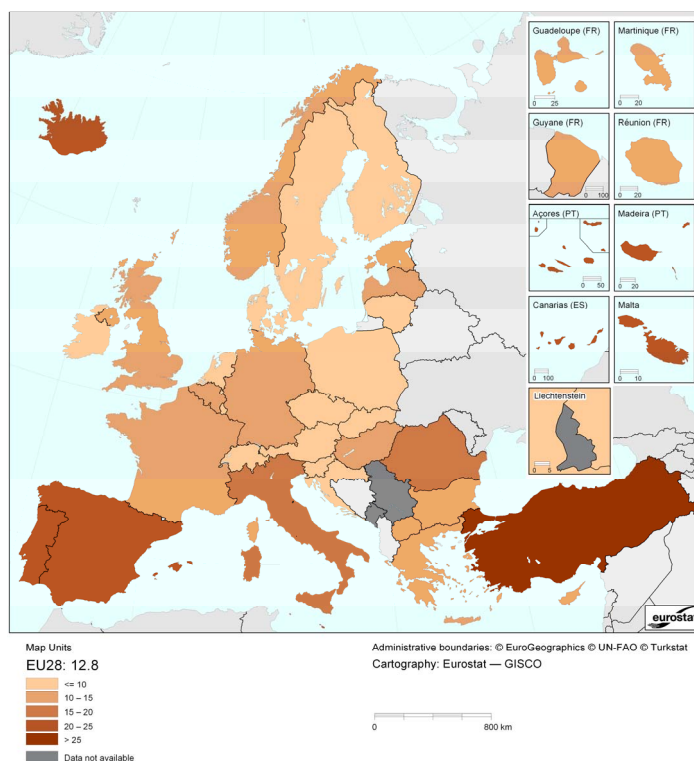
good quality VET can be successful in helping many young people complete upper secondary education.

Leaving school before completing upper secondary education is often the outcome of a progressive and cumulative process of disengagement⁹. It is triggered by problems that can be related to the course of study, the school, or to certain health, personal, or emotional difficulties young people face. It can be associated with the socio-economic or family background of pupils¹⁰. Limited access to quality education or to an individual's preferred choice of study may be especially problematic in rural or disadvantaged areas.

Structural characteristics of the education system, such as inflexible education pathways, early tracking or high retention rates may also contribute to high ESL rates. At the school level, an unhealthy school climate, bullying or poor relationships between pupils and teachers may trigger ESL. Pupils who do not feel ownership of their education and do not have a voice in the school may lose interest and become at risk of ESL¹¹.

Figure 2.1 ESL rates in European countries

Early leavers from education and training, 2012
% of 18-24 year-olds



Footnote:

Provisional data for DE, LU, NL, PL and EU28. Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (online data code: edat_lfse_16)

⁹ A-M. Nevala and J. Hawley (2011), Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU, authored by GHK for the European Parliament (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/studies>; executive summary available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/cult/dv/esstudyearlyschoolleaving/esstudyearlyschoolleavingen.pdf).

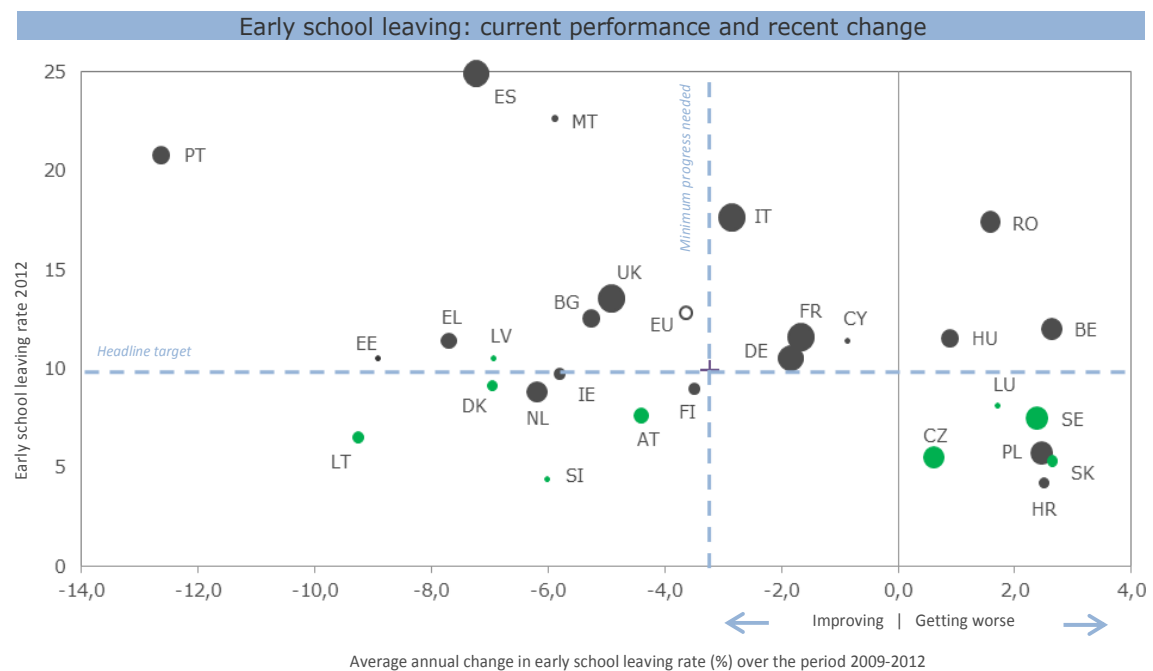
¹⁰ This report uses the term 'pupil' for all children and young people in primary and secondary education, including upper secondary.

¹¹ For an overview of reasons leading to ESL, A-M. Nevala and J. Hawley (2011) *op cite* ref 9.

As reflected in Figure 2.1 above, statistics show that there are wide disparities of ESL rates between European countries¹². While some experience high rates of ESL, others have rates well below the European headline target of 10%. In addition, there are considerable differences between regions¹³. These differences are in part due to certain characteristics of the education system, but also to historical, economic, and social reasons. A better understanding of ESL in Europe requires a closer examination of the situation in different regions. It also requires a clearer understanding of young people, their family and social background, their employment prospects and the education and training offer available to them.

In recent years, different countries have also experienced different developments with regard to ESL. Figure 2.2 below shows both the level of ESL per country and its progress in reducing ESL between 2009-2012. While some countries and the EU on average are showing good progress, some countries are stagnating, whilst in others, ESL rates are growing. The specific social and economic conditions of the countries can only partly explain these differences, which also depends on the existence or non-existence of targeted policies against ESL.

Figure 2.2 Development of ESL rates per country



Early school leaving has significant societal and individual consequences. This includes the increased risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. In 2012, 40.1% of early school leavers were unemployed; of whom, it is reported that approximately 70% would like to work. Overall the unemployment of young people under 25 years

¹² See also detailed table in the annex to this report.

¹³ Rates per region by NUTS-code 1:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/dataset?p_product_code=TGS00106.

old was, comparatively, at 22.8% across the EU. Studies on the long-term effects of youth unemployment show that exclusion from the labour market can have long-term scarring effects on future employment prospects¹⁴.

The current economic crisis may have diverging impacts on ESL. The crisis has hit sectors typically employing low-skilled young people (e.g. construction, tourism, retail). This has reduced the labour market 'pull' effect observed during the boom years and in some countries may have encouraged young people to remain in school or return to education and/or training¹⁵. At the same time, high unemployment rates can discourage young people from engaging in education and training if obtaining a qualification is no longer perceived as a guarantee to secure employment. Poverty and the unemployment of parents increases the risk of young people leaving education and training prematurely; young people growing up in low-income families may feel they need to leave education and training in order to contribute to the household income.

2.3 Costs of ESL in Europe

Participation in high quality education is beneficial for the individual, society and the economy. The rate of return, taking into account the private, fiscal and social costs and benefits of education, is positive. On the opposite side of the spectrum, research findings show that ESL and low levels of educational attainment reduce lifetime earnings, lead to higher unemployment rates, and to large public and social costs. This can be in the form of reduced tax revenues and higher costs of public services costs related to healthcare, criminal justice and social benefit payments for example¹⁶.

As a word of caution, calculating the cost of ESL is difficult and risks estimation errors and double counting of costs. Calculations at national level therefore differ substantially depending on the variables taken into account. To date, it is difficult to estimate the costs of ESL at EU level. Existing studies show however that an additional year of schooling can increase individual lifetime earnings by between 4% and 10%¹⁷, depending on the circumstances. Accurate data that differentiates between groups of early school leavers is required. Studies need to identify more precisely the causal effect of education on earnings, health, and crime¹⁸.

Only a few studies in Europe have evaluated measures against ESL with regard to cost efficiency. This is linked both to the way policies or programmes to reduce ESL are designed and to the lack of accurate data. Existing studies indicate that policies differ in their efficiency, but also that measures have different impacts on different groups of pupils and in different contexts. The long-term effect of policies is often not sufficiently taken into account. Future research needs to a) clarify casual effects of policies, b) collect the relevant data, and c) calculate the efficiencies of policies¹⁹.

¹⁴ Education and Training Monitor 2013, *op. cite ref 8.*; Communication from the Commission of 12.03.2013, Youth Employment Initiative, COM(2013) 144 (http://ec.europa.eu/prelex/detail_dossier_real.cfm?CL=en&DosId=202474).

¹⁵ Employment and social developments in Europe 2012, Commission Staff Working Document, Luxembourg 2012, p.24, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7315>.

¹⁶ R. Dale (2010), Early school leaving, lessons from research for policy makers, NESSE Report (<http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports/activities/reports/early-school-leaving-report>).

¹⁷ Giorgio Brunello, Maria De Paola (2013), The costs of early school leaving in Europe, EENEE Report (forthcoming)

¹⁸ See: Overview and examples of costs of early school leaving in Europe, Mapping Report produced by the TWG on ESL (http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/twg_en.htm) also referring to for example: Belfield, C. & Levin, H. (eds) (2007), *The Price We Pay: Economic and Social Costs of Inadequate Education.*; NESSE, 2009; Psacharopoulos (2007), Brookings Institute, Washington; Nevala, A-M, Hall, J. (2011) *Reducing early school leaving in the EU.* European Parliament. Psacharopoulos, G. (2007), *The Costs of School Failure A Feasibility Study.* European Expert Network on Economics of Education.

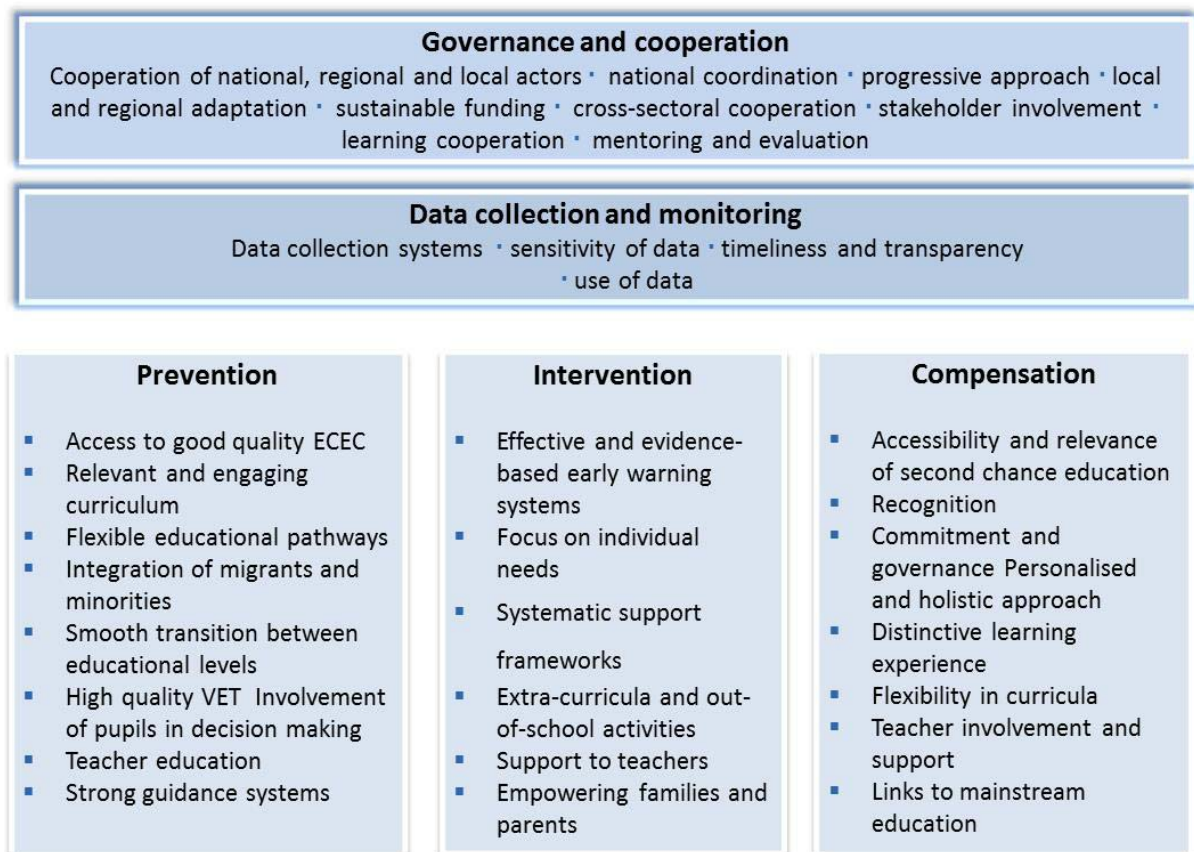
¹⁹ Brunello, De Paola, EENEE Report, *op. cite ref 18.*

3 Conditions for successful policies against early school leaving

Early school leaving is a complex, multi-faceted social process. It is reflective of a range of inter-related personal, social, economic, educational and family-related reasons. Schools play an important role in addressing ESL but cannot and should not work in isolation. Experiences show that ESL measures that are limited in scope and timing have little sustainable impact in reducing ESL. The 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce ESL therefore asks Member States to implement comprehensive approaches that focus on the root causes of ESL and that are able to reduce ESL in a sustained way. Given the remit of the TWG, this report concentrates on measures used in education and training policy to reduce ESL as presented in Figure 3.1 below. This does not exclude that measures are required in other policy areas too.

Education and training policies that aim to reduce ESL need to establish conditions for successful learning for all. Schools should be a place where pupils feel comfortable and supported, feel ownership of their own learning and can engage in the life of their school community. This is important both for the emotional, social and educational development of the pupil and for the overall governance of the institution. As a condition of successful learning, teachers need to strengthen their role as facilitators of learning. They need autonomy, time, and space for innovation, teamwork, feedback, self-reflection and evaluation. They need access to enhanced opportunities for continued professional development.

Figure 3.1 Measures against ESL addressed in this report



3.1 Governance

Early school leaving requires a long-term response with sustained political and financial commitment together with strong leadership from all key actors. This includes policy makers, educational authorities as well as parents, pupils, teachers and their representative associations. In countries that have sustainably curtailed ESL rates such as the Netherlands²⁰, reducing ESL has remained a continued political priority despite changes occurring in government.

A national²¹ strategy to reduce ESL is necessary to ensure a coherent, systemic and coordinated approach, the exchange of good practice, and the efficient use of resources. It requires strong coordination and cooperation between national, regional and local actors. Depending on the structure of the country - national, regional and local level actors play different roles. They will have different responsibilities within a comprehensive strategy. Important elements of a sustainable and comprehensive strategy include:

- A coordinating body: A coordinating body such as a dedicated unit within the Ministry of Education with cross-department links or a separate agency can support cooperation at national level and collaborate with ministries/institutions in related policy fields (e.g. education, economy, employment, youth, health, welfare and social policy). It can facilitate collaboration with stakeholders, but also help to raise awareness and ensure long-term political commitment for ESL. It could be responsible for policy development, monitoring and assessment of ESL measures at national level and the dissemination of good practice.
- A progressive approach: A long-term national strategy for ESL needs to be flexible and responsive. It should allow for revision and modification of (evolving) priorities and actions where necessary. Macro-economic and social conditions can change and influence the decisions and motivation of young people to continue with their education and training. Experiences also show that reducing ESL becomes more challenging as the number of early school leavers declines and requires more complex and targeted solutions to help those young people most alienated from education and training.
- Local and regional adaptation: National strategies should allow for local and regional developments and adaptations. Initiatives and measures should respond to concrete local and regional needs to achieve the greatest impact. The role of local authorities in developing and implementing ESL policies is crucial. They are typically well-informed about the situation of young people in their area, are responsible for the delivery of the most relevant services, and are best placed to facilitate cooperation between different services and practitioners. Schools and local stakeholders need autonomy to identify and develop local solutions with local actors. There should be a balance between a bottom-up and top-down approach and between the need for a universal response and more targeted interventions.
- Awareness raising and training: In order to ensure sustained political commitment from policy makers and stakeholders, it is important to provide information and training on ESL. It is important to raise the level of awareness among those working with young people at risk of ESL.

²⁰ Reducing early school leaving in the Netherlands, Report of a Peer Learning Activity taking place in The Hague and Rotterdam in September 2012 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/esl/pla_en.pdf)

²¹ Depending on the structure of a country and its education system, the regional level might be appropriate, e.g. in federal states or countries with strongly decentralised education systems.

- **Sustainable funding:** Long-term interventions need time to produce results, but generate more effective and lasting effects than short-term, fragmented initiatives. This may be challenging for some countries. In some Member States, adopting and implementing a comprehensive strategy against ESL may compete with other political priorities during a time of economic austerity. Countries should develop smart funding mechanisms and strengthen the role of relevant actors outside the education and training sector (including the private sector).

Funding can be used as an incentive to take action to reduce ESL. Some countries have chosen to introduce performance-based funding to reduce ESL. However, this approach risks favouring solutions that tend to lead to quick, unsustainable successes. Countries that choose to adopt performance-based funding should ensure that it is embedded in the overall strategy to reduce ESL. It should be carefully monitored and evaluated in its impact and comply with the administrative culture of the country. Performance-based funding should be complemented by extra support especially for schools in disadvantaged areas²².

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Continuous monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to reduce ESL is essential to steer policy development. The monitoring of services/support at system level is desirable to ensure systematic rather than ad hoc reporting. Monitoring and evaluation can also allow for comparison between regions and local authorities and can help facilitate the exchange of good practices.

3.2 Cross-sectoral cooperation

Reducing ESL requires the active involvement and cooperation of stakeholders at national, regional, local and school level. This includes teachers, parents, pupils and their representative associations together with guidance centres, trade unions, employers, and other experts such as social workers or school psychologists. Key representatives from policy fields such as employment, youth, health, welfare and social policy need to be involved in a collective approach to reducing ESL from the start. Each stakeholder and each policy area provides a valuable and different perspective in understanding ESL processes. They each play an important role in defining solutions and offering expertise to address different factors leading to ESL. Cooperation is particularly important in second chance education where learners often face multiple problems and require comprehensive support.

Cooperation can take different forms at national, regional, local or school level. This will depend on the administrative structure of the country and its education and training system. It can encompass different forms of teamwork, networking, inter-agency or inter-institutional cooperation and multi-agency responses. Different forms of cooperation should complement and support each other and should be monitored in their development and success. A coordinating body as mentioned in section 0 can also support the development of local and regional cooperation, provide guidance for local and regional actors and facilitate collaboration with stakeholders. Cooperation at local or school level is usually easier to achieve if backed by related national policies, in which governments facilitate cross-sectoral work and bring national policies from different policy areas into alignment.

Cooperation should be embedded in the mainstream working practices of all services and stakeholders working with young people. It requires a systemic configuration of these services, where subsequently boundaries between services and professions are

²² In the Netherlands, financial incentives are given to schools based on achievements on reducing ESL rates. Reducing early school leaving in the Netherlands, *op cite*

eroded and synergies are developed²³. It requires clear and shared goals, a common language, a mutual understanding of expected outcomes, good communication and a clear definition of roles and responsibilities of all actors. However, organising the involvement and contribution of a wide range of stakeholder can be challenging. Successful and sustainable cooperation takes time to develop; local and regional cross-sectoral cooperation needs sustained support from higher political levels. In many countries, cooperation between services and stakeholders is still weak.

Important elements for successful cooperation within the context of ESL include:

- Inter-agency or inter-institutional arrangements: Local authorities and other relevant services should establish arrangements for cross-sector collaboration to tackle ESL. They can provide additional support to help deal with family-related and social problems that result in young people leaving school early, for example through outreach approaches. Collaboration could be in the form of inter-institutional platforms, like those used in France, or by bringing relevant services together, such as the House of Guidance in Luxembourg²⁴. Capacity building programmes to strengthen local alliances to reduce ESL should be supported. Good practices on ESL should be shared between local communities and beyond.
- Central role of schools: Cooperation should be centred on schools. Their boundaries should be opened up to enable them to include other professionals (as teams) such as social workers, youth workers, outreach care workers, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists and occupational guidance specialists in efforts to reduce ESL²⁵. Schools should be encouraged to develop strategies to improve communication between parents and locally based community services to help prevent ESL.
- Involvement of pupils and parents: Schools and regional or local authorities need to pay special attention to involving pupils and parents and their representatives in the planning and implementation of measures to reduce ESL. Parents need to be supported in their engagement with school education, be strongly encouraged to get involved and responsible for their children's school attendance and education. Schools should develop specific outreach programmes to encourage the active participation and representation of vulnerable parents and families, such as those from low socio-economic or low education backgrounds, single parent families and parents of migrant background. Schools should also be enabled to efficiently engage parents, pupils and local actors who offer their time and experience.
- Learning cooperation: Inter-professional cooperation requires relational expertise, which enables professionals to recognise and work with the expertise of others. Training opportunities to enable professionals to learn how to cooperate effectively should be available to all involved.

²³ Anne Edwards and Paul Downes (2013), Alliances for Inclusion - cross-sector policy synergies and interprofessional collaboration in and around schools, Commissioned Research Report for EU Commission, NESET (http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/neset/report_en.pdf)

²⁴ Reducing early school leaving in France, Report of a Peer Learning Activity taking place in Paris in April 2013 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/esl/france_en.pdf). These examples are presented in Annex 3.

²⁵ A. Edwards and P. Downes (2013), NESET report, *op. cite ref 24*, p.73.

4 Evidence-based policies against ESL

An accurate understanding of the scope and reasons behind ESL is necessary to design and implement targeted policies against ESL. Collection of data and information should cover all levels and types of education and training, including private schools, special needs education and VET. Data collection on young people who have never enrolled in school may also be relevant for some countries and regions.

Accurate quantitative data on the number of early school leavers and those at risk of ESL is required to estimate the scale of ESL. A wide range of data is important for both understanding ESL and targeting policies. An understanding of the following factors is required:

- The age at which discontinuation of education and training occurs;
- The relationship between ESL and truancy;
- Differences with regards to ESL according to gender, academic performance or achieved education levels;
- The socio-economic background or a proxy, such as neighbourhood information;
- The migration or minority background and/or mother tongue of the learner.

Special care should be devoted to the method of collecting evidence examining the main reasons underlying ESL for different groups of pupils, schools, types of education and training institutions, local authorities or regions. In this respect, it is important that the voice and perspectives of young people are heard to understand reasons behind ESL and in the design of targeted policies.

When collecting a wide range of data on individual pupils, users must be aware of the sensitivity of data. The cooperation of different stakeholders is advisable to establish a common understanding of the type of data and information required, the possible indicators and data collection methods.

- Data collection systems on ESL at the national or regional level: In order to collect data on the scope and characteristics of ESL, countries apply different data collection systems. These systems are often designed to provide data on the education systems in general, but also in relation to ESL. National student databases or national student's registers, based on individual student numbers, provide a good opportunity to measure accurately the scope of ESL at a central level. The experiences of some Member States indicate that a central body responsible for data collection can help guarantee the accuracy, validity and reliability of data. Local and regional data collection systems may offer the foundation for a response to a concrete situation within a region or municipality. However, they are not always designed in a manner that allows for comparability at a national level. Centralised systems have the potential to ensure the continuity of data monitoring in relation to the mobility of young people.
- Large-scale empirical studies on ESL: Large-scale quantitative and qualitative empirical studies exploring the correlations and reasons for ESL are important for the development of sound and targeted policies addressing ESL. Studies with longitudinal designs are needed to explore the development of decisions and attitudes towards education and school leaving. Data from such studies should also be collected at a European level.
- Small-scale qualitative studies on ESL: Small-scale qualitative studies can be an important data source for understanding features of ESL in a specific setting or

among specific groups of pupils. These studies offer an important opportunity to capture the voices of young people leaving education.

Accurate, valid and reliable data on ESL does not automatically lead to the better use of data in policy development. Data and information on ESL needs to be available in a format that supports policy design, setting targets, prioritising and allocating funds and monitoring developments. Basic conditions include the:

- Provision of timely data: Data needs to be provided in a timely and frequent manner. Annual data collection is not sufficient for in-time interventions and for measuring the effectiveness of measures. Different forms of reporting at different times in the year and for different users should be considered.
- Security of data: Member States have different approaches to data protection; the collection of personal information must comply with country specific requirements for data protection. It is important that the personal information and identity of each young person is protected. Countries should ensure that data is only used for the purpose of policy development.
- Transparency of data: Data collection needs to allow for the comparison of aggregated data between schools, local authorities and/or regions. This openness can be beneficial in encouraging cooperation between national, regional, local and school levels and in triggering initiatives/actions to address ESL. However, the stigmatisation of low performing schools or neighbourhoods must be avoided.
- Reporting of data: Data reporting should be adjusted or indexed to the contextual information of the specific school and its needs. It is important to provide schools with data in a user friendly and easily accessible format.
- Follow-up of data: The publication and analysis of data should be followed by concrete measures. Adequate and targeted support should be available to local authorities, stakeholders and schools (particularly those with high rates of ESL) in order to help them continuously improve their practice.

5 Prevention, Intervention, Compensation

Comprehensive strategies to reduce ESL must address the entire education spectrum and include prevention, intervention and compensation measures. Preventing ESL requires initiatives at system level; intervention takes place at the level of individual schools. However, the distinction between prevention and intervention is not always clear-cut. This chapter follows the definition of prevention, intervention and compensation proposed in the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce ESL.

There are a set of core principles that are equally relevant in prevention, intervention and compensation. Firstly, learners of all ages must be at the centre of education with a focus on building individual strengths and talents. Schools should enable all pupils to feel respected and feel that their individual strengths, abilities and specific needs are recognised. Schools therefore need to establish conditions in which young people can flourish and grow.

Secondly, learners require learning environments that are welcoming, open, safe, and friendly and where pupils feel noticed, valued and part of a community. Schools have the potential to empower young people with a sense of ownership, belonging and self-fulfilment, skills and knowledge that enable them to be active citizens and play a positive role in society. Schools should provide opportunities to help learners build confidence and develop a desire for learning.

Thirdly, education staff must be aware of the scope and challenge of ESL, its main triggers and ways to prevent it. Schools and teachers should be equipped with the skills, expertise and resources to provide all pupils with the learning support they require.

Countries should define the right balance between different types of measures, depending on the structure of their education and training system, and their specific conditions. Coordination of measures at school, local, regional and national level should help to avoid overlaps and gaps in provision. Young people at risk of ESL and those who have already left education and training prematurely should have easy access to different learning opportunities and targeted support.

5.1 Prevention

Prevention measures seek to tackle ESL before its first symptoms are visible. Successful prevention of ESL considers the pre-conditions for successful schooling and the design of education and training systems. It must ensure that education and training institutions and their learning environment (including the physical environment) provide a stimulating learning climate for all pupils. This includes equal access to quality education for all children and young people. However, in some countries costs and mobility restraints can limit access to education.

At system level, the following characteristics of the education and training system can help reduce obstacles to completing upper secondary education:

- Access to good quality early childhood education and care (ECEC): Evidence shows that access to good quality education at an early age facilitates the development of key competences. The evidence also shows that good quality ECEC increases educational achievements and reduces the risk of ESL at a later stage²⁶. Access to good quality ECEC is particularly important for children from

²⁶ The 2009 OECD's PISA assessment of students at age 15 shows that, for most countries, students who have attended pre-primary education have better results than those who have not. OECD (2012) Starting strong III: a quality toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care.

socially disadvantaged backgrounds and makes entry into the education system easier.

- Relevant and engaging curriculum: A curriculum that is relevant and coherent can motivate pupils to fully develop their strengths and talents. The curricula should be designed in such a way that it reflects the different affinities of the pupil, takes into account different starting points, and is adapted to the pupil's ambitions.
- Flexible educational pathways: The strict design of educational pathways can create severe obstacles to complete upper secondary education. Situations where pupils and their parents are required to make premature obligatory choices between different educational tracks at an early age make education systems highly selective and can result in demotivating those who have been incorrectly oriented. Research also shows that grade repetition risks undermining pupils' confidence. It can trigger ESL while not being effective in addressing possible learning deficits. Many countries have started to substitute grade repetition with investment in individualised learning and targeted learning support²⁷. Obligatory entry tests may limit access to upper secondary education; failing these tests leave pupils with limited options to continue their education and training. Education pathways should be flexible and cater for all pupils. Education pathways designed as less challenging options with limited future career possibilities should be avoided.
- Better integration of newly arrived migrant children: Children from newly arrived migrant families need targeted support to acquire the language of tuition and to catch up with the curriculum. Inclusive learning environments can support their integration and increase their educational success. Migrant children should be placed within the same age group as their native peers to ensure their successful inclusion. The administrative process for enrolling newly arrived migrant children needs to be timely and adapted to the specific situation of their families²⁸.
- Smooth transition between different levels of education: Measures to facilitate the process of adaption should start from transition from home to the world of education. Transition from primary to lower-secondary education and from lower to upper secondary should be facilitated. Closer cooperation between schools, induction programmes and targeted support for children facing difficulties in adapting to the new school environment can avoid alienation as a result of difficult transition experiences. Stronger permeability of educational pathways is also necessary, offering concrete transfer options for young people who realise that they may prefer a different course of study.
- High quality, attractive and engaging vocational education and training (VET): High quality VET, of equal value to academic education, provides opportunities for all young people to explore and learn more about the world of work and ease transition to the labour market²⁹. It is important that high quality VET allows progression to higher education in the same way general upper

²⁷ Nevala and Hawley, Reducing early school leaving in the EU, *op. cite* ref 9.

²⁸ Educational support for newly arrived migrant children, 2013, study authored by Public Policy and Management Institute at the request of the European Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/reports-and-studies_en.htm)

²⁹ Commission Communication of 20.11.2012, Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes (http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking_en.htm); Work-Based Learning in Europe: Practices and Policy Pointers, 2013 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/work-based-learning-in-europe_en.pdf)

secondary education does. VET can help reduce ESL through the provision of high quality, structured work-based learning opportunities³⁰.

- Involvement of pupils and parents in school decision-making: Young people's opinions should be highly valued. The active participation of pupils in the school community increases their engagement and motivation and facilitates school effectiveness. There should be space for pupils to influence their schools and take ownership of their educational path. They should have the opportunity to voice their opinions and be involved in decisions affecting the school and its functioning. Schools could facilitate their participation through school councils or student consultations for example. Parents, as the primary educators of their children, should also be represented in the decision-making process of the school. Securing the active involvement of parents in the school is essential to ensure conducive and supportive learning environments in general and especially in preventing ESL and addressing it early.
- Initial and continuous education for education staff: The quality of teaching and the competences of the teachers are a determining factor in the contribution teachers can make to reducing ESL. High quality teaching and learning calls for the continuous professional development of teaching staff. Adopting a learner-centred approach in teacher education with a focus on diversity and inclusion is recommended. Teachers should be capable of identifying different learning styles and pupils' needs and be equipped with the skills to adopt inclusive and student-focused methods, including conflict resolution skills to promote a positive classroom climate. Teachers should be supported in dealing with diversity in terms of the social and ethnic background of pupils as well as supporting individuals with special learning needs and/or learning disabilities. They need to understand ESL, its different triggers and early warning signs and be highly aware of their role in preventing it. Teachers need the skills and ability to work with other professions and partners to prevent ESL. These skills should be developed and strengthened during initial and continuous teacher education. Teachers should have the opportunity to participate in work placements in schools with high levels of ESL during teacher education to get a better insight in ways to address ESL at school level.
- Whole school approaches: Quality initiatives such as a whole school approach encourage the creation of conducive and supportive learning environments. Such an approach requires strong leadership and careful planning with clear and smart objectives for all school staff. It entails the provision of training and support to teaching staff in their pedagogic approach, external monitoring and opportunities for self-reflection. A whole school approach encourages and supports positive and caring relationships for and between teachers, school staff and pupils. A strong and well developed system of emotional support in schools is needed, especially for those at risk of ESL.
- Strong and well-developed guidance system: High quality, up-to-date guidance made available at an early stage is essential for providing young people with the information they need to make informed education and career choices. Helping young people understand their own strengths, talents, different study options and employment prospects is essential. It is important that guidance goes beyond the simple provision of information and focusses on the individual in relation to their particular needs and circumstances. Guidance could be provided through interactive methods (mentoring, coaching, one-to-one guidance, work placements) and through online services. Ensuring young

³⁰ Lyche, C. (2010), Taking on the Completion Challenge: A Literature Review on Policies to Prevent Dropout and Early School Leaving, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 53, OECD Publishing.

people have access to all relevant information, advice and guidance under a single entry point should be encouraged.

- Cooperation with the world of work: Providing opportunities at an early stage that allow young people to experience the world of work, for example through 'tasters' in enterprises for example, could help them understand job demands and employer expectations. It can also raise their motivation to continue in education and training and to focus better on future career choices.

5.2 Intervention

Intervention measures are defined as measures addressing emerging difficulties at an early stage. Many intervention measures apply to all pupils, but are especially beneficial and relevant to those at risk of ESL. Other intervention measures are more student-focussed and build on the early detection of support needed for learning and motivation. They should take a multi-professional and holistic approach and provide individual guidance in addition to practical and emotional support. Pupils with learning difficulties/disabilities or those who face personal, social or emotional challenges often have too little contact with education staff or other adults to support them. They need easy access to teachers and other professionals supporting their educational and personal development. They also need guidance and mentoring together with cultural and extra-curricular activities to broaden their learning opportunities.

Examples of different intervention measures are outlined below:

- Early Warning Systems (EWS) refer to different methods and routines aimed at identifying and responding to early signs of ESL. The intention is to provide timely and targeted support for pupils at risk of ESL. Approaches to early detection vary across Member States and can be more or less formalised. Although often driven by national policies or legislation, their implementation tends to be local. In many countries, EWS are part of 'mainstream' school monitoring systems.

School staff play a key role in recognising early signs of disengagement. They are important actors in providing a first response to these signs, where necessary, in conjunction with youth and social workers and/or other professionals working with young people. Responses to early warning signals should be fast and include parents and pupils. Individual action plans could be created to help and guide at-risk pupils.

Most existing EWS monitor absenteeism as a signal for ESL; some also take into account marks and the exam results of pupils. However, this approach provides a narrow perspective on the individual and their situation. Early detection should be based on a comprehensive view on the individual that also includes social, family-related and emotional factors. Consideration should also be given to the impact of critical life events (including traumatic events) on the personal development of a young person. The challenges associated with EWS include having a clear understanding of their scope, context, methodology and benefit. EWS should be evaluated and monitored to ensure their efficiency, effectiveness and relevance to the specific context of the school.

- Systemic support frameworks within schools: A support framework should exist within the school to ensure that pupils at risk receive the support they need in a timely manner. It should be based on a strong multi-professional approach and teamwork. Responsibility for pupils at risk could be designated to a co-ordinator or to a 'school care/student support team' for example. The co-ordinator or the team could involve a range of professionals inside or outside school; one staff member may also be assigned to an individual or a family in

need of targeted support. In addition, counselling support could also be provided to parents and teaching staff. Strong leadership and clearly defined roles and responsibilities are key to the success of such a framework.

- Focus on the needs of the individual pupil: Individual learning support, flexible learning pathways, high quality teaching, and learning based on student-focused methods should be a substantial part of school policies aimed at reducing ESL. There should be greater flexibility in the choice of subjects/courses and the provision of additional learning support, including measures to improve the motivation and resilience of young people. Special support should be provided to pupils with learning difficulties/disabilities and to those who experience difficulties balancing education with their home life. Pupils who experience problems in trying to catch up with learning after long periods of interruption should also receive special attention.
- Extra-curricular and out-of-school activities to enrich the learning offer: Many young people at risk of ESL lack a sense of identity or connection with the school. Extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for young people to develop such a sense of belonging. Extra-curricular and out-of-school activities should be compatible with educational aims to avoid potential disconnection between school and out-of-school life experiences.
- Support to teachers: Developing the capacity of school staff to create and maintain learning environments that support at-risk pupils is of crucial importance to reducing ESL. Teachers may need support to develop and adapt different methodologies and skills to meet the needs of individual pupils. Teachers should also be given more time and space for teamwork and to draw on the expertise of other professionals. More opportunities for networking among schools experiencing similar challenges in relation to ESL would be ideal.
- Empower families and parents to support their children's education: Schools and local community services should develop approaches that enable parents to become a resource in their children's learning. Some parents need to be supported in their role to encourage and motivate young people to aim higher in their educational aspirations and achievements. For many pupils, parental involvement is important for gaining recognition, demonstrating and celebrating achievements, raising self-esteem and self-respect.
- Raise parental awareness of ESL: It is important to involve parents as partners in identifying early signs of disengagement, academic difficulties or problems that may lead to ESL. Pro-active parents who are attentive to their children's general experiences towards education play an essential role in EWS and in supporting their child in their educational endeavour.

5.3 Compensation

Whilst preventing ESL is more efficient than compensating its effects, compensation measures will always be necessary for those young people who have had their education interrupted due to various reasons. Compensation measures aim to re-engage people in education and training. This section of the report focuses on second chance schemes as alternative education and training opportunities for young people. It is acknowledged that other approaches exist across Member States, for example, individually tailored programmes that focus on re-integration into mainstream education or on providing practical work experiences in combination with schooling.

Second chance schemes focus on a holistic and personalised approach, though provision might differ in its emphasis and orientation. Some second chance schemes

provide the opportunity to gain formal upper-secondary qualifications, others focus on preparing young people for VET or employment. Provision can vary in terms of the intensity of support provided to young people. This will depend on the specific needs of the young person. For second chance schemes to be successful, the following aspects should be considered:

- Accessible and relevant second chance schemes: Second chance schemes are located within different institutional frameworks. Second chance schemes should ensure they are easy to reach and accessible to all people interested in continuing their education and training. They should be responsive to the diversity of the youth population and the local labour market. This requires opportunities for flexible study that enable young people to access on-going provision and resources at different points of the day, week, term, or year.
- Recognition: Second chance schemes should be high quality. They should offer an alternative way to re-engage with education and gain qualifications. The recognition and validation of learning gained in second chance schemes is crucial and should provide young people with qualifications that are recognised on the labour market. They should also provide access to other education/training pathways.
- Commitment and governance: Political commitment and strong school leadership is essential for second chance education. School management should consider a whole school approach and encourage multi-service collaboration in second chance education. It is recognised that some schools and teachers need support in developing such approaches.
- Personalised and holistic approach to second chance education: Greater emphases on personal development supports young people re-develop their relationship with learning, the world of work and society. Young people should be involved in the development of their own learning and development plans. A personalised and holistic approach implies:
 - targeted second chance provision focused on personal development with opportunities to develop life skills and employability skills;
 - access to specialised support (such as psychological or emotional support), counselling, career guidance and practical support (such as financial support or help with securing accommodation);
 - new pedagogic approaches such as cooperative learning, peer learning, project work and more formative assessment.
- A distinctive learning experience: Second chance schemes should provide students with positive learning experiences. They should encourage young people to leave negative learning experiences behind and focus on building self-confidence, trust and motivation. Enabling young people to think more positively about their future is a first but necessary step to gain qualifications at a later stage. Key to the success of second chance schemes is an understanding of the systemic and individual factors that have contributed to ESL. It is also important to understand factors that have influenced a young person's decision to re-engage in education and training. A physical learning environment that is safe and stimulating is particularly important for second chance education. Providing common areas where teachers and students share facilities and space helps to build relationships based on mutual respect and trust. Young people should have an active role in shaping their physical learning environment.

- Flexibility in the curricula: The curriculum should be innovative, relevant and flexible in terms of the structure and timing of provision. Teachers should use pedagogic approaches that respond to the needs of individual students in second chance schemes. National legislation should allow for greater autonomy in relation to second chance schemes. It should be possible for staff to decide in relatively short timeframes the study programmes and mobility of students within the system. This is especially important in VET oriented second chance schemes. Flexibility should also include measures to allow students to return to mainstream education.
- Teacher involvement and support: A teachers' role in second chance education is typically broader than in mainstream education. Teachers often provide advice and guidance, and mentor students on issues not always related to learning. Teachers in second chance schemes help young people (re)develop positive relationships with adults and engage with other young people outside lesson time. A teachers profile and motivation to work in second chance education are important consideration in teacher recruitment.

Second chance education requires teachers to be innovative and flexible. The continued professional development of teaching staff should be ensured. Teachers will need to draw on the expertise of specialist services/interventions outside and inside the school environment, (e.g. access to psychologists). Teachers should also receive recognition for their work. Stability and continuity in the teaching workforce is important for students.

- Links between second chance education and mainstream education: Easy access to compensation measures risks making leaving education prematurely more attractive to some young people and schools with high numbers of young people at risk of dropping out. At the same time, research demonstrates that second chance schemes are most successful where they offer a genuine alternative to the formal school system³¹. Maintaining links between second chance provision and mainstream education remains important from both a student and teacher perspectives.

From the student perspective, it is important that students do not become isolated and distanced from mainstream education. From the teacher perspective, ensuring synergies with mainstream schools or co-location within the same building offers opportunities for shared staffing, training, and for the reciprocal exchange of pedagogical experiences and expertise.

The successful elements of second chance schemes have the potential to inform change and practice in mainstream schools to prevent ESL. Some elements are more difficult to replicate in mainstream education than others. A recent European study outlined possible adaptations and ways to profit from experiences in second chance education³². Whilst there is need for more practical experiences in transferring good practices from second chance schemes into mainstream education, the study emphasised that the starting point is a political will for change. Public acceptance of new approaches, pedagogical expertise, strong school leadership, sustainable funding and a strengthened role of local authorities are also required. The transfer of good practices should also be part of teachers' training. As discussed above, second chance schemes that are located within the mainstream schools provide opportunities for teachers from both schools to work closely together and enhance transferability of experiences and expertise.

³¹ Nevala and Hawley (2011), Reducing early school leaving in the EU, *op. cite ref 9*.

³² ECORYS (2013) Preventing early school leaving in Europe – lessons learned from second chance education, (forthcoming).

6 Brief conclusion

Member States are working on the Europe 2020 target to reduce the rate of ESL to below 10% by 2020, and many have made progress. However, developments are not happening everywhere at the same pace, and some countries performed worse in 2012 than in previous years. Sustained political support is needed to ensure that positive trends continue.

The work of the TWG on ESL has confirmed that good results in reducing ESL can only be obtained if a comprehensive strategy is in place, based on strong and continuous political commitment of all stakeholders in its implementation, at all levels. The TWG has highlighted the importance of striking the right balance between central and local measures, and between preventative, intervention and compensation measures. It has confirmed that the strong involvement and commitment of parents, students, local communities, youth, social and employment services and businesses is essential in developing and implementing policies against ESL. The key policy messages presented on page 3 reinforce the need for a comprehensive approach to ESL. Schools cannot and should not work in isolation.

Reducing ESL in a comprehensive way requires a critical revision of the entire education and training system. Too often is the case that policies against ESL only address those at risk of dropping out or those who have who already left education and training without qualifications. The TWG on ESL takes the view that effective policies need to take a holistic view and to look at all aspects within the education system that may trigger ESL. Reducing ESL is an important European goal and of benefit to all pupils, teachers, parents and communities. Reducing ESL requires a collective sense of responsibility and action for the benefit of the individual, of Member States, for Europe and for financial and social reasons.

This report presents the outcomes of the main activities of the TWG since December 2011. During this time, the group has focused on certain aspects of ESL and there is clearly more work to do in the future. Cooperation at EU level on ESL will continue in the framework of the Open Method of Cooperation on Education and Training; issues such as the role teachers in addressing ESL, parental involvement and a whole school approach to ESL will be developed further in this context.

Annex 1 Checklist on comprehensive policies

This table presents a progression continuum in the development of comprehensive policies to reduce early school leaving (ESL). The left side of the table reflects the starting position of many countries in developing their comprehensive policies against ESL and the right side presents good practice identified by members of the Thematic Working Group. This checklist can be used to self-assess current policies to reduce ESL by trying to locate the position of current policies and where countries could aspire to using the progression continuum marked by the arrows and different level of shading.

| | | Progression continuum | | | | |
|-------------------|--|-----------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Governance | There is no common strategic approach to address ESL. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | The country has a sustainable strategy to reduce ESL that is nationally coordinated. |
| | Political commitment to reduce ESL is low. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | There is sustained political commitment from policy makers, educational authorities and stakeholders to reduce ESL. |
| | Measures and programmes to reduce ESL do not cover the entire education and training (ET) system. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | The strategy covers the entire education and training (ET) system including provision for special education needs (SEN). |
| | ESL is mainly addressed within education policy; Initiatives from other relevant policy areas (e.g. health, youth, employment) are not coordinated with education policies and measures to reduce ESL. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Measures supporting the reduction of ESL are integrated into all relevant policies aimed at children and young people. |
| | There is no coordination at national level. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | There is a coordinating body at national level that ensures coordination across different policy sectors and with relevant stakeholders. |
| | There is no regular exchange of good practices. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | There is a regular exchange of good practices at all levels. |

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| Cross-sectoral cooperation | Monitoring is underdeveloped; there is no possibility to measure in a consistent way the effectiveness and efficiency of measures and programmes. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Monitoring and evaluation is embedded in the design of the strategy to reduce ESL and within all of its measures and programmes. Monitoring and evaluation is consistently used to test/assess efficiency and effectiveness. |
| | No evaluation of existing measures and programmes is foreseen. | ► | ► | ► | ► | The strategy will be evaluated and revised after a defined period. |
| | Existing measures and programmes cannot be adapted over time. | ► | ► | ► | ► | The strategy allows for adaptation at regional and/or local level over time. |
| | Funding is mainly project-based and needs to be re-negotiated when funding periods come to an end. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Sustainable funding of successful initiatives, programmes or measures is ensured (covering also possible adaptations over time). |
| | Cooperation is not part of the working practices of all services and stakeholder working with children and young people. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Cooperation is embedded in the working practice of all services and stakeholders working with children and young people. |
| | Cooperation happens on an ad-hoc basis, but is not institutionalised. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Inter-agency or inter-institutional arrangements support cooperation between different services and stakeholders (e.g. social workers). |
| | Schools do not play a central role in cooperation with other services and stakeholders. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Schools play a central role in cooperation with other services and stakeholders. Cooperation is centred around schools. |
| | Roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined and lead to inefficiencies. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Clear roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders ensure efficient and effective governance of measures and policies to reduce ESL. |
| | Understanding of goals and expected outcomes differ between services and stakeholders; there is no common language. | ► | ► | ► | ► | All services and stakeholders share common goals, a common language, a joint understanding of expected outcomes. |

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| | The involvement of parents and pupils and their respective associations is underdeveloped. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Local and regional arrangements involve parents and pupils and their respective associations. |
| | There are no initiatives planned to improve cooperation. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Measures are in place to further develop cooperation mechanisms and improve relational expertise of all services and stakeholders involved. |
| Data collection and monitoring | Data is collected without central coordination and with only limited comparability. | ► | ► | ► | ► | There is a central system for data collection, coordinated by a central body. |
| | Not all types and level of education and training are covered within the data collection system. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Data collection covers all types and levels of education and training (including special needs education). |
| | Data aggregation is limited. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Data can be aggregated at all local, regional and national levels. |
| | Data covers only the number of early school leavers, their age and gender. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Data and information covers a wide range of aspects including number, age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity (if possible). Academic achievement and mother tongue of pupils are additional aspects taken into account. |
| | The quality and reliability of data is not always high; there are weaknesses in some regions or with regard to some types of data. | ► | ► | ► | ► | The quality and reliability of data is high. |
| | Studies are not conducted regularly; studies are not necessarily complementing other forms of data collection. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Systematic data collection is complemented with regular surveys (e.g. longitudinal studies or studies to capture the motivation of early leavers from education and training). |
| | Data is collected annually. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Data is collected at several times of the year. |
| | There are risks concerning data security. | ► | ► | ► | ► | The security of personal data is ensured and complies with specific national requirements. |
| | The comparability of existing data is low. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Data collection allows for comparison between schools, local authorities and/or regions. |

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| | Data reporting is not adjusted to the different needs of policy makers, schools and local authorities. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Reporting is adjusted to the needs of policy makers, schools and local authorities. |
| | Data publication is not necessarily linked to follow-up measures. | ► | ► | ► | ► | The publication and analysis of data is followed by concrete measures; data is used to further develop strategies, programmes and measures to reduce ESL. |
| Prevention | Learning environments are not always conducive, sufficiently stimulating or well equipped. There is no policy on supporting schools in creating such learning environments. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Education and training institutions provide conducive and stimulating learning environments (including the physical environment) for all pupils. Schools are supported in creating such learning environments. |
| | Access to good quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) is limited for (some) disadvantaged groups in society. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Good quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) is accessible to all groups in society and especially to groups at high and increased risk of ESL. |
| | Potential obstacles to school success at system level have not been reduced or mitigated. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Potential obstacles to school success at system level have been identified and have been reduced or mitigated. The flexibility of education pathways has been increased. |
| | Targeted and inclusive support for children from a migrant or minority background is lacking or insufficient. | ► | ► | ► | ► | The support for children from a migrant or minority background is embedded in a more inclusive approach in school education; targeted support to address their specific needs is available. |
| | Transition between educational levels remains difficult for some/too many children; there is no policy on providing specific support to smoothen transition. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Measures at system level have been taken or are under development to ease transition between educational levels. This concerns closer cooperation between primary and secondary schools especially. |
| | VET displays high ESL rates; measures against it are missing or insufficient. The potential of VET to reduce ESL rates is not used. | ► | ► | ► | ► | The potential of VET in reducing of ESL has been identified; measures to reduce ESL in VET are in place. Reforms to increase the attractiveness of VET are under way. |
| | Pupils are only seldom involved in decision-making at school level. | ► | ► | ► | ► | There is a growing focus on involving pupils in decision-making at school level. Schools are encouraged to develop measures and policies to better involve pupils in |

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| | | | | | | decision making at school level. |
| | Parents' involvement in school education and in decision-making processes in schools is low. The active engagement of vulnerable families in particular is missing. Schools do not have special programmes to reach out to parents. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Parents are supported in their engagement with school education and encouraged to be involved in decision-making processes in schools. Schools have outreach programmes to encourage the engagement of vulnerable families in particular in school education. |
| | The awareness of ESL among teachers is limited; ESL is not addressed in initial teacher education or in continuous professional development. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Teachers and other professionals working with young people are aware of ESL. Preventing ESL is part of both initial education and continuous professional development. |
| | Guidance is not available to all pupils; the offer of high quality guidance is insufficient. | ► | ► | ► | ► | High quality guidance is available to all pupils, particularly during periods of transition (e.g. from lower to upper secondary education) |
| | Work experiences are not systematically part of school education; contacts with the world of work are underdeveloped. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Pupils have the opportunity at an early stage to experience the world of work (e.g. through short-term traineeships, episodes of work experience) in order to understand job demands and employer expectations. |
| Intervention | Early warning systems are not developed systematically. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Early warning systems have been developed and are implemented at school level - especially in schools that experience high rates of ESL. |
| | Early warning systems are not sufficiently monitored. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Early warning systems are monitored in their efficiency and effectiveness. |
| | There is no systemic support framework in schools to support pupils at risk of ESL; support is provided on an ad-hoc basis. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Schools have set up systemic support frameworks to support pupils at risk of ESL effectively in a timely manner. |
| | Multi-professional teams do not exist to support schools; cooperation with other services such as social and youth services, health services and with the local community is low. | ► | ► | ► | ► | Multi-professional teams work inside schools or in cooperation with several schools. Schools cooperate with social and youth services, health services, local community and/or other education and training providers. |
| | Schools are not in the position to provide individual | ► | ► | ► | ► | Schools provide individual learning support and support |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| | learning support or to allow for different learning methods. | | | | | different learning methods. Student-focused teaching methods are commonly applied. |
| | Extra-curricular and out-of-school activities are taking place on an ad-hoc basis. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Extra-curricular and out-of-school activities are an integral part of the learning offer in all schools. |
| | Professional development of school education staff and support for teachers working with pupils at risk of ESL is under developed. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Schools take care of the professional development of their staff and support teachers working with pupils at risk of ESL. |
| | Support for parents and families to help pupils at risk of ESL to remain in school is low. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Schools (in cooperation with local communities) support parents and families to help pupils at risk of ESL to remain in school. |
| | ESL is not discussed within the school community or with parents. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Schools raise awareness about ESL and discuss first signs of it with parents. |
| Compensation | Compensation measures are not broadly available. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Compensation schemes such as Second Chance Schemes are available to all young people. |
| | Qualifications achieved in second chance education are not recognised on the labour market. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Second chance education is of high quality and offers qualifications that are valued and recognised on the labour market. |
| | Second chance education cannot provide a personalised and holistic approach in supporting young people. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Second chance education provides a personalised and holistic approach in supporting young people and helps them to re-develop their relationship with learning, the world of work and society. |
| | The learning experience in second chance education is comparable to mainstream education. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Second chance education provides a distinctive learning experience and offers flexible curricula that are adaptable to the specific situation of the learner. |
| | There is no specific support for teachers in second chance education. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | Teachers in second chance education receive targeted support to cope with their broad range of tasks. |
| | There is no cooperation between second chance education and mainstream education. | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | ▶ | There is a close cooperation between second chance education and mainstream education. |

Annex 2 ESL rates in Europe

| | 2009 | 2012 | | | | | | | 2020 |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Total | Total | Males | Females | Native-born | Foreign-born | | | Target |
| | | | | | | EU 27 | Non EU 27 | Sub-total | |
| EU | 14.3 | 12.7 | 14.5 | 11.0 | 11.6 | 22.8 | 26.7 | 25.6 | < 10.0 |
| Belgium | 11.1 | 12.0 | 14.4 | 9.5 | 10.6 | 17.4 | 26.0 | 22.6 | 9.5 |
| Bulgaria | 14.7 | 12.5 | 12.1 | 13.0 | 12.6 | : | : | | 11.0 |
| Czech Republic | 5.4 | 5.5 | 6.1 | 4.9 | 5.5 | (10.0) | (8.5) | (9.3) | 5.5 |
| Denmark | 11.3 | 9.1 | 10.8 | 7.4 | 9.0 | : | (11.7) | 10.1 | < 10.0 |
| Germany | 11.1 | 10.5p | 11.1p | 9.8p | 9.1 | : | : | : | < 10.0 |
| Estonia | 13.9 | 10.5 | 14.0 | 7.1 | 10.6 | : | : | : | 9.5 |
| Ireland | 11.6 | 9.7 | 11.2 | 8.2 | 9.2 | 15.1 | 6.8 | 12.3 | 8.0 |
| Greece | 14.5 | 11.4 | 13.7 | 9.1 | 8.3 | (24.7) | 45.8 | 42.0 | 9.7 |
| Spain | 31.2 | 24.9 | 28.8 | 20.8 | 21.4 | 39.1 | 41.1 | 40.7 | 15.0 |
| France | 12.2 | 11.6 | 13.4 | 9.8 | 10.8 | 23.5 | 22.7 | 22.9 | 9.5 |
| Croatia | 3.9 | 4.2 | (4.6) | (3.6) | 4.2 | : | : | : | 4.0 |
| Italy | 19.2 | 17.6 | 20.5 | 14.5 | 14.8 | 35.4 | 40.5 | 39.1 | 15.0-16.0 |
| Cyprus | 11.7 | 11.4 | 16.5 | 7.0 | 8.1 | 21.6 | 19.5 | 20.7 | 10.0 |
| Latvia | 13.9 | 10.5 | 14.5 | 6.2 | 10.6 | : | : | : | 13.4 |
| Lithuania | 8.7 | 6.5 | 8.2 | (4.6) | 6.4 | : | : | : | < 9.0 |
| Luxembourg | 7.7b | 8.1p | 10.7p | 5.5p | 7.1 | (11.1) | : | 10.6 | < 10.0 |
| Hungary | 11.2 | 11.5 | 12.2 | 10.7 | 11.4 | : | : | : | 10.0 |
| Malta | 27.1n | 22.6 | 27.5 | 17.6 | 22.7 | : | : | : | - |
| Netherlands | 10.9 | 8.8p | 10.2p | 7.3p | 8.6 | 13.0 | 11.9 | 12.2 | < 8.0 |
| Austria | 8.7 | 7.6 | 7.9 | 7.3 | 6.0 | (10.2) | 21.5 | 17.7 | 9.5 |
| Poland | 5.3 | 5.7p | 7.8p | 3.5p | 5.7 | : | : | : | 4.5 |
| Portugal | 31.2 | 20.8 | 27.1 | 14.3 | 20.9 | : | 19.4 | 20.3 | 10.0 |
| Romania | 16.6 | 17.4 | 18.0 | 16.7 | 17.4 | : | : | : | 11.3 |
| Slovenia | 5.3 | 4.4 | 5.4 | (3.2) | (4.2) | : | (10.3) | (10.1) | 5.0 |
| Slovakia | 4.9 | 5.3 | 6.0 | 4.6 | 5.3 | : | : | : | 6.0 |
| Finland | 9.9 | 8.9 | 9.8 | 8.1 | 8.7 | : | : | (14.9) | 8.0 |
| Sweden | 7.0 | 7.5 | 8.5 | 6.3 | 6.7 | (10.3) | 13.1 | 12.8 | < 10.0 |
| United Kingdom | 15.7 | 13.5 | 14.6 | 12.4 | 13.7 | 16.1 | 9.9 | 12.2 | - |
| Montenegro | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | - |
| Iceland | 21.3 | 20.1 | 23.6 | 16.5 | 19.3 | 32.6 | : | 28.1 | - |
| MK* | 16.2 | 11.7 | 11.1 | 12.3 | : | : | : | : | - |
| Serbia | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | : | - |
| Turkey | 44.3 | 39.6 | 36.1 | 43.0 | : | : | : | : | - |
| Norway | 17.6 | 14.8 | 17.6 | 11.9 | 14.6 | 20.1 | 15.3 | 17.1 | - |
| Switzerland | 9.1d | 5.5 | 5.7 | 5.3 | 3.7 | 8.9 | 17.1 | 14.1 | - |

Source: Eurostat (LFS). Intermediate breaks in time series for NL (2010) and LV (2011). Notes: "b" = break in time series; "p" = provisional; "(" = Data lack reliability due to small sample size; ":" = data either not available or not reliable due to very small sample size; "n" = national data. *MK: The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Annex 3 Examples of practices from Member States

This annex provides examples of practices from different countries represented in the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving. The examples include both well-established practices and more recently implemented measures and programmes, whose results and impact have not yet been assessed³³. Their presentation in the context of this report aims to inspire policy actions. They are organised according to the structure of the report.

Governance – comprehensive approaches in addressing ESL

The **Dutch programme for the reduction of early school leaving** – Aanval op schooluitval is based on a number of key principles and areas of actions. A focus on prevention, early intervention and school based provision (in partnership with other actors), and a multi-stakeholder approach are at the heart of the programme. The programme involves the state, municipalities and schools working together. Four-year agreements are signed between the Ministry of Education and regions, which stipulate the progress each region is expected to make in reducing ESL within a specified timeframe. In total, 39 covenants were signed for the period 2008-2011 and new contracts were drawn for the period 2012-2015. Funding is based on achievement in the reduction of ESL. Each region, city and school is able to decide the type of measures they wish to implement in order to meet the targets assigned to them.

In 2012, **Austria** adopted a national strategy against ESL. It aims to inter-connect measures at the structural level (reforms and improvements within the school education system); measures at the level of the specific school (initiatives on school quality and improvements of teaching and learning environments); and measures to support students at risk (youth coaching as a new nationwide measure to support students at risk). As there are already a number of compensatory initiatives in place in Austria, the focus is currently on prevention and intervention. Among others, the strategy comprises of measures on the individualisation of learning and teaching, the implementation of educational standards, the new competence-based and partly standardised university entrance exam and a focus on quality assurance.

Coordination of policies against ESL

In the **Netherlands**, a special unit within the Ministry of Education manages the national programme for reducing ESL. Six 'account managers' have been assigned responsibility for ESL across a number of regions. They negotiate agreements with the regional representatives, monitor progress and also provide assistance and support for their regional, local and school level actors. In addition, they also facilitate the exchange of experiences with other regions or schools and hold regular meetings with key people from within the region.

In **Malta, Spain** and **Austria**, the Ministries of Education have created specific units to implement, coordinate and monitor policies against ESL. **Bulgaria** foresees a similar body in its draft National Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving, which is in the process of adoption.

³³ Additional information on recent policy developments in the area of ESL can be found in the Eurydice Report 'Education and Training in Europe 2020 Responses from the EU Member States' (forthcoming)

In **France**, under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, up to eight different Ministries are involved in reducing ESL where regular policy dialogue across Ministries have been developed. For example, inter-service meetings take place every two months and inter-service working groups have been established with responsibility for developing common tools, collecting best practices and organising awareness raising events.

Cross-sectoral cooperation

In 2012, **Luxembourg** established a 'House of Guidance', which brings together all relevant counselling services for young people and adults such as guidance services, educational and psychological support. Services are hierarchically and financially dependent on different Ministries and are not administratively integrated. However, the fact that they are under the same roof has significantly increased cooperation.

In **France**, in the framework of the inter-ministerial coordination, 360 local 'platforms' have been created throughout the country since 2010. They work in partnership with local stakeholders and networks active in the fields of education, youth work, youth inclusion and provision of guidance, employment, health, justice and agriculture. The aim is to ensure that more coordinated and tailored solutions are offered to young people identified as early school leavers. In addition, linked to the platforms, the Ministry of Education has introduced a network of training, qualification and employment called 'FOQUALE' with a key aim to improve coordination between all actions and actors under its responsibility. The purpose of the FOQUALE network is to support young people to re-engage in positive learning.

In **Portugal**, there is a nationwide network of 'Commissions for the Protection of At-Risk Children and Youth', managed by the municipalities. Each commission is composed of a small executive team of 3 to 5 full-time members that usually include staff from the municipality, social security services, local NGOS and teachers. This team works directly with a larger team also representing health services, education, security, parents and local associations – where ESL is a high and legal priority amongst the additional and broader duties of these different teams. By law, both teams are responsible for ESL and the protection of children's rights to remain in education until the age of 18.

Data collection systems

In the **Netherlands**, each student has a unique reference number and retains this number throughout their educational career regardless of any change in school, municipality or region. This system makes it possible to track the progression of all pupils. A nation-wide system administers the 'unique reference number'. The Basic Record Database for Education (BRON) records all pupils and it is the same as the one used for school financing. Young people who are registered on the BRON system as being of compulsory school age but not attending education or training and not holding a basic qualification are classified as early school leavers. The BRON system captures a broad range of 'intelligence' on children and young people. This includes age, gender, the locality of the student, ethnic origin, education/school type and school history. ESL data can be linked to socio-economic data for each region, city and neighbourhood. Aggregate data is available at national, regional and local levels and for each individual school and training institution.

The **Estonian Educational Information System (EEIS)** is a national register that consolidates information on the education system, including information on educational institutions, pupils, teachers, graduation documents and curricula. Local governments can use EEIS to access information on the pupils living in their territory, and on those who have moved to a school located in the territory of another local government. Educational institutions are obliged to enter information into the EEIS and to check and amend the entered information for accuracy. Pupils and teachers can view the education-related information held on them. The register tracks each student's education career. It is also visible if the student has dropped out of school and if he/she has continued in an evening school, vocational school etc. The register does not provide data about entry into the labour market.

In **France**, local platforms are supplied with information from the SIEI (Système interministériel d'échanges d'informations). The SIEI collects data from the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Agriculture schools, as well as Apprentice Training Centres and the 'Missions locales' (access points for employment services for people under 25 years of age). It allows for the production of nominative lists of early school leavers twice a year. Access to the data is highly restricted; the system is only accessible via secure software by the heads of the local Platforms (Plates-formes de suivi et d'appui aux décrocheurs) which re-group all actors active with early school leavers and disengaged learners within a certain territory. The SIEI provides information, which is useful for the follow-up of the young person, and has contributed to increased awareness and understanding of ESL processes.

In **Luxembourg**, a digital national pupil register and a systematic procedure developed by the Ministry of Education with the services of Local Action for Youth (*Action Locale pour Jeunes, ALJ*) is able to identify young people leaving school without a diploma. Monthly lists are produced which are then used by ALJ to follow-up early school leavers.

Portugal has a national database that collects, on a monthly basis, information from school staff, students and social support benefits. It collects information on students on an individual basis. Information is biographic (age, special needs, social support benefits, information on parents such as profession and employment status as well as education level) and refers to the activity of each student in the system: absences, class, school year, evaluation. Data is accessible at individual, school, regional and national level and is delivered on a business intelligence system that is a support system for school managers and other decision makers.

Collecting information on reasons for ESL

The Early School Leaver Monitor, carried out by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA) at the University of Maastricht in the **Netherlands**, collects information on an annual basis on the reasons why young people drop out of school. Research carried out in 2011 surveyed³⁴ 2,145 early school leavers who had left education without a basic qualification. The research findings revealed that the principal reasons for ESL were education related (cited as the main reason by 45% of respondents), followed by physical or mental health complaints (18%), followed by personal reasons, and labour market pull factors (mainly cited by pupils from vocational courses).

In 2006, **Hungary** launched a Life Course Survey which follows 10 000 pupils from the 8th grade (last grade of primary education) until the end of upper secondary education using questionnaires. It allows for an analysis of the most important trends both in school success and in ESL. Regarding children with parents having only primary school education, the survey found that Roma children are at higher risk (25% points' difference) of ESL than non-Roma. The most important reasons leading to ESL, were identified as absenteeism, poor academic results, and the feeling that experiences of school-life are not relevant for the children.

Transparency of data

In **Sweden**, under the heading Open Comparisons (OC)³⁵, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has increased the access to comparable information on quality, results and costs within areas (including schools) for which Swedish local authorities and regions are responsible. The aim is to stimulate comparisons and to contribute to a greater openness concerning results and costs. The starting point is that systematic and open comparisons stimulate an increased efficiency and strengthen the control of activities. The comparisons also serve to spur the ambition to obtain a better result and to show good examples of practice. Open comparisons of both compulsory and upper secondary school are published every year. They include information on results, completion rates and transition to the labour market. In 2011, a special OC with a focus on ESL was carried out. The report, that includes a study on success factors to reduce ESL, has been translated into English and can be downloaded from SALAR's website³⁶.

Luxembourg has carried out a systematic survey of all early school leavers since 2003 where every ESL is then contacted by the ALJ. This is a proactive approach and has two main targets: on the one hand, to enable a young person (with their family) to identify a new course of action suited to their needs and on the other hand, to establish and understand the reasons why the young person left school. The most recently published survey (2010/2011)³⁷ shows that nearly 24% of young people leave school during the year because they do not like the curricula they have chosen. They report that the orientation they received was incorrect. The survey also shows that 17 % leave school during the academic year because they risk failing the year. A further 14% were unable to find an apprenticeship and therefore decided to leave school.

Prevention – reducing grade repetition

To prevent incorrect orientation and to reduce the practice of grade repetition in lower secondary education, **Belgium (fr)** has introduced a compulsory common pathway for the first two years of secondary education (12-14 years), in the continuity of primary school (decree 30 June 2006). During this period, for pupils experiencing learning difficulties, an individual learning plan (PIA - plan individual d'apprentissage) is set up; the plan includes special support. Children have the opportunity to attend special classes to catch up with learning and then return to the regular classes.

³⁵ http://english.skl.se/activities/open_comparisons

³⁶ <http://webbutik.skl.se/sv/artiklar/preventing-early-school-leaving.html>

³⁷ <http://www.men.public.lu/fr/publications/secondeaire/statistiques-analyses/decrochage-scolaire/decrochage-10-11/index.html>

In order to reduce grade repetition in basic education, **Portugal** has introduced an extraordinary period at the end of the school year where students from 4th and 6th grades that failed national exams (Portuguese and Math) receive additional support from teachers and have the opportunity to repeat the exam. Students or groups facing difficulties also have a Pedagogic Support Plan designed by teachers, parents and school psychologists if needed.

Prevention – educational orientation

The new structure of the school education system in **Berlin (Germany)**, introducing an integrated secondary school (ISS), is expected to provide more individualised support and learning. It also introduces heterogeneous learning groups, all-day schools and work-based learning. One of the key aims of ISS is to mitigate against early tracking. As such, the ISS combines elements of academically oriented learning with vocational training and offers a range of vocational qualifications, as well as the possibility of completing the Abitur as offered in the Gymnasium.

In **France**, the choice between academic and vocational education at the end of lower-secondary is taken by the school Principal after a dialogue with the pupil and his/her family. To ensure the preferences and decision of the family and the pupil is taken into account when he/she is 18 years of age, an experimentation has been launched in 117 schools aimed at enabling families and pupils to have the final say in the decision-making process. The lack of choice is considered to be one factor leading to ESL, since pupils are obliged to take a route that does not necessarily correspond to their aspirations. The experimentation is expected to have an impact also on teaching and assessment styles.

Prevention – involving young people in school decision making

In **Belgium (fr)** the government has decided to finance specific training for pupils who are elected by their peers to be class delegates. They can act as mediators to tackle problems inside their own class group, between different class groups, their peers and the staff of the school such as educators, teachers, and headmasters.

Intervention – early warning systems

In 2012, the Flemish government in **Belgium** adopted an action plan on 'Truancy and other forms of anti-social behaviour'. The action plan aims at all students in compulsory education, but also focusses on pupils at-risk of ESL. The actions addresses anti-social behaviour and truancy in a continuum of mapping the phenomenon, informing and sensitizing, preventive work, guidance, and sanctioning. It aims to reduce truancy and other forms of behaviour leading to ESL.

In **Belgium (fr)**, a dedicated service checks the implementation of compulsory education. Its purpose is twofold: identifying the children between 6 and 18 years old who do not comply with compulsory education and checking the school attendance of children who are registered in schools. The latter task is important to detect the pupils at risk of dropping out of school; truancy is regarded as one indication of other difficulties faced by the pupil at school or at home. Based on information provided by the school, the administration sends an official letter to the parents to remind them of

respecting compulsory education. If the situation does not improve and the problem cannot be solved within the school, field workers working for the Ministry of Education can provide additional support to the school stakeholders. One of the main aims of their intervention is to re-establish the communication between the pupil and his/her family and the school.

In **Iceland**, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has developed a 'Risk Detector' to prevent ESL from upper secondary schools. The aim of the risk detector is to provide school counsellors with a systematic approach to identify students at risk of dropping out based on factors that could predict school failure, according to research and practice. The risk detector is mainly a questionnaire for students enrolled from the 10th grade up to the 1st year in upper secondary school. The main categories of the questionnaire include: Student background, family factors, previous school experience, school engagement and attitude towards education, psychological adjustment and working while at school, friends at school and friends school engagement. The risk detector was initially tested in three schools with high ESL rates and received very positive feedback from all school counsellors. The Ministry has now decided to expand the programme to 18 out of 32 upper secondary schools.

Intervention – multi-professional cooperation in schools

Since 2001, social pedagogues have worked in each school in **Lithuania**. Today there are about 1000 social pedagogues working in the schools, day care centres, and children's homes. They offer counselling to children, families and teachers. They organise social skills development groups for pupils with behaviour problems and implement prevention programmes. They are members of the 'Child's Welfare Group' at school, which deals with problems students face. The group consists of a wide range of specialists: social pedagogues, school administration representatives, teachers, special educational needs (SEN) teachers, school psychologists and parents. In addressing attendance problems in schools, the group works in close cooperation with territorial unit inspectors for juvenile affairs and the staff of the municipal children's rights protection departments.

In **Portugal**, school multidisciplinary teams are composed of counsellors, psychologists, social workers and mediators that support individuals and groups facing difficulties. In some cases, when learning difficulties are more severe, additional resources are deployed to cooperate with external specialized therapists that come to schools to support students.

In **Malta** a social work service is provided in all state colleges focusing primarily on absenteeism where priority is given to primary pupils. All school staff must report pupils who are habitual absentees. Intervention measures, involving the pupil and his/her family, aim to tackle the obstacles that prevent the student from attending school. This includes co-working with social support workers, counsellors, school management team, guidance teachers, educational psychologists, prefects of discipline, career guidance and youth workers. Social workers also liaise with services external to the Directorate for Educational Services (DES) on behalf of their clients

In addition, an outreach programme is held yearly in **Malta** with pupils who are not planning to sit for their secondary education certificate. These pupils are contacted either by the social worker or/and trainee career advisor. 'One-to-one' interventions are held with the student to formulate a tailor made programme concerning his/her career path. National agencies such as Agenzija Zgħazagh, Foundation for Educational

Services (FES) Youth Inc and Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) team up with the colleges in order to design projects and initiatives to encourage and motivate pupils to reach out to these entities to seek for help.

In **Ireland** Pastoral Care/Student Support Teams operate in many post-primary schools. These teams involve a range of school personnel (Principal, HSCL, Guidance Counsellor, Learning Support Teacher) and at times external agents such as the Public Health Nurse, Youth Worker. The care team meets frequently and ensures a coordinated approach to support identified children at risk.

In **Luxembourg** all secondary schools have a Psychological and School Guidance service (SPOS). In addition, partners of the 'House of Guidance' cooperate with schools on a regular basis and provide presentations in class on the different services and possibilities offered to pupils and young people.

Each school in **Belgium (fr)** has contact with a psycho-medico-social centre (CPMS). These centres support young people and/or their parents in all issues related to school, vocational guidance, family and social life, and health. The consultations are voluntary and free of charge. Psychologists, nurses, social workers and doctors form a multidisciplinary team that allow for a holistic approach in helping young people. The content of consultations remains strictly confidential.

In **France** within the Ministry of Education, the Mission to Tackle Early School Leaving (mission de lutte contre le décrochage (MLDS) is in charge of preventing ESL and helping school leavers return to school or training. Multi-agency teams (Groupe de prévention du décrochage scolaire) are also in place within the schools to identify and support pupils who are demotivated as well as to support the integration of newcomers.

Intervention – targeted programmes

In 2005 **Ireland** implemented an Action Plan for Educational Inclusion 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)' involving a process for identification of schools with the highest levels of disadvantage. DEIS is an integrated multi-faceted strategy to address educational disadvantage from pre-school through to completion of upper second-level education and seeks to tackle educational underachievement and ESL. Under the terms of DEIS, high priority is given to early intervention; specific measures and support to improve literacy and numeracy; increased emphasis on the involvement of parents and families in children's education; planning, target-setting and measurement of progress and outcomes are in place. In addition, the Home School Community Liaison and School Completion Programme are two major interventions under DEIS. Furthermore, the Early Start Programme is a pre-school programme in 40 DEIS primary schools. Since 2010, the early childhood care and education (ECCE) initiative in Ireland offers one-year free pre-school education to all children in the year prior to enrolment in primary education.

In **Portugal** different programmes are specifically designed for territories, schools, classes or pupils that are at risk of ESL or that are performing below target. These secondary prevention programmes include the TEIP Programme (for schools located in socially and economically disadvantaged areas), the 'Mais Sucesso Escolar' (More School Success) Programme and the 'Percursos Curriculares Alternativos' (Alternative Curricula Pathways) Programme. They are run by the Ministry of Education and Science and have nationwide coverage. The TEIP and 'Mais Sucesso' Escolar

Programmes have recently been extended and now cover over 25% of pupils and schools in Portugal (15.6 % for TEIP and 10.2 % for 'Mais Sucesso'). They provide extra support to pupils (academic, personal, social) inside and outside the classroom in the form of mentoring/tutoring, intercultural mediation, guidance and vocational experiences. They include in-service teacher training, as well as parent and community involvement. It is worth noting that 'Mais Sucesso' was originally a teachers' initiative, later recognised and supported by the Ministry.

In **Spain**, the PROA Plan (since the academic year 2004-05) aims to address inequalities in education, prevent social exclusion and provide extra resources to education establishments. It works together with pupils, families and the local environment. It offers extra support for individual pupils facing difficulties as well as targeted support for primary and secondary schools hosting large numbers of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Under the framework of the forthcoming Law for the improvement of Quality in Education, PROA will be replaced by other measures and initiatives, which imply a deep structural reform of the education system. These reforms include the establishment of a two-year course of Basic Vocational Training and the development of a new, more rational curriculum.

Intervention – Guidance

In **Austria**, Youth coaching has been developed by the Ministry for Social Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to keep, or reintegrate, young people in the education and training system. The target group includes pupils who are at risk of not attaining any qualification at lower or upper secondary level; young people below the age of 19 who are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET) as well as young people up to the age of 25 who require special educational support. Youth Coaching aims to advise, support and assist young people and ensure their sustained integration into the (upper secondary) education and training system. Where this is not yet possible, young people should reach alternative objectives or sub-objectives. Youth coaching providers closely cooperate with schools (for identification of at risks pupils) and with different institutions (such as Public Employment Service Austria, training workshops, projects for young people with mental health impairments) which are suitable for the young people during or after their coaching period. <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/jugendcoaching>

In **Denmark**, 52 municipal Youth Guidance Centres help young people continue or complete their chosen education programme. The main target groups are pupils in primary and lower secondary school and young people under the age of 25 who are not involved in education, training or employment. The Youth Guidance Centres support young people during their studies and in their transition to the labour market. In compulsory education, each pupil is required to prepare an education plan in partnership with a youth guidance counsellor. The pupil is expected to participate in a series of consultations in order to develop these plans and is encouraged to start thinking ahead to employment and further education opportunities after compulsory education. If the pupil is unable to decide, the pupil may be offered a 10-day 'bridging course' that introduces the pupil to various educational pathways and job-fields. Furthermore, after compulsory education, Danish municipalities are legally obliged to monitor all young people between 15-17 years of age and help those who are not in employment or education.

Intervention – work-based learning

Production schools, or similar models, have been established in a number of countries (e.g. **Denmark**, **Austria** and **Lithuania**). Young people may gather practical experience of job-related processes and requirements as well as insights into 'what professional life is about'. Although the concept of production schools varies from country to country, it generally combines academic learning programmes and practical work experience. The aim is to raise the motivation of young people to engage in learning and to provide them with the experience necessary to make informed decisions on their future careers. Production schools often offer workshops for learning by doing, vocational guidance, socio-pedagogic support, practical experience and assistance in improving basic education skills.

Berlin (Germany), as well as other German Länder introduced 'productive learning' (Produktives Lernen) as one measure to reduce the number of early school leavers. Productive Learning is offering an individualised curriculum combining school-based academic education and practical work experience. Individualised learning is at the core of the concept, which include the learner carrying out self-chosen learning tasks and following individualised learning plans. A key element is that the learner spends around half of their weekly learning hours in companies, social, political and cultural establishments and other workplaces undertaking practical learning tasks.

The learner can choose the place for practice learning themselves depending on their career orientation and preferences. Here, the cooperation between different stakeholders, including schools and employers is of key importance. A mentor, usually a worker from the company, supports the learner. The Productive Learning concept foresees also that learners receive individual advice from a teacher for one hour per week, including planning of learning tasks and for reflection of learning outcomes.

Intervention – creating conducive learning environments

The 'whole school approach' in **Ireland** builds on collective engagement and individual reflection from all school staff (not only principals and teachers) to continuously improve the school and its learning environment. Depending on the specific situation of a school, measures for improvement can address different issues. Measures usually take into account all aspects of school life (e.g. curriculum, physical environment, organisation of the school day, provision of services). Schools in Ireland have a high degree of autonomy and a strong 'corporate' culture. Schools collaborate also with partners in the community, based on the understanding that schools are part of an educational continuum. They are critical players in children's development, but only one among others. The whole school approach is embedded in all practices and legislation; especially since the Education Act 1998.

Located in a disadvantaged area of **Berlin**, Campus Rütli is based on a new educational concept which includes the creation of a collective and integrated social space where the entire spectrum of care, guidance and educational institutions for young people collaborate and jointly shoulder responsibility. Integration between schools (from 1st to 13th grade), and between schools and youth clubs, sports and other extra-curricular activities, individualised learning, age mixing, cooperation with local institutions (libraries, theatre, etc.) are some of the distinctive features. Parents are invited to the school twice a month, and a parents' centre is located in the same building.

The Golden 5 Programme in **Poland** is an educational programme and a modular course for educational staff to create a more congenial and effective school environment. Its aim is to overcome pupils' adaptation difficulties during their transition from primary to lower secondary school, to prevent social exclusion and to improve academic achievement. It concentrates on improving teachers' competences in applying strategies for classroom management, building relationships, social climate, personalised learning and family-school relationships. Teachers conduct a self-evaluation of their skills, and then select steps they will apply in the classroom. They also decide on which pupils to focus their efforts first (these are mainly children at risk of social exclusion and in need of special attention). The programme is implemented in a classroom environment over a 16-week timeframe. During this period teachers are supported by certified trainers who meet once on a weekly basis. Schools interested in applying the Golden 5 Program may take part in training opportunities held by one of more than 70 Golden 5 trainers prepared to provide in-service trainings to teachers in order to help them implement the program in their classroom.

Intervention – measures at family and community level

In **Ireland** Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) is a preventative strategy and a major component of DEIS, the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. The scheme is targeted at pupils identified as at-risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system due to background characteristics which tend to adversely affect pupil attainment and school retention. HSCL targets the causes of educational underachievement by focusing on the parents and relevant adults whose attitudes and behaviours impinge upon the educational lives of children. The primary role of the HSCL responsible in schools, who is a teacher released from all teaching duties, is to engage in full-time liaison work between the home, the school, and the community. He or she seeks to enable parents to act as a key resource in their children's learning and supports the development of the pupil-parent-teacher relationship, so that school becomes a place where all young people can reach their potential. The HSCL scheme places significant emphasis on collaboration with the local community, seeks to develop and promote partnership with parents and encourages a whole-school approach to improving attendance, participation and retention in education.

In **Malta** social workers work closely with parents of habitually absent pupils to support them and to help them understand the importance of education as well as act as a direct link between the home and the school environment. The role of the social support workers includes teaching parents, parental and home management skills in their homes. This has proven to be successful in that the worker has ample time to build a trusting working relationship with the parents resulting in a decrease in absenteeism especially in primary state schools.

In **Bulgaria** 'Amalipe', an NGO working with Roma, created several Community Development Centres. Community centres help set up and develop parent clubs with the participation of Roma parents. The aim is to work with local communities to improve education, hygiene and health education, understanding the risks associated with early marriages and births. Roma parents are encouraged to participate in discussions on topics such as healthcare, education, social issues, employment, the upbringing of children and parental competence and skills development. Cultural events and celebrations of traditional holidays are organised to increase the capacity for self-organisation and mutual help.

Intervention – Individual support

In **Denmark**, the policy approach to reducing ESL is organised in three strands: 1) Supporting measures for pupils who need help and motivation to complete compulsory education. The measures include special courses for improving basic skills in reading and writing, help with homework and more practically oriented classes for pupils lacking academic skills. 2) Improved mentoring, guidance and bridging courses for disadvantaged pupils who are struggling and need support through their compulsory education. Youth Guidance Centres support young people during their studies and in their transition to the labour market. 3) More differentiation and individualisation of educational provisions in order to meet the needs of all pupils, match talent and support disadvantaged pupils.

In **Portugal**, EPIS is a privately funded NGO, established in 2006 and is supported by more than 250 corporate and business associates. Its aim is to empower low-performing pupils (12 to 15 years old) and motivate them to complete compulsory education. The programme is full-time, and delivered by specially trained 'mediators for school success', who work in cooperation with schools (but outside classes). Based on a well-established methodology, EPIS mediators help selected at-risk pupils develop their non-cognitive skills that will enhance their beliefs, self-esteem, conscientiousness and openness to experience, which are essential for school success.

In **Poland** 'Youth Centres' are dedicated to pupils at risk of dropping-out of school due to emotional and behavioural problems and who require special education and therapy. These pupils have typically underachieved in school and have a history of long-term absenteeism or truancy. Education in boarding schools and therapeutic sessions are provided to each student. Social pedagogues and psychologists work with young people. Admission to the centre is on a voluntary basis but requires a letter of referral issued by Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centre. There are 65 centres in Poland at present, financed and supervised by the Ministry of National Education.

In **Poland**, schools and pre-primary schools have the possibility of employing Roma Education Assistants. The main role of the Roma Education Assistants is to support Roma pupils and their parents in communication with schools, to initiate psychological support for pupils with special educational needs and to build good relationship between parents and teachers. The main aim of this project is to improve low school attendance among Roma pupils and to help them to fulfil an education program.

In **Norway**, the Follow-Up-Service (Oppfølgingstjenesten) is a body subordinate to the county school authorities. It has offices in each County Municipality and acts as a safety net for young people. The service is obliged to follow up all early school leavers and other young people between the ages of 16 and 21, who are neither in the education system, nor at work. The service provides the information, guidance and practical assistance to direct the individuals into an activity leading to higher education, a formal vocational qualification or a partial qualification that can improve the access to the labour market. In June 2013, 19900 young people were in the target group for the Follow-Up-Service; the service has arranged contact with at least 92% of them. The Follow-Up-Service and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation offered approximately 9000 young people some kind of activity. A total 1500 young people had an unknown status at the end of the school year 2012/2013 as opposed to approximately 10 000 in the year 2009/2010.

In the **Czech Republic** a pilot programme was implemented from 2010 to 2013 in two regions (‘Romodrom for Education’), funded by ESF and the state budget. It aimed at providing individual support to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and was ran by an NGO in cooperation with teachers, SEN teachers, headmasters (primary and secondary schools), local social departments and families of children. The programme included regular activities with children and their parents, based on mentoring, tutoring, peer group activities of children, motivation weekends and visits to future possible workplaces and local companies.

Compensation

The DOBBANTO programme in **Hungary** was a pilot project from 2008 to 2011 and involved 15 schools located in different geographical areas across Hungary. The focus of the project was to help students to re-enter school education or VET, adult education or employment. The pilot project targeted 15-25 year olds who for a range of multiple and complex reasons experienced difficulties with mainstream education.

The starting point of the pilot was to change the physical learning environment (welcoming, relaxation areas) together with the organisation of learning (small groups, small teams of teachers) and to provide creative and flexible learning experiences linked to employability and career development. A key focus was on the development of communication, social and learning competencies supported by innovative instructive methods such as cooperative learning, project based learning, experimental learning and out-of school learning. As a student-centred pedagogical approach, one of the key elements of the pilot was to provide opportunities for young people to create their own personal development plans with a view to them taking responsibility for their own development and longer term plans. One-to-one teacher student/student meetings in addition to team building sessions facilitated this approach. Due to the success of the pilot project, plans are now in place to develop ‘the Bridge Programme’ in Hungary for low achievers, early school leavers and for young adults.

In **Portugal**, early school leavers over 15 years old can complete their lower secondary education in the Integrated Programme of Education and Training (PIEF). PIEF classes may be held in regular schools, NGO’s, communities’ facilities and enterprises. Each group has a full-time tutor and a small group of teachers develop a tailored curriculum with a high degree of flexibility and strong vocational focus. Students may enrol and finish their studies at any time of the year and the duration of the course depends on their own pace. There are also some experiences of Second Chance Schools, namely in the Oporto Metropolitan Area.

In **France**, ‘Microlycées’ operate in some secondary schools (lycées), where they have a dedicated space. They prepare students who have not attended school for at least six months for the Baccalaureate. Students are typically between 16 and 25 years old and although the reasons why they have dropped out of education vary, they all need to rebuild confidence in themselves and in their own learning. With its focus on mentoring, it also helps students to identify their aims, understand their development needs and cope with their problems.

Teachers work closely with the students, have additional pedagogical tasks and are strongly involved in mentoring individual students. The support work provided to students is very intense (regular meetings with individual students, follow-up of absenteeism, common room for teachers and students, no separate teachers’ room).

In addition, teaching is organised more interdisciplinary and teachers often work in pairs. There is a stronger focus on teamwork among the teachers, on experimental and innovative teaching styles and on small learning groups. 'Microlycées' are staffed with full-time teachers and a psychologist; they organise exchanges between the teachers in the secondary school and in the 'Microlycée'. An important characteristic in the 'Microlycée' is also flexibility in terms of timetables and the approach to learning – for example, with more opportunities to learn in workshops together with the possibility to choose between different workshops and receive personalised support for missed homework.

In **Ireland**, the 150 Youthreach centres aim to provide early school leavers with the knowledge, skills and confidence required to participate fully in society and to progress to further education, training and employment. Youthreach targets at young people (aged 16 – 20) with poor qualifications and who are unemployed. Youthreach centres are small out-of-school units that intend to be small, dynamic studio or laboratory-style settings with an inbuilt adaptability and capacity to respond to the needs of young people. While Youthreach is a national programme, centres are locally managed and programmes reflect therefore the particular social, economic and cultural environment in which they operate. Besides offering flexible learning opportunities, they also provide guidance, mentoring and counselling.

In **Sweden**, the goals of municipal adult education are to support and encourage adults from the age of 20 in their learning. Municipal adult education aims to give them the opportunity of developing their knowledge and competence in order to strengthen their position in working and societal life, and promote their personal development. The municipalities are obliged to provide municipal adult education, covering both compulsory school level and upper secondary level. The starting point is on the needs and conditions of the individual learner, with priority for those who have received least education. Municipal adult education aims at promoting personal development and providing routes to further studies. At the upper secondary level, the diploma can be a vocational diploma, or a diploma for studying in higher education.

In **Flanders (Belgium)**, the Public Employment Service offers several qualification routes for students that left school with or without a qualification. The so-called OKOT-routes (Dutch acronym for qualifying pathways) offer a jobseeker to follow a qualifying pathway in an educational centre. The focus of these OKOT-routes is on jobs with a shortage of skilled workers on the labour market, and the level of qualification in these OKOT-routes can be different, starting from a diploma of secondary education until a professional bachelor degree. In these OKOT-routes, there are some tracks with an intensive follow-up of the students. E.g. in the 'OKOT – nursing', an internet portal (www.zorg-portaal.be) was constructed and provides more options to support and coach students, resulting in a higher graduation rate.

In **Luxembourg**, the E2C (Ecole de la 2e Chance) opened in 2011 and offers a regular school programme with a specific pedagogical approach in order to allow ESL to complete their education in school with an official diploma.

Since 2012, the PES in **Luxembourg** offers a three month course for ESL to allow them to return to school or integrate into the labour market. The National Youth Service offers voluntary services to provide opportunities for young people to experience the labour market over a period of a few months. This provides young people with the opportunity to develop a realistic personal project. The main objective is to motivate ESL to return to school. During this transition period the, 'Action locale pour jeunes' (ALJ) offers individual support and coaching in order to maintain the level of motivation of those youngsters.

Compensation – support to teachers

In the Dobbanto programme in **Hungary**, teachers receive specific training before the start of the programme, and receive regular training and support. This includes a monthly visit by a 'change mentor' to facilitate reflective thinking and the process of change, and to identify alternative solutions to problems the team is struggling with. In addition, regional meetings are organised, where teachers and managers of schools participating in the programme meet with the teams of four or five other schools every six months for a direct exchange of experiences and learning from each other. School leaders are encouraged to engage in a process of self-reflection and are supported in developing their own leadership practices by 'edu-coaches' with business skills and extensive experience in different aspects of education.