

# WP2. Requirement and opportunity analysis

## R2.6 Updated report on the existing ESL policies and challenges from partner countries and Europe

Project KALIS

Version Number 2.0



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# About KALIS

The ERASMUS+ project KALIS-"Keep all learners in schools" is a 36 months KA220-SCH - Cooperation partnerships in school education.

At a European level, the need to reduce early school leaving (ESL) has been highlighted in the Europe 2020 strategy "A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", stating that "ESL is a pressing concern for the individual, for society and the economy. The skills and competences gained in upper secondary education are seen as the minimum credentials for successful labor market entry and as the foundation for further learning and training opportunities.

In the European 2020 policy message "A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving" its stated that "The school is a key actor to tackle early school leaving but it cannot work in isolation, as there are factors outside the school that will influence a learner's level of engagement and success. Therefore, a 'whole school approach' to early school leaving is needed." In a 'whole school approach', all members of the school community (school leaders, middle management, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families) feel responsible and play an active role in tackling educational disadvantage and preventing drop-out. We call this a Holistic approach.

However, the tools and methods to support this holistic policy message is missing for most schools and KALIS project have ambition to give a huge contribution in that direction.

In line with the chosen priorities, the project aims to develop brand new innovative holistic approaches to better prevent Early School Leaving (ESL) which involve school management, teachers, students, and parents. In addition, the approaches will bridge the experience and the developed pedagogical tools from previous Erasmus+ projects.

The project has developed several objectives to achieve this:

- Conduct requirement and opportunity analysis to collect best practices as prerequisites to develop the professional requirements for train the teachers curriculum, learning game, ESL Warning tool and ESL prevention strategy for schools.
- Develop a comprehensive Micro-Learning training program for upskilling of educational staff "How to Motivate Students and Reduce School Dropout", including necessary training materials and assessment strategy.
- Design and develop a real time ESL Warning tool that includes communication and send warning alerts to parents.
- Develop a serious learning game for students supporting them to create their own strategies to avoid ESL.
- Design and develop an Early School Leaving Prevention Resource (ESLPR) platform where resources are accessible.
- Summarize and conclude ESL prevention strategy for schools based on best practices and developed tools.
- Investigate the room of opportunity for implementation of ESL concept in European schools, as well as contribute to current regional and national policies within ESL.



### *Introduction:*

In the context of researching the key elements of results to be developed by the KALIS project team, the literature review assumed a pivotal role, serving as a foundational and integral facet of scholarly inquiry. The overarching purpose of the literature review is to systematically examine and synthesize existing knowledge, theories, practices, and interventions pertinent to the prevention of Early School Leaving (ESL). By engaging in a comprehensive review of the academic literature, the KALIS project team endeavored to empirically inform and methodically shape the development of innovative and holistic approaches for ESL prevention.

A foundational objective of the literature review was to discern and examine established interventions that have demonstrated efficacy in ESL prevention. This entailed a meticulous examination of successful strategies deployed by analogous projects and educational initiatives globally. By extrapolating insights from these endeavors, the project team aspired to instill its own initiatives with a proven and informed framework.

Given the intricate nature of ESL, the literature review served as a conduit for unraveling the myriad factors influencing the phenomenon. Educational, social, economic, and individual elements intertwine in complex ways, necessitating a nuanced comprehension of their interplay. It is within this contextual understanding that the KALIS project endeavors to cultivate holistic and integrated approaches to ESL prevention.

The design of the teacher training program is intricately informed by the literature review, wherein effective training models are extracted and examined from interviews with teachers, trainers and school management board. Pedagogical techniques, communication strategies, and methodologies proven to enhance teacher effectiveness in identifying and addressing signs of potential ESL form integral components of this academic inquiry.

In the context of technological solutions, the literature review guided the team towards an understanding of existing real-time alert systems. By dissecting the features, data analytics models, and communication protocols of successful systems in diverse educational contexts, the KALIS project aimed to develop an alert system tailored to the specific needs of ESL prevention.

The literature review also extended its purview to the design of an educational game targeting young students for dropout prevention. In doing so, the team analyzed prior efforts in gamifying educational content and discerned how game-based learning may be utilized to engage students in topics pertinent to educational success and dropout prevention.

With the vision of establishing a web-based resource hub, the literature review informed the identification of evidence-based resources. This includes curriculum materials, research findings, and best practices which are meticulously curated to ensure the resource hub becomes a reliable repository for educators and stakeholders in the ESL prevention landscape.

Crucially, the literature review shed light on successful models of stakeholder collaboration involving school management, teachers, students, and parents in ESL prevention efforts. Insights garnered from this academic pursuit provided guidance on effective communication strategies, community engagement approaches, and collaborative frameworks that can be seamlessly integrated into the holistic approach envisaged by the KALIS project.

Addressing the challenge of early school leaving in Europe required a comprehensive understanding of the myriad factors influencing this phenomenon. The literature review served as a vital tool in

unraveling the complexities surrounding premature disengagement from education, by shedding light on the root causes and risk factors contributing to early school leaving. This process enabled a nuanced appreciation of the intricate interplay between socio-economic conditions, individual circumstances, and educational policies that influence students' decisions to leave school prematurely. Successful interventions implemented in various European countries have been identified, will be adapted, and tailored to suit the unique challenges within different educational systems from partner countries in KALIS project.

The cultural and contextual diversity across Europe added another layer of complexity to the issue. The literature review aided in unraveling how cultural nuances and contextual factors influence early school leaving. This knowledge is indispensable for tailoring interventions that resonate with the unique circumstances of different communities.

In addition to these historical and socio-economic factors, our research included a qualitative case study focusing on the evaluation of early school leaving policies in Europe. This case study aimed to examine the logics and assumptions behind the design of policies aimed at combating ESL in Europe. By analyzing systematic documentary evidence and conducting in-depth interviews with educational experts and policymakers, we aimed to understand the rationale behind these policies and how they have been justified. Through this comprehensive approach, we aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to ESL and the effectiveness of various intervention strategies.

Within the scope of this study, the case study design, which is a design belonging to the qualitative research method, was used. The working group for this study consisted of 31 teachers, inspectors, educational experts, and headmasters from five different countries: Romania, Bulgaria, Norway, Spain, and Germany. These participants were selected based on their involvement in educational practices and interventions aimed at reducing school dropout rates. The diversity of the group in terms of geographical location and type of educational institution provided a broad perspective on the issue.

In essence, this literature review is not just a procedural step; it is the cornerstone of a theoretical framework that guided our research and our future interventions. By synthesizing theories and models from existing literature, researchers from KALIS consortium created a foundation for comprehending the intricate dynamics of early school leaving, fostering a more informed and effective approach to tackling this pressing issue in European education.

### *Key Concepts and Definitions:*

What is meant by 'early school leaving'?

The European Union defines early school leavers as people aged 18-24 who have only lower secondary education or less and are no longer in education or training.

Early school leavers are therefore those who have only achieved pre-primary, primary, lower secondary or a short upper secondary education of less than 2 years<sup>2</sup>

The data on early school leavers are collected annually via the European Labour Force Survey.

Early school leaving can take several forms. It includes young people who have dropped out of school before the end of compulsory education, those who have completed compulsory schooling, but have not gained an upper secondary qualification, and those who have followed pre-vocational or vocational courses which did not lead to a qualification equivalent to upper secondary level.

### Who is not considered to be an early school leaver?

The definition of early school leavers excludes anyone who participated in some form of education or training in the four weeks prior to the date of the survey. Likewise, young people who initially drop out of school but then return to finish upper secondary education before the age of 25 are not regarded as early school leavers.

### What is the EU's objective?

The Europe 2020 strategy contains five headline targets. One is to reduce the EU average early school leaving rate to less than 10% by 2020.

However not all EU countries have managed to reach this joint objective. The proportion of early leavers from education and training in the EU in 2022 ranged from 2.3 % in Croatia to 15.6 % in Romania.

Among partner countries in KALIS project, Romania, followed by Spain face the biggest rates, Germany and Norway are 1-2 points behind, while Bulgaria is very close to the target.

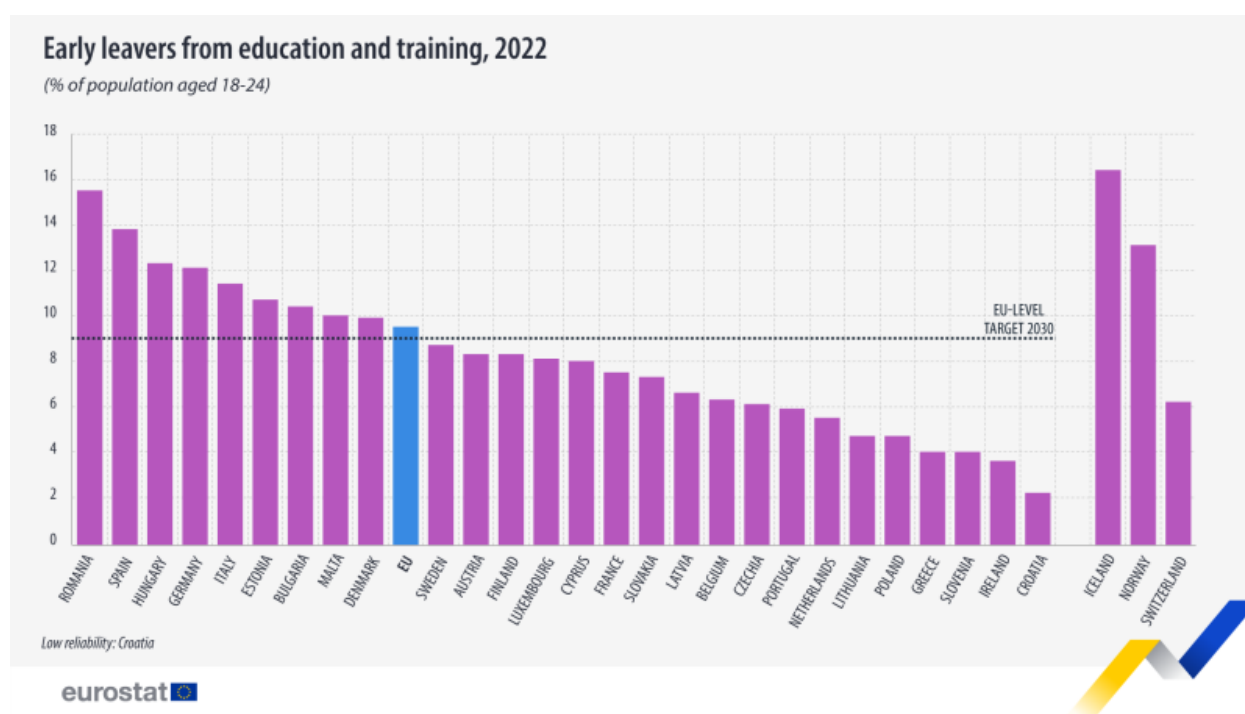


Figure 1 Early leavers from education and training, 2022 Source: Eurostat <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:V2-early-leavers-230523.png>

The results also vary between women and men as well as between young people living in areas with different degrees of urbanisation, both within countries and between the EU Member States.

The early school leaving target is strongly related to smart and inclusive growth. It impacts directly on the employability of young people and contributes to breaking the cycle of deprivation, social exclusion and poverty.

### What is a best practice?

Best practices in education refer to methods, strategies, and approaches that have demonstrated effectiveness in achieving positive outcomes for learners. These practices are evidence-based and

recognized as exemplary in promoting student engagement, achievement, and overall educational success.

### What is dropout prevention?

Dropout prevention encompasses a set of strategies and interventions designed to identify and address the factors that contribute to students leaving school prematurely. It includes early intervention, support systems, and targeted programs to keep students engaged in their education.

### Who are at-risk students?

At-risk students are those who face factors or conditions that may hinder their academic success and increase the likelihood of early school leaving. These factors can include socio-economic challenges, learning disabilities, or a lack of support systems.

The concept of early school leaving (ESL) is complex, exhibiting variations in definition and measurement across Member States in Europe. Divergent interpretations of ESL stem from disparities in the criteria used to demarcate premature departure from educational and training systems. Member States employ distinct thresholds, encompassing leaving before the completion of compulsory schooling, prior to attaining a minimum qualification, or without finishing upper secondary education.

### *Historical Context:*

*A historical analysis of early school leaving (ESL) in Europe* reveals temporal shifts and underlying factors that have shaped the trajectory of ESL across the continent.

During the 19th century, the advent of industrialization set the stage for a notable emergence of ESL. The demand for labor in burgeoning factories drew many children away from formal education, reflecting a societal inclination towards immediate economic contributions over prolonged scholastic pursuits.

The post-World War II era witnessed comprehensive educational reforms as European nations sought to rebuild and fortify their societies. Despite these efforts, economic exigencies prevailed, compelling some to forego education for immediate income. The struggle between economic necessity and educational aspirations persisted, encapsulating the complex landscape of ESL.

The mid-20th century economic boom ushered in improvements in living standards. Nevertheless, societal transformations and a perceived disjunction between formal education and certain segments of the population contributed to enduring ESL. As access to education expanded, a disquieting coexistence of educational opportunity and dropout rates became apparent.

The latter half of the 20th century unfolded against a backdrop of educational expansion and societal change. Despite increased accessibility, countercultural movements and societal shifts occasionally clashed with traditional educational structures, introducing new dimensions to ESL patterns.

The late 20th and early 21st centuries marked a shift towards knowledge-based economies, accentuating the pivotal role of education in future employability. Initiatives aimed at improving educational quality and aligning curricula with evolving workforce demands sought to mitigate ESL and foster a more seamless transition from education to employment.

Socioeconomic disparities have remained a consistent undercurrent in the historical analysis of ESL. Students hailing from disadvantaged backgrounds encounter heightened challenges, including limited



access to resources and support, amplifying the propensity for premature departure from the educational system.

Policy interventions have played a critical role in ESL mitigation efforts. The Bologna Process, initiated in 1999, exemplifies a pan-European endeavor to standardize the higher education landscape, enhancing mobility and fostering a unified approach to qualifications, with the implicit aim of reducing ESL at the tertiary level.

Technological advancements in the 21st century have introduced novel dimensions to the ESL narrative. The integration of online learning and digital resources offers alternative pathways for students, potentially mitigating ESL by providing more flexible and accessible learning environments.

In more recent years, the educational landscape has grappled with the challenges presented by the influx of refugees and migrants. Efforts to address the educational needs of these diverse populations underscore the importance of inclusivity in ESL mitigation strategies.

ESL has been a persistent challenge internationally, still lacking a single internationally accepted definition or concept in educational and social terms. The European Union has long recognized the issue and has attempted to address it by clarifying terms and strategies to prevent and resolve it. European summits such as the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the Council Recommendation of the EU in 2011, the Europe 2020 Strategy, and the 2022 Recommendation for School Success exemplify this effort. Over time, this concept has evolved significantly: initially, in the 2000 Lisbon Strategy, the term referred to those outside the education system with few details, while in 2011 it focused on those leaving education with a secondary level of education or lower and were no longer actively engaged in education or training. (Cascino, 2023).

Moreover, the impact of global events, such as economic recessions or the COVID-19 pandemic, has reverberated through educational systems, potentially exacerbating ESL trends. Economic downturns have amplified dropout rates, while disruptions to traditional learning environments necessitate adaptive strategies to prevent a surge in ESL.

In conclusion, ESL in Europe, is a multifaceted phenomenon deeply entwined with historical, economic, and social currents. Comprehensive ESL mitigation strategies must acknowledge this historical context, recognizing the dynamic interplay of factors that have shaped educational trajectories across different epochs.

Major policy developments and initiatives over the years.

Here are some notable trends and initiatives:

**The Bologna Process:** Initiated in 1999, the Bologna Process aimed to create a standardized European Higher Education Area. This process sought to facilitate student mobility, improve the quality and comparability of higher education qualifications, and enhance the competitiveness of European higher education globally.

**Europe 2020 Strategy:** The Europe 2020 strategy, launched in 2010, set ambitious goals for the European Union, including in the field of education. It emphasized smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, with education playing a crucial role in achieving these objectives.

**Youth Guarantee:** The Youth Guarantee was introduced as part of the EU's response to youth unemployment. Enacted in 2013, this initiative aimed to ensure that all young people under 25 receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship, or a traineeship within

four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. **The reinforced Youth Guarantee** is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. All EU countries have committed to the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee in a Council Recommendation of October 2020. The Recommendation is based on a Commission proposal, part of the Youth Employment Support package.

**Erasmus+ Program:** The Erasmus+ Program, established in 2014, is the European Union's flagship program for education, training, youth, and sport. It provides opportunities for students, educators, and youth workers to study, train, and gain experience abroad, fostering international cooperation and exchange.

**European Pillar of Social Rights:** Adopted in 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights outlines a set of principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labor markets and welfare systems. It includes principles related to education and lifelong learning, emphasizing equal access to quality education and training.

**New Skills Agenda for Europe:** Launched in 2016, the New Skills Agenda for Europe focuses on ensuring that people develop a broad set of skills throughout their lives. It aims to improve the quality and relevance of education and training, making it more responsive to labor market needs.

**Digital Education Action Plan:** In 2018, the European Commission presented the Digital Education Action Plan, which outlines strategies for making better use of digital technology in education. It emphasizes the development of digital skills, the integration of digital tools in teaching and learning, and the promotion of innovative teaching methods.

**European Education Area:** The European Education Area was proposed to be established by 2025. This initiative aims to create a common European space for learning, ensuring that individuals can move freely and have their qualifications recognized across European countries.

**Recovery and Resilience Facility (NextGenerationEU):** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union introduced the Recovery and Resilience Facility as part of the NextGenerationEU initiative. This includes funding for investments in education and digitalization to address the impact of the pandemic on education systems.

### *Regional Context:*

The current state of early school leaving (ESL) in Germany

Germany is slightly above the benchmark at 10.1% (cf. Bundesamt für Statistik, 2021, Internationale Bildungsindikatoren im Ländervergleich, p.32). The absence of a comprehensive nationwide strategy in **Germany** to prevent school and training dropouts is noted, but various actors at different levels have implemented measures to support young individuals in successfully completing their education. The article emphasizes the importance of political frameworks and measures established by different entities to reduce dropout rates:

- o The Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK) set the basic framework in 2007 and later in 2010, defining strategic goals and action areas to address school dropouts.
- o The Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (BMAS) introduced the Aus- und Weiterbildungsgesetz (Training and Further Education Act) in 2023, aiming to assist young people struggling to transition from school to vocational training.

o The Allianz für Aus- und Weiterbildung, involving representatives from the government, employment agencies, states, and business organizations, outlined measures to prevent training dropouts in its joint declaration for 2023-2026.

o The Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF) initiated the Exzellenzinitiative Berufliche Bildung in 2022, focusing on strengthening career guidance, especially in high schools (cf. Jugendhilfeportal 2023).

Preventing early school leaving has been a priority in Germany, leading to various programs and initiatives aimed at reducing dropout rates and supporting students at risk. Here's an overview of key initiatives and approaches (cf. Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF):

a) Full-Day Schooling Programs: Germany has expanded full-day schooling to provide comprehensive support, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These programs offer extracurricular activities, homework support, and meals, aiming to create a more supportive environment for students.

b) Vocational Education and Training (VET): Germany has a well-established dual education system that combines classroom learning with apprenticeships in companies. This hands-on approach helps engage students who might struggle in traditional academic settings and provides practical skills leading to employment opportunities.

c) "Bildungsberatung" (Educational Counseling): Counseling services are crucial in identifying students at risk of leaving school early. These services offer guidance to students, parents, and teachers, helping to address individual needs and challenges early on.

d) "Schulsozialarbeit" (School Social Work): Introducing social workers in schools has been beneficial in supporting students facing social, emotional, or family-related difficulties. These professionals provide guidance, counseling, and support to students in need.

e) Bridge Programs: Transitioning from primary to secondary school or from school to work can be critical periods for potential dropouts. Bridge programs help students navigate these transitions more smoothly, offering mentorship, orientation, and support during these phases.

f) Inclusive Education: Efforts to create inclusive educational environments for students with disabilities or special needs have been implemented. These programs aim to integrate students into mainstream education, providing necessary accommodations and support.

g) Flexible Learning Pathways: Initiatives that offer alternative learning paths and flexible schedules cater to students with different learning paces or those facing personal challenges. This approach accommodates diverse needs and reduces the risk of students dropping out due to feeling academically overwhelmed.

h) Preventive Measures: Some programs focus on identifying warning signs of potential dropout early on, such as absenteeism, academic struggles, or behavioral issues. By intervening at these initial stages, they aim to prevent the progression to dropping out.

i) Public-Private Partnerships: Collaboration between governmental bodies, educational institutions, NGOs, and private entities has led to innovative programs targeting at-risk students. These partnerships often bring diverse resources and expertise to the table, enhancing the effectiveness of interventions.

j) Research and Evaluation: Continuous research and evaluation of these programs are essential to assess their effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and refine strategies in preventing early school leaving.

Literature on these programs typically includes evaluations of their effectiveness, case studies showcasing successful implementations, and discussions on challenges faced in reducing early school leaving rates. Researchers often explore the socio-economic factors, family dynamics, and individual circumstances influencing dropout rates to tailor interventions effectively. The success of these programs often depends on their adaptability to local contexts, ongoing assessment, and collaboration among stakeholders.

These initiatives reflect ongoing efforts to enhance the quality, accessibility, and relevance of education across Europe.

Regarding gender differences, the situation was more favorable for young women aged 18 to 24 compared to young men in the EU. On average, only 8% of young women were early school leavers, while 12% of young men fell into this category. In Germany, the gender-specific figures mirrored the EU average, with 8% for women and 12% for men.

Variations were observed among different regions within Germany. Bremen, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein, and Hessen recorded the highest percentages of early school leavers, while Bavaria and Saxony had the lowest rates. Additionally, values for Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, and Thuringia were below the EU target. However, limitations in data availability exist due to low sample sizes at the regional level.

The results from the 2020 Microcensus are subject to limited comparability with previous years and lack the usual depth of analysis due to methodological changes and technical challenges in data collection attributed to the introduction of a new IT system and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's important to note that the term "early school leavers" does not equate to school dropouts; it defines individuals based on age, educational attainment, and current educational participation. This includes individuals who have successfully completed secondary or vocational schooling but have not pursued further education or training. Educational participation encompasses attendance at schools or universities, as well as involvement in educational activities such as courses, seminars, or private lessons for general or vocational development (cf. Bundesamt für Statistik, 2021, Internationale Bildungsindikatoren im Ländervergleich, p.32).

In early 2023 there the well-known German foundation Bertelsmann-Stiftung conducted a new study on ESL, which was widely shared and discussed in major German newspapers and media stations.

The study highlights the persistent high levels of young people leaving school without obtaining a secondary education certificate in Germany. Despite regional progress, the percentage of school leavers without qualifications has stagnated at around six percent since 2011. This data analysis, conducted by education researcher Klaus Klemm, underscores the societal challenge of these individuals facing limited future prospects, particularly in light of increasing skill shortages.

The study reveals that within this group, there are more males (60%) than females, and individuals with foreign citizenship are almost three times more likely to lack qualifications compared to those with German citizenship (13.4% versus 4.6%). Additionally, half of the school leavers without qualifications attended special needs schools. Across states, significant variations exist; while Bavaria reports a low rate of 5.1%, Bremen records nearly double the proportion at 10%.



Nicole Hollenbach-Biele, an expert on educational matters, emphasizes that despite positive strides in some regions, the overall failure to reduce the number of school leavers without qualifications is concerning. She stresses that in today's complex job market, individuals without qualifications are at a higher risk of precarious employment.

To address this issue, the experts recommend interventions at two levels. Firstly, schools should employ better support mechanisms, including digital tools to identify and address learning gaps early on. Additionally, there's a suggestion to document acquired competencies beyond formal certificates, recognizing the importance of showcasing a student's skills even without a traditional diploma.

Furthermore, the implementation of the Schülerdatennorm, allowing data sharing between schools and job centers, is proposed. This would enable better vocational guidance for school leavers without prospects. The Bertelsmann study also advocates for the government's planned apprenticeship guarantee to ensure opportunities for those without formal educational qualifications (cf. Klemm, Klaus, 2023. Jugendliche ohne Hauptschulabschluss. Bertelsmann-Stiftung).

### The current state of early school leaving (ESL) in Norway

Proportion of pupils/apprentices who completed with study or vocational qualifications during 5/6 years 2016-2022, is 81.0%.

### Share of pupils/apprentices who have completed upper secondary education within five/six years, by education programme and year

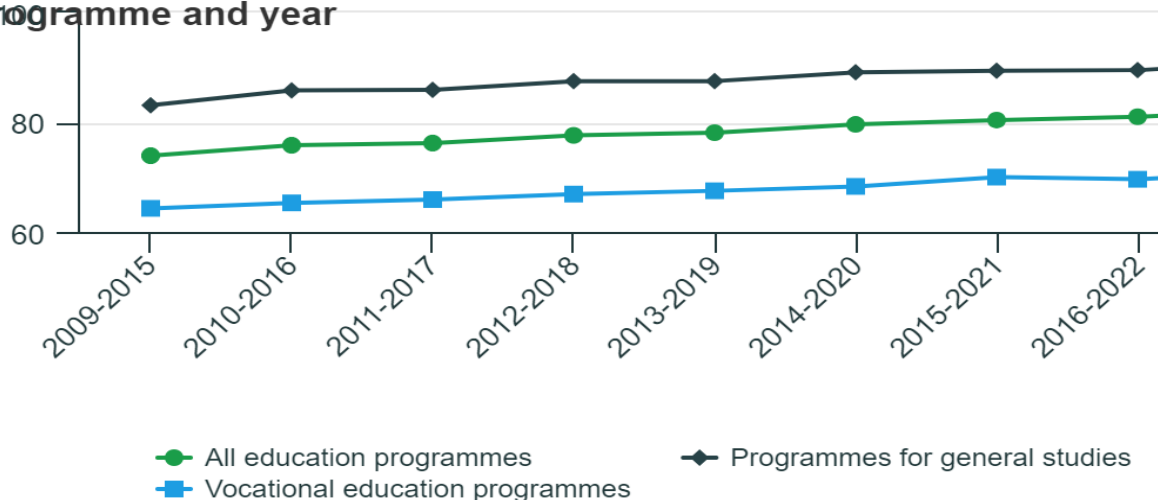


Figure 2 Share of pupils/apprentices who have completed upper secondary education within five/six years, by education programme and year

### The Completion Reform

#### Causes of dropout

The research behind the national reform is aware of the complexity in the topic, but highlight two main reasons based on research on today's student group:

**Mental ailments and disorders.** There are many reasons for non-completion of the school course that are not directly school-related. It may concern living conditions challenges, psychosocial problems, health challenges, and linguistic challenges. A survey among students in shows that 40 per cent of the student's state that failure to complete the programme is due to circumstances outside school, and

mental health problems are cited as the most frequent reason for dropping out among these young people.

**Stress culture and performance expectations.** School can help develop a stress culture among the pupils, for example by communicating performance expectations. This can lead to stress-related ailments among students, which can affect their ability to complete the school course.

The Norwegian government proposed a number of measures to prevent or prevent drop-out.

Research shows that different types of mentoring schemes are effective in preventing dropout. Older pupils can contribute to a safe and good transition for new pupils in upper secondary school and offer academic and social support.

The Government believes that more schools should use mentoring schemes in the transition from primary to upper secondary school.

**Follow-up obligation for students with absence.** Schools must work better and more systematically to follow up students who have or are at risk of absence. This is because attendance is necessary for learning, and the school serves as a social arena that can give students a sense of belonging and friendship.

Schools are encouraged to initiate measures early in upper secondary education to avoid pupils ending up in a negative spiral that ends with them not finishing. This includes **competence-raising measures** in special education and **inclusive practices for the employees**.

The Government will consider proposing a duty for county authorities to **work systematically and preventively with students who are at risk of failing subjects**. This means that pupils should get help before it becomes too much to catch up.

### Efforts on policy level to prevent dropout

Norway has national curriculum, but implementation is distributed to the county council as school owner for secondary level/VET education, while the municipalities is schools owner for primary education till students are 16 years.

The national strategy highlight a wide range of strategies aimed at improving Secondary/VET level and making education more accessible and relevant to different groups of students, including adults.

The Government proposed a vocational requalification right that gives everyone with completed study or vocational qualifications the opportunity to take new vocational qualifications. This measure is specifically aimed at adults and should be offered as training specially organized for adults.

- The Government has initiated trials with modular structured training to make the training more flexible and better adapted to the needs of students.
- Digitization in schools. The Government has presented an action plan for digitalization of primary and secondary education, with measures to strengthen infrastructure, develop digital learning resources and increase the competence of teachers. This includes support for digital homeschooling, especially in light of the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.
- A common national absence registrations system, since schools today interpret differently what constitutes valid absence and what constitutes "illegal" absence.

### Summarized research at national level for VET sector

The drop out from VET education is a bigger problem than dropout from the general studies at secondary level. An expert group suggested these 8 measures to improve the situation.

1. Less students in each class in high school. As long as "piece-price funding" of students continues, county governments are rewarded when classes become crowded. Give the teacher time for the individual student, especially the most resource-intensive students.
2. A number of students have a greater need for follow-up other than what lies within the teacher's responsibility and day-to-day opportunities. Support personnel such as public health nurses, educational and psychological counselling services (PPT) must therefore be readily available, as well as strengthened psychological and follow-up services.
3. Extra measures must be put in place for boys with multicultural backgrounds who are at risk of dropping out. These measures may, for example, be reinforced training, close follow-up in the basic subjects, especially the focus on Norwegian, English and mathematics. Increased subsidies for companies or enterprises that admit boys for practical training, increased apprenticeship grants and enhanced follow-up of teachers while these students are in practice are also necessary.
4. Vocational specialization is many students' first encounter with a place of work in a possible future profession. It is important to have a good and safe framework for students who are otherwise at risk of dropping out. Time must be set aside for teachers to accompany students who will have training in a company. The practice of confiscation of hours by teachers in the subject is unfortunate and must not be continued.
5. An unfortunate practice of merging vocational classes into common subjects has developed. This creates little motivation and interest in both common subjects and vocational subjects among the students. Students must receive vocational instruction in both programme subjects and common subjects.
6. All students with inadequate Norwegian language skills must immediately be given a genuine right to enhanced Norwegian language instruction.
7. Students in vocational education programmes are entitled to training from teachers with both professional and pedagogical education. Everyone who teaches vocational education programmes without being qualified must immediately be offered the opportunity to complete a vocational teacher education programme that is binding and well facilitated.
8. Students who do not receive an apprenticeship must be offered an adequate alternative. It can be an intermediate year for students who need to improve their grades in subjects, or it can be an alternative 2-year practice-based course, so that students are better equipped to take the subject or journeyman test. No student should stand with a half-run and wait for a place that may not come.

### The current state of early school leaving (ESL) in Bulgaria

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the processes connected to the implementation and coordination of the Strategy. An important milestone in the Strategy is the establishment of a Coordination mechanism (referred to as the Mechanism) (back2school) to tackle early school-leaving, involving the educational, social, health and administrative services as well as municipalities.

This is [Interim report on the implementation in 2019 of the Strategy to reduce the rate of early school leavers](#) (2013-2020)

The 2019 Interim Report on Bulgaria's strategy to reduce early school leaving (ESL) outlines the progress in implementing national educational policies. It details the execution of lifelong learning and adult education strategies under the National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2014-2020. The report covers two main impact areas: enhancing educational attainment and coordinating stakeholder engagement in lifelong learning. It includes data on measures taken and their effectiveness, highlighting the reduction of ESL rates and challenges faced. This report is a crucial component for shaping future educational policies and targets up to 2030, aiming to continuously improve Bulgaria's education system.

**ESL Rates:** Bulgaria had been struggling with relatively high ESL rates, particularly at the upper secondary education level. Some regions experienced higher dropout rates, often linked to socioeconomic disparities. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:V2-early-leavers-230523.png>

**Challenges:** Socioeconomic factors, insufficient support structures, and disparities between regions contributed to ESL. Estimated around 12% to 13%, with higher rates at the upper secondary level. Rates varied across regions, with certain areas experiencing higher dropout rates due to socioeconomic disparities. Lack of parental interest is raised as a challenge and may require specific strategies to overcome. This issue was raised to various reasons, and addressing it effectively requires a nuanced approach. There is an emphasis on the secondary school stage only, while also noting the inclusion of primary schools. This aspect can be used to target efforts and resources according to the specific needs of the different levels of learning. In collaboration with qualification centers, and training organizations, schools are supported with training packages. These programs are focused on inclusive education, child rights, and violence prevention. These initiatives reflect a comprehensive approach to tackling the challenge of student dropouts in Bulgaria, emphasizing the importance of teacher training and support.

**Application information:** Focusing efforts and resources on training and resources, as well as involving external partners, seems to be a key success factor. Implement systems to identify students at risk of dropping out at an early stage. Early intervention can include personalized learning plans, mentoring, and additional academic support. Develop curricula and teaching methods that are inclusive and adaptive to diverse learning needs. Invest in ongoing teacher training to equip educators with the skills to address diverse learning needs, implement inclusive teaching practices, and manage classrooms effectively.

**Key Stakeholders:** Involvement of administration, teachers, parents, and external partners appears to be a key element for successful implementation of initiatives. Involving key stakeholders is crucial in effectively addressing the issue of student dropouts. It could bring diverse perspectives, resources,



and expertise to the table, which can significantly enhance the effectiveness of dropout prevention strategies. Here's how the involvement of various key stakeholders can help:

📌 **Educators and School Administrators:** Teachers and school leaders are on the front lines of education. They play a critical role in identifying at-risk students, implementing educational interventions, and fostering an inclusive and supportive school environment.

📌 **Parents and Families:** Engaging parents and families in their children's education can greatly impact student motivation and achievement. Parents can provide valuable insights into their children's needs and are essential partners in supporting learning at home.

📌 **Students:** Including students in discussions and decision-making processes can provide critical insights into the challenges they face. It also empowers students to be part of the solution, enhancing their engagement and commitment to their education.

📌 **Local Government and Policy Makers:** Government bodies and policymakers can provide the necessary regulatory framework, funding, and resources to support effective dropout prevention programs. They can also facilitate cross-sector collaborations for a more comprehensive approach.

📌 **Community Organizations and NGOs:** Organisations within the community, such as non-profits, youth centers, and social service agencies, can offer additional support and resources. They can provide mentoring, tutoring, extracurricular activities, and other services that schools may not be able to offer.

The current state of early school leaving (ESL) in Romania is characterized by numerous difficulties related to both quality and equity within the education system. These challenges not only limit Romania's capacity to build a knowledge-based modern economy but also hinder its ability to facilitate social mobility.

Romania has struggled to achieve the targets set within the Europe 2020 strategy, particularly regarding early school leaving. The rate of early school leaving in 2020 stood at 15.6%, surpassing the targeted 11.3%. While the early school leaving rate in major cities is below the European Union average and aligns with the national goal for 2020, rural and small urban areas face a significantly higher rate of 26%, showing an upward trend.

According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, which measure the skills of 15-year-old students in mathematics, reading, and science, Romania consistently ranks among the lowest in the European Union, alongside Bulgaria and Cyprus. Over 40% of 15-year-olds suffer from functional illiteracy, posing long-term social and economic challenges.

Various reasons contribute to the early abandonment of studies, including personal or family issues, learning difficulties, or precarious socio-economic situations. The repercussions of school dropout are far-reaching, encompassing unemployment, social exclusion, poverty, and health problems. The primary challenge facing Romania's education system stems from significant disparities in quality and high rates of early school leaving. Low participation in education exacerbates inequality of opportunities among students. The rural-urban gap, desegregation, and the inclusion of the Roma population remain key challenges with implications for inclusive growth and the reduction of social inequalities.

The (re)integration of children and young people outside the school system remains one of the main challenges, alongside improving the quality of education and strengthening preventive measures targeting students.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further compounded the negative effects that education must counterbalance. Parents' difficulties in finding employment may lead to minimal support for their children and even attempts to involve them in the workforce for survival.

School dropout adversely affects innovation and growth, as a competent workforce is fundamental to the entire economy, not just high-tech sectors. The long-term effects of school dropout are felt in societal evolution and economic growth, with early school leavers tending to participate less in the democratic process and being less active citizens.

Early school leaving and school dropout represent processes of gradual disengagement from school, associated with unexcused absences, declining academic performance, and inappropriate school behavior. Recognizing and addressing these warning signs early is crucial, as chronic situations with multiplying and diversifying signals make effective intervention more challenging. Integrated interventions that address both school-related and underlying external issues are considered efficient tools for intervention.

Risk factors associated with school dropout include individual or family factors (such as poverty, low family education, or the family's valuation of education), school-level factors (related to the school environment, organizational culture, teacher-student relationships, teaching and learning quality, and the school-community-parent relationship), community-level factors (including local traditions,

culture, gender roles, child-rearing practices, living conditions, available resources, dominant values, and beliefs), and institutional factors within the entire education system.

The educational landscape in Romania is marked by a complex interplay of factors, where early school leaving (ESL) rates serve as poignant indicators of the challenges within the system. Across all regions of the country, with the exception of the capital city Bucharest, the prevalence of school dropout exceeds the European average, with rates varying significantly. In the Western region, the dropout rate stands at 11%, while in the South-East and Central regions, it reaches a substantial 23%.

The intricacies of the ESL phenomenon become even more pronounced when considering its correlation with poverty in employment. Data from the Social Monitor underscores a close association between the school dropout rate and the incidence of poverty in employment—a condition where individuals are employed but fail to garner sufficient income for a decent standard of living. Romania, in this context, grapples with a poverty in employment rate of 14.5%, a figure that surpasses many of its European counterparts and significantly eclipses the European Union's average of 8.5%.

The convergence of two critical metrics—school dropout rates and poverty in employment—reveals a compelling narrative. Research illuminates a robust correlation, highlighting that over half of those who prematurely terminated their educational journey in Romania currently find themselves either unemployed, disengaged from active job seeking, or participating in informal labor lacking proper documentation, according to Eurostat data.

Further compounding the educational and socio-economic challenges is Romania's distinction of having the highest percentage within the European Union—34.5%—of individuals confronting the risk of poverty or social exclusion, as reported by Eurostat. This statistic underscores a pervasive socio-economic dilemma affecting a substantial segment of the population.

This narrative unfolds against a backdrop where the educational trajectory of Romanian students is intricately interwoven with economic realities. The high correlation between ESL rates and poverty in employment accentuates the imperative for holistic interventions. Strategies aimed at reducing ESL should not only address educational shortcomings but also grapple with the socio-economic inequalities that underpin premature school leaving.

Efforts to foster inclusive educational environments need to be nuanced, recognizing the diverse needs of students across various regions and socio-economic backgrounds. Simultaneously, initiatives targeting enhanced employment opportunities and poverty reduction emerge as pivotal components in a comprehensive approach to mitigating the root causes of early school leaving in Romania. The narrative thus navigates through the statistical landscape, shedding light on the intricate dynamics that shape the educational and socio-economic fabric of the nation.

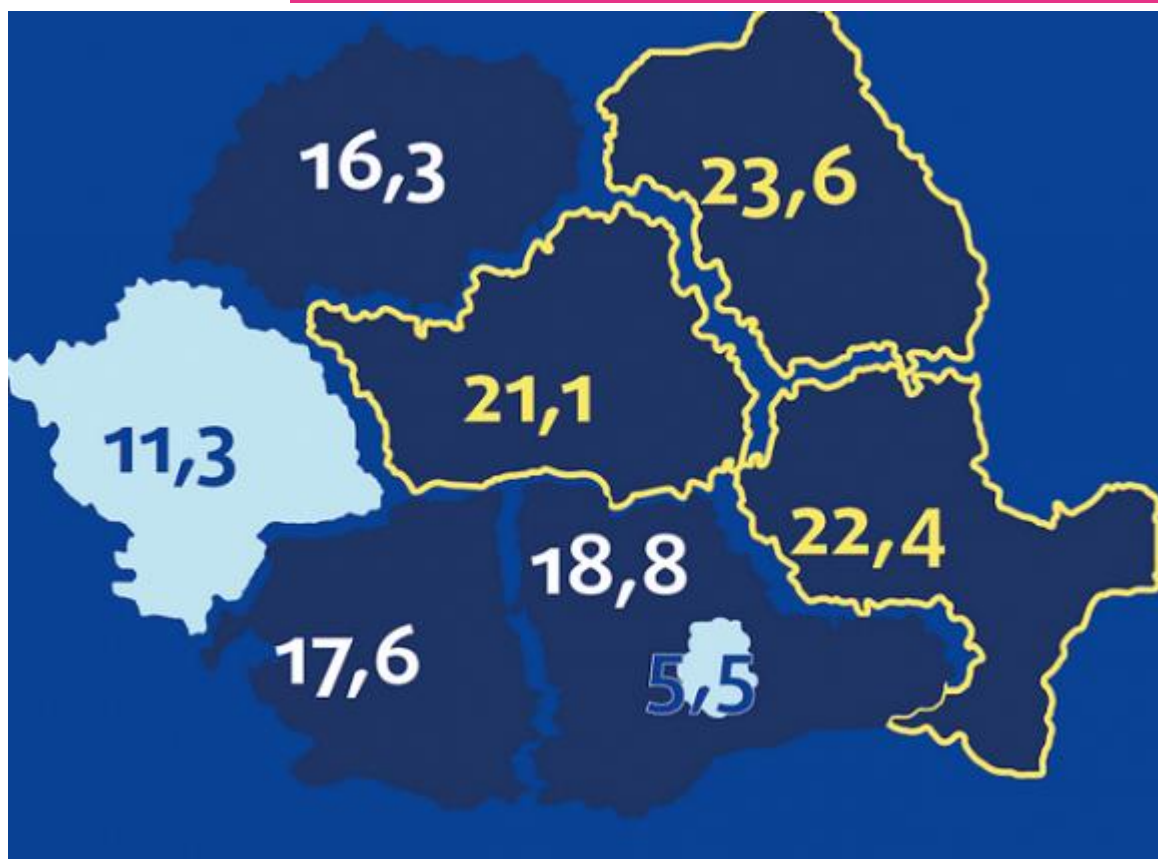


Figure 3 Share of drop-out by regions. Source of Photo: Transindex.ro

Early school leaving poses a significant challenge to Romania's education system, with numerous interconnected factors influencing this phenomenon. Understanding these factors is crucial for devising effective strategies to reduce ESL rates. This narrative delves into the diverse elements affecting both the demand for education among students and families and the supply of education within the Romanian context.

#### *Factors Influencing Students/Families Regarding the Demand for Education:*

- Low family income: Financial constraints hinder the ability of families, particularly those in poverty, to cover the collateral costs of education.
- Limited territorial accessibility: Remote rural areas face challenges in accessing educational services, contributing to increase ESL.
- Child labor and caregiving responsibilities: Involvement in seasonal work or caring for younger siblings can divert students' focus from education.
- Parental migration: The temporary withdrawal of children from school often occurs when parents migrate abroad for employment.
- Parental education level: The educational background of parents, especially mothers, plays a significant role in students' educational attainment.
- Perceived benefits of education within the family: Varied family attitudes towards the benefits of schooling influence students' commitment to education.
- Children with disabilities: Unique challenges faced by students with disabilities contribute to higher ESL rates.
- Health, early marriage, and pregnancy: Personal circumstances, such as health issues or early marriage, may lead to students leaving school.



- Poverty and parental engagement: Limited employment opportunities and low parental involvement in education contribute to ESL, particularly in rural communities.

### *Factors Influencing the Supply of Education:*

- Insufficient educational opportunities: Inadequate availability of Second Chance, and After School programs in rural and impoverished areas.
- Limited apprenticeship/practical training positions: A shortage of opportunities for apprenticeships or internships impacts students' skill development.
- Inadequate infrastructure: Lack of crèche facilities, particularly in rural areas, hinders access to early childhood education.
- Infrastructure challenges: Weak infrastructure within educational institutions affects the quality of education.
- Misalignment between education offerings and local economic needs: Educational programs may not align with the specific economic demands of local communities.
- Quality of educational processes: Behavioral issues among students and educators, outdated teaching methods, and insufficient learning resources impact the learning environment.
- Insufficient support for minority students: Students from minority groups may not receive adequate support within the education system.
- Quality of teaching and learning processes: Ineffective teaching methods and a lack of modern resources hinder students' academic success.
- School environment: Poor communication between educational levels, parents, and relevant local institutions contributes to ESL.
- Limited financial resources at the ministry level: Insufficient budget allocations hinder the implementation of targeted ESL measures.
- Lack of school counselors or psychologists: Inadequate support for students with special educational needs contributes to ESL.
- Data reliability issues: Inaccurate and untimely data impede the education sector's ability to monitor ESL trends effectively.
- Weak correlation between education offerings and labor market needs: The mismatch between available education programs and labor market requirements contributes to ESL.
- Limited financial allocation per student: Inadequate funding per student covers only basic administrative costs and teacher salaries, with little available for ESL-specific measures.

The National Program for reducing early school leaving (ESL) in Romania represents a significant and comprehensive initiative outlined by the Ministry of Education. Rooted in evidence-based practices and designed to be cost-effective and reliable, this program seeks to address the complex issue of ESL through an integrated and systemic approach at various levels of the educational system.

At the heart of this initiative is the acknowledgment of the multifaceted challenges associated with early school leaving. The program recognizes the need for a methodological framework that encompasses detection, identification, and intervention measures. It establishes an institutional architecture equipped with specialized human resources, ensuring the efficient provision of services aimed at reducing ESL.

One of the pivotal aspects of the program is its action plan, strategically devised to enhance the quality of education and improve transition rates within the educational system. The plan aims to facilitate a smooth progression from primary to secondary and lower secondary to upper secondary levels, creating favorable conditions for students to complete their compulsory education.

A distinctive feature of the program is the incorporation of an Early Warning Mechanism in Education <https://mate.edu.ro/>. This mechanism plays a crucial role in the early detection and timely intervention of signs indicating a risk of ESL. It encompasses a methodological coordination structure and an implementation unit, ensuring a holistic and proactive approach to addressing the issue.

The "Romania Educată" Project, within which this National Program is situated, underscores several priority areas, among which Inclusive Quality Education for All Children holds a significant position. This particular focus aims to broaden access to education, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and implement targeted measures such as school reintegration programs, inclusive pedagogy, and pro-equity policies.

The program targets a diverse range of educational institutions, particularly those located in rural areas and identified as having a high risk of ESL. The emphasis on inclusivity extends to the beneficiaries, encompassing over 2,500 primary and lower secondary state educational institutions. Among these institutions, the program directly impacts more than 400,000 students and approximately 45,000 teachers, equipping them with the necessary tools, including digital resources, to enhance teaching practices.

Grant programs, integrated into the fabric of the National Program, add a critical dimension to the initiative. These grants, valued in relation to the number of students and poverty indices, are envisioned to provide support through individual intervention plans tailored to the unique needs of students.

The program adopts an inclusive approach that ensures no student is left behind. It addresses vulnerable groups at risk of ESL, including those from rural and small urban areas, marginalized zones, the Roma community, students with special educational needs, those in the child protection system, and those facing various socio-economic challenges.

As Romania grapples with demographic shifts, the National Program positions itself as a proactive response to the declining population and an aging demographic. By focusing on the foundational levels of primary and lower secondary education, the program recognizes the importance of nurturing a strong educational foundation for the country's future.

### The current state of early school leaving (ESL) in Spain

As outlined by Feria-Vicero (2017), a study conducted in 2016 revealed Spain's notable distinction for having one of the highest rates of early school leaving, around 19%, nearly 9 points higher than the European average of 10.7%. Despite numerous strategies implemented since then to reduce this percentage, there remains concern regarding the challenge of reaching the European goal of 10% by 2030.

The 'Europe 2020' document emerged as a response to the unmet objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, setting more specific goals such as reducing the rate of early school leaving to below 10% and increasing the number of graduates in Europe. This underscores the priority placed on combating early school leaving, acknowledged as a critical point for the human, social, and economic development of our societies. Addressing this issue becomes essential in achieving social cohesion and equity in the educational realm, representing a crucial challenge in this regard (Sanuy et al., 2017)

Likewise, one of the Autonomous Communities or regions with the highest school dropout rates is Andalusia. That's why from the beginning, efforts have been made to implement school dropout prevention programs to reduce its percentage, which in 2002 was 37%, still significantly higher than the Spanish and European average, standing at 23% according to data collected in 2016 (Feria-Vicero, 2017)

As can be observed in the study just presented in 2016, as a whole, during the last decade Spain has shown remarkable progress in reducing ESL (13,9% in 2022). That said, it still has one of the highest ESL rates among OECD and EU countries, with significant differences between men and women.

Furthermore, while several autonomous communities have already reached the ET2020 objective of an ESL rate below 9% (the Basque Country, Cantabria and Navarra), others are still far from achieving this objective. These include six autonomous communities with ESL rates above 15%, Castilla-La Mancha, Andalusia, Valencian Community, Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, Region of Murcia, and the city of Ceuta.

High ESL is also reflected in poor educational attainment. In 2021, 28% of young adults (25-34 year-olds) in Spain had left school without an upper secondary qualification, well above the OECD average of 14% (OECD, 2022) In the same year, the percentage of young adults who had completed compulsory secondary education (lower secondary) and was still studying was 61.2%, compared to 71% in OECD countries and 74.4% in the EU (OECD, 2022).

The evidence available suggests several “pressure points” where students seem at greater risk of early school leaving. Pressure points tend to occur towards the end of lower secondary education, when students reach the age of 16, and education stops being compulsory. For example, from the students completing the (lower secondary) Basic-level VET programme in 2019, 61.8% continued into the Intermediate level VET programme and 1.2% continued into the general upper secondary education programme. More than a third of students (36%), however, did not continue their schooling. Furthermore, a 2019 survey showed that from all students that had completed lower secondary education in the school year 2013/14, 95.9% continued formal education (in general upper secondary or VET programmes). Among these students, two years later, in the 2016/17 school year, 83.4% remained in the education system (INE, 2020).

Over the years, policies have been developed to combat and reduce early school dropout rates through various national and international programs. Feira-Vicero (2017) highlights a pioneering example in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, such as the Beca 6000 scholarship, and other

programs aimed at re-engaging students who left the educational system, like the Second Chance Scholarship. Here are some of the programs implemented in Andalusia and Spain overall to ensure academic success and put an end to school dropout rates:

#### Prevention Programs:

- "Becas 6000" (6000 Scholarships): Aimed at high school and vocational training students, offering conditional financial aid to mitigate the lack of family income while the student is in the educational system. They are awarded €6000 distributed in monthly installments.
- Special Education Grants: Targeted at students with specific study support needs, contributing to educational costs to ensure their continuity in the educational system.
- Transportation Grants: Offered to students at different educational levels to ensure equal access to education through the free transportation service to public educational centers.
- "Beca Adriano" (Adriano Scholarship): Geared towards students across various educational levels to alleviate the lack of family income while not in the job market, providing a grant of €1500.

#### Reinforcement, Guidance, and Support Programs (PROA Programs):

- These programs aim to improve the basic competencies of students with specific educational support needs by offering compensatory actions. They promote the appropriate use of Spanish as the language of instruction for foreign students and complement actions to enhance academic success in public schools that serve students disadvantaged from an educational standpoint due to their cultural and social environment.

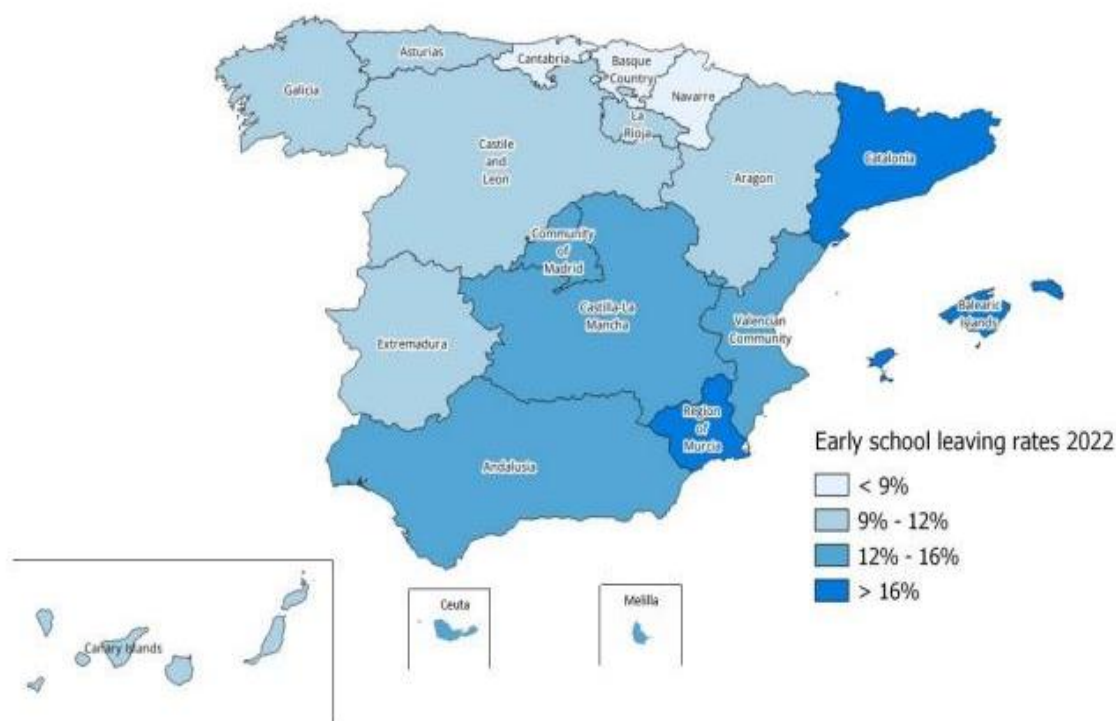


Figure 4 Early School leaving rates in Spain by autonomous communities, 2022

### *Common Strategies and interventions used to reduce ESL in Europe.*

Intervention measures in practice can take the shape of various different policy measures and practices at the national as well as the system (school or provider) and individual level. Some of the main policy measures implemented to intervene against ESL include:

- Providing individual support to students: supporting students who are low achievers, from different backgrounds, or with special needs or learning difficulties can be important in early intervention against ESL.
- Closely connected to providing special individual support is the practice of offering language support to students whose mother tongue is different from the country in which they live. Language support to migrants can reduce key obstacles to learning, as well as make migrants feel more socially included in their school community.
- Facilitating transitions between different levels of education: research shows that for some learners, the transition from for instance primary school to secondary school can be difficult. The style of teaching changes from having one teacher to having several, schools and classes can become bigger in size, the material studied more challenging, and the workloads become heavier. The transition between lower and upper secondary school involves another step into more independent learning of more challenging educational material. For some students this transition is difficult to adapt to, resulting in poorer academic performance, or feelings of loneliness or exclusion. To avoid the lack of motivation and engagement growing to point where a student leaves school early, measures can be provided aiming to provide extra support or attention to students who transit from one educational level to another.
- Specialist staff supporting teachers and students can be important to help creating inclusive and constructive school environments. Teachers are specifically trained to offer the courses they teach, and have often not received specific training in how to deal with ESL or how to notice early warning signs in this regard. Specialist staff can help teachers in how they can support students or create a good school environment.
- Identifying groups at risk of ESL: at a national or system levels, school attendance databases can be put in place to monitor attendance at schools. Some countries implement national obligations for schools to set up such registers for example. Such a measure requires complementary implementation measures concerning steps to undertake, and to explain how to intervene with those students who are absent too often and appear to be at risk of ESL. Thus, developing early warning systems for students at risk of ESL and absenteeism management go hand in hand. These two types of practices aim to monitor students and trigger warnings when a student is absent a lot of the time. In those cases, the school can then initiate steps to intervene with a student and offer support before they leave school or training early.
- Cooperation with parents: when children are absent from school, having mechanisms to help setting up support for students to ensure that their needs are being fully understood and met by the school can help to intervene early if a student is struggling and absent, and at risk of ESL.

Van der Graaf, Vroonhof, Roullis and Velli (2019)

In the concerted effort to tackle the enduring predicament of early school leaving (ESL) in Europe, policymakers and educational authorities have drawn upon a spectrum of strategies, underpinned by key frameworks such as the Lisbon Strategy and the "Education and Training 2010." These overarching initiatives have not only provided a guiding vision but have also steered the formulation and implementation of specific measures aimed at reducing ESL across the continent.



*The Lisbon Strategy*, launched in 2000, represented a pivotal milestone in the European Union's commitment to fostering a knowledge-based economy and enhancing social cohesion. Central to its objectives was the recognition of education as a cornerstone for sustainable development. By setting ambitious targets, including the reduction of ESL rates, the strategy sought to propel Europe towards becoming the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy.

As an integral component of the Lisbon Strategy, the "Education and Training 2010" framework delineated explicit goals and strategies for the enhancement of education systems within the European Union. Adopted in 2001, this framework outlined specific targets related to ESL reduction, emphasizing the pivotal role of education in facilitating economic growth, innovation, and social progress.

Within the framework of these overarching strategies, several concrete measures and interventions have been implemented across European nations:

**Quality Assurance Mechanisms:** European countries have instituted robust quality assurance mechanisms to monitor and evaluate educational outcomes. These mechanisms, aligned with the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and "Education and Training 2010," are designed to ensure the effectiveness of educational interventions in reducing ESL.

**Cross-National Collaboration:** Recognizing the transnational nature of educational challenges, European countries have engaged in collaborative initiatives. Platforms such as the European Lifelong Learning Programme and Erasmus+ facilitate the exchange of best practices, enabling nations to learn from one another's experiences and innovations in ESL reduction.

**Policy Harmonization:** The Lisbon Strategy and "Education and Training 2010" have provided a common policy framework, fostering harmonization among European countries. Shared objectives and benchmarks allow for a more coherent and synergistic approach to ESL reduction, aligning national policies with broader European goals.

**Investment in Teacher Training:** Acknowledging the pivotal role of educators in addressing ESL, European nations have invested in comprehensive teacher training programs. These initiatives aim to equip educators with the necessary skills to identify at-risk students, employ effective teaching strategies, and create inclusive learning environments.

**Promotion of Inclusive Education:** The frameworks emphasize the importance of inclusive education practices. European countries have undertaken measures to create learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students, reducing disparities and fostering a sense of belonging within the educational system.

**Flexibility in Education Pathways:** To accommodate varied learning preferences and career aspirations, European nations have introduced flexible education pathways. Vocational training, apprenticeships, and alternative learning models provide students with diverse avenues for skill development and academic engagement.

One noteworthy initiative aimed at addressing early school leaving (ESL) is the European Union's Strategic Framework for Education and Training, commonly known as "ET 2020." Launched in 2009, ET 2020 serves as a successor to the "Education and Training 2010" framework and continues to shape the educational landscape across European member states.

### *ET 2020- A Holistic Approach to Education and Training*

The ET 2020 framework revolves around a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to education and training. It extends its reach beyond traditional academic metrics to encompass broader objectives such as social inclusion, employability, and personal development. At its core, ET 2020

strives to create a cohesive, adaptable, and inclusive European education system capable of addressing contemporary challenges, including early school leaving.

Key Components of ET 2020 in Tackling ESL:

**Inclusive Education Strategies:** ET 2020 places a significant emphasis on inclusive education strategies that seek to accommodate the diverse needs of students. By fostering environments that cater to varied learning styles and abilities, the initiative aims to diminish the factors contributing to early school leaving.

**Flexible Learning Pathways:** Similar to the measures under the Lisbon Strategy and "Education and Training 2010," ET 2020 underscores the importance of flexible learning pathways. By diversifying educational routes, such as vocational training and apprenticeships, the framework provides alternatives that resonate with the aspirations and aptitudes of a broader spectrum of students.

**Digital Skills and Innovation:** Acknowledging the role of technology in shaping the educational landscape, ET 2020 prioritizes the development of digital skills and innovation. Integrating technology into education not only enhances the learning experience but also aligns with the evolving demands of the contemporary workforce, potentially reducing disengagement and dropout rates.

**Social Inclusion and Equity:** ET 2020 aims to create education systems that prioritize social inclusion and equity. By addressing socio-economic disparities and promoting equal access to quality education, the initiative endeavors to diminish the risk factors associated with early school leaving.

**Teacher Professionalization:** Much like the emphasis on teacher training in previous frameworks, ET 2020 recognizes the pivotal role of educators. The initiative supports professional development for teachers, empowering them to employ effective strategies for identifying at-risk students and fostering an environment conducive to student success.

**Evidence-Based Policy and Monitoring:** ET 2020 underscores the importance of evidence-based policy formulation and continuous monitoring of educational outcomes. By collecting and analyzing data related to ESL and other key indicators, the initiative enables informed decision-making and facilitates the refinement of strategies for ESL reduction.

**Impacts and Challenges:** As with any comprehensive initiative, the impact of ET 2020 is subject to ongoing evaluation. While it has played a crucial role in shaping the educational priorities of European Union member states, challenges persist, including the need for sustained funding, coordinated implementation, and adaptation to evolving educational landscapes.

*The Second Chance Program* is a transformative educational initiative designed to provide individuals who have experienced early school leaving or educational disruption with an opportunity to re-engage with learning and acquire essential skills. This initiative is particularly pertinent in addressing the diverse challenges that contribute to early school leaving across European countries. Several nations within the European Union have embraced Second Chance Programs as a means to empower individuals, foster social inclusion, and mitigate the long-term impacts of educational discontinuity.

Key Components of Second Chance Programs:

**Flexible Learning Pathways:** Second Chance Programs typically offer flexible learning pathways that cater to the unique needs and circumstances of individuals who have left formal education. These pathways may include part-time or modular courses, vocational training, and adult education programs.

**Holistic Support Services:** Recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals returning to education, Second Chance Programs often integrate holistic support services. These may encompass counseling, mentorship, and socio-emotional support to address not only academic gaps but also the personal and social aspects affecting learners.

**Recognition of Prior Learning:** Many Second Chance Programs acknowledge and value prior learning experiences. Recognition of prior learning allows individuals to build upon their existing knowledge and skills, facilitating a smoother reintegration into the education system.

**Tailored Curricula:** Curricula within Second Chance Programs are often tailored to align with the diverse backgrounds and learning styles of participants. This customization ensures that educational content is relevant, engaging, and conducive to the success of individuals seeking a second chance at learning.

**Focus on Key Competencies:** Instead of a rigid adherence to traditional academic subjects, Second Chance Programs often prioritize the development of key competencies such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and problem-solving. This approach equips learners with skills essential for both personal and professional success.

**Implementation Across European Countries:** Several European countries have embraced and implemented Second Chance Programs, each tailoring the initiative to suit their specific educational context and societal needs. Noteworthy examples include:

**France:** France has implemented the "Second Chance Schools" (Écoles de la Deuxième Chance), providing alternative educational pathways for young people who have left the formal education system early. These schools offer personalized support, vocational training, and guidance to facilitate reintegration.

**Italy:** Italy's "Second Chance" initiative focuses on providing education and training opportunities for early school leavers and those at risk of exclusion. This program offers a range of vocational courses and adult education options to address the diverse needs of learners.

**Spain:** Spain has established "Second Chance Schools" (Escuelas de Segunda Oportunidad), offering educational programs for young people who face difficulties in mainstream education. These schools provide a supportive environment for skill development and academic re-engagement.

**Portugal:** Portugal's "Qualifica" program focuses on adult education and training, providing a second chance for individuals who left school prematurely. It offers a variety of courses and flexible learning options to accommodate the diverse needs of participants.

**Belgium:** Belgium, particularly in the Flemish Community, has developed "Second Chance Education" programs aimed at reintegrating early school leavers into education and training. These programs often emphasize practical skills and individualized learning pathways.

**Romania:** In Romania, the Program "A doua șansă" has emerged as a crucial initiative to address the challenges associated with early school leaving and educational discontinuity. Acknowledging the diverse factors contributing to students leaving formal education prematurely, Romania has implemented tailored interventions to provide individuals with a second chance at learning and skill development.

While the specifics of Second Chance Programs vary across countries, the overarching goal remains consistent—to provide individuals with an alternative educational route, equipping them with the

skills and knowledge necessary for personal and professional success. These initiatives underscore the commitment of European nations to inclusive education and the belief that everyone deserves a second chance at learning.

### *Key findings based on their effectiveness and impact.*

The Lisbon Strategy, Education and Training 2010, and ET 2020 have shaped European efforts to address ESL. These initiatives emphasize inclusive education, flexible learning pathways, digital skills, and holistic support. Countries like France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium have implemented tailored Second Chance Programs.

Second Chance Programs are recognized as transformative initiatives across European countries, including Romania and Spain. These programs provide flexible learning pathways, holistic support services, and recognition of prior learning to empower individuals who left formal education.

**Effectiveness of Strategies:** Strategies such as early identification, individualized learning plans, alternative education pathways, parental involvement, community engagement, and inclusive education practices are identified as effective in reducing ESL. Data-driven decision-making, professional development for educators, and cross-sector collaboration are integral components.

**Key Challenges:** Challenges include the need for policy harmonization, sustained funding, coordinated implementation, and adaptation to evolving educational landscapes. The impact of interventions depends on the ability to address socio-economic determinants and create inclusive educational environments.

Thus, while there have been positive strides in addressing ESL, challenges persist. Effective strategies involve a multi-dimensional and collaborative approach, recognizing the diverse needs of students and the socio-economic factors influencing educational outcomes. The success of interventions depends on continuous evaluation, adaptation, and a commitment to creating equitable and inclusive educational systems.

### Best Practices and Case Studies:

The following good practices have been carried out in Romania.

TITLE	MAIN GOAL	TARGET GROUP	GOOD PRACTICES AND FACTORS	IMPACT (OUTCOMES/RESULTS)	WHY IS IT RELEVANT FOR KALIS?
<b>RESCUE</b> <b>Reading Early School Leaving Signals</b> <a href="https://projectrescue.eu">https://projectrescue.eu</a>	The primary objective of the RESCUE project is to establish the initial signs and warning patterns regarding the risk of early school leaving (ESL). It aims to create a comprehensive mechanism for ESL prevention and intervention at both the school and community levels.	The target group comprises students at risk of ESL, their families, teachers, and the broader community.	The best practice in the RESCUE project lies in its holistic approach to ESL prevention. Key factors contributing to its success include the development of a multidimensional risk measurement tool that covers aspects such as family background, economic conditions, community ties, and academic performance. Additionally, the project focuses on building the capacity of teachers to identify, analyze, and address ESL risks effectively. The involvement of multiple stakeholders, including schools, NGOs, and community members, ensures a collaborative and community-driven approach to ESL prevention.	The impact of the RESCUE project is evidenced by improved early identification of ESL risk factors, personalized intervention plans for at-risk students, enhanced cooperation between schools and communities, and the overall reduction of ESL rates. The project's outcomes include a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, increased community engagement in ESL prevention, and improved educational outcomes for students.	The RESCUE project is highly relevant for Knowledge and Learning in Schools (KALIS) due to its innovative and comprehensive approach to ESL prevention. By integrating a class-level risk measurement tool, teacher training, and community collaboration, the project exemplifies best practices in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The knowledge generated from the RESCUE project, including the risk measurement tool and successful intervention strategies, can contribute valuable insights to the KALIS initiative, fostering continuous learning and improvement in addressing ESL challenges in diverse educational contexts.
<b>TEACH FOR ROMANIA</b>	TEACH FOR ROMANIA, affiliated with the global Teach for All network, aims	The program targets communities in	TEACH FOR ROMANIA adopts a rigorous recruitment process to identify the most talented and	The impact of TEACH FOR ROMANIA is reflected in the improved educational outcomes	TEACH FOR ROMANIA is highly relevant for the Knowledge and Learning



<a href="https://teachforromania.org/">https://teachforromania.org/</a>	<p>to recruit and train committed individuals, both with and without prior teaching experience, to become teachers in public schools serving children from vulnerable backgrounds. The program, initially developed in 1990 by Teach for America in the United States, attracts top graduates who might not traditionally consider teaching as a career option, operating internationally in 32 countries.</p>	<p>rural and peri-urban areas with a focus on the last two grades of the schools' disadvantage index. The participants in the program, referred to as teachers, engage with students and families from these disadvantaged communities.</p>	<p>motivated individuals, emphasizing leadership potential and dedication to teaching. The program's success lies in its comprehensive training, support, and continuous counseling provided to teachers. The curriculum includes a six-week intensive Academy of Leadership and Pedagogy, equipping participants with the necessary skills to succeed as teachers and facilitate student achievement. The program also incorporates a standardized evaluation of children's competencies twice a year, offering targeted support based on the results.</p>	<p>of students in disadvantaged communities. The program contributes to the development of a positive and supportive school environment, fosters community engagement, and addresses the educational disparities faced by children from vulnerable backgrounds. The outcomes include increased teacher effectiveness, positive changes in students' academic performance, and the establishment of a network of alumni contributing to education-related initiatives.</p>	<p>in Schools (KALIS) initiative due to its innovative approach in tackling educational disparities. The program's emphasis on leadership, rigorous teacher selection, intensive training, and ongoing support aligns with KALIS's objectives of enhancing teacher effectiveness and improving educational outcomes. The standardized evaluation processes and the continuous development opportunities offered by TEACH FOR ROMANIA can contribute valuable insights to the broader KALIS initiative, promoting best practices in addressing educational challenges in Romania and beyond. The program's success in bridging gaps in disadvantaged communities makes it a noteworthy case study for knowledge dissemination and learning in the education sector.</p>
<p><b>The Good Behavior Game</b></p>	<p>The Good Behavior Game (GBG) is a classroom</p>	<p>It targets students</p>	<p>The Good Behavior Game operates on the principle of</p>	<p>The Good Behavior Game has demonstrated positive outcomes</p>	<p>The program's focus on creating a positive</p>

<a href="https://www.bluprintsprograms.org/programs/20999999/good-behavior-game/print/">https://www.bluprintsprograms.org/programs/20999999/good-behavior-game/print/</a>	<p>behavior management strategy designed to assist elementary teachers in mitigating aggressive, disruptive behavior, and other behavioral challenges among students, with a particular focus on highly aggressive children. The primary objective is to create a positive and effective learning environment conducive to academic success.</p>	<p>displaying aggressive or disruptive behavior, aiming to foster a more conducive learning atmosphere for all students. Teachers actively engage in the game as facilitators, and the entire class benefits from the positive behavioral reinforcement.</p>	<p>positive reinforcement and teamwork. Teachers divide the class into teams and establish clear behavioral expectations. The game introduces a system of rewards and consequences based on the collective behavior of the teams. Students are encouraged to exhibit positive behavior and collaboration, fostering a sense of responsibility and teamwork. The key factors contributing to the success of the GBG include the clarity of rules, consistent implementation, and the use of positive reinforcement techniques, creating a structured yet supportive classroom environment.</p>	<p>in reducing aggressive and disruptive behavior among students. Research indicates improvements in academic performance, increased prosocial behavior, and a more positive social environment within classrooms. The game's impact extends beyond individual students, positively influencing the overall classroom dynamics and creating a conducive atmosphere for effective learning.</p>	<p>learning environment and improving student behavior contributes valuable insights to KALIS's goal of enhancing the overall educational experience. The structured nature of the game, coupled with its adaptability, makes it a relevant case study for schools seeking effective strategies to address behavioral challenges and promote a positive school culture. The GBG's success in fostering collaboration and positive behavior serves as a model for knowledge dissemination and implementation within the broader education community.</p>
<p><b>Dropout Detective</b> <a href="https://aspirededu.com/dropout-detective/">https://aspirededu.com/dropout-detective/</a></p>	<p>Dropout Detective is an innovative educational tool designed to enhance student success by providing early intervention mechanisms to identify and address potential dropout risks. Developed by Aspire EduTech in the United States, its primary goal is to empower educators with insights and analytics to</p>	<p>The target group includes educators, administrators, and support staff who play pivotal roles in student retention. The tool caters to a diverse student population, aiming to</p>	<p>Dropout Detective operates as a comprehensive student success platform, leveraging data analytics and predictive modeling to identify students at risk of dropping out. The tool integrates with existing student information systems and learning management systems, providing real-time insights into academic performance, attendance, and engagement. Key factors contributing to its</p>	<p>The impact of Dropout Detective is evidenced by its ability to reduce dropout rates and enhance student success. Through timely identification of potential challenges, educators can implement targeted interventions, such as academic support, counseling, and mentoring. The tool contributes to improved student retention, academic achievement, and overall satisfaction. Additionally,</p>	<p>Its emphasis on early intervention and personalized support contributes to the overarching goal of enhancing student success and retention. As KALIS seeks to promote effective strategies for educational institutions, Dropout Detective serves as a relevant case study for the successful</p>

	support students at risk of disengagement from their academic journey.	identify early signs of academic challenges and dropout risks.	success include the use of advanced analytics, early warning systems, and user-friendly interfaces. Dropout Detective empowers educators to intervene proactively, offering personalized support to students based on their specific needs and challenges.	Dropout Detective supports data-informed decision-making for educational institutions, enabling them to refine and optimize support systems.	implementation of technology-driven solutions in the context of student engagement and achievement. The tool's impact on student outcomes underscores the importance of leveraging data analytics for proactive educational interventions.
<b>Reconstruction and Development for Developing an early warning system for the prevention of early school leaving in Romania</b>	While contributing to a reduction in the level of early school leaving in Romania, this EWM will also contribute to enhancing cohesion, competitiveness, sustainable growth and job creation in Romania. The proposed EWM addresses two gaps that have been identified in the current Romanian policy framework for preventing and reducing ESL: (i) there are no clear and mandatory procedures for collecting data on groups at risk of ESL, and (ii) there is no comprehensive intervention mechanism involving School Inspectorates and schools that would ensure coordinated implementation of ESL	While the proposed EWM addresses the school, county inspectorate, and central level, the school has been identified as the key level and focus of interventions. Given the key role of the school in the proposed EWM, but also of all other levels, this document also highlights the need for human and financial resources and training.	The proposed EWM includes a coherent methodological framework for detection/identification and intervention measures and, an institutional architecture of specialized human resources able to provide efficient services and an action plan to coordinate and implement the interventions. The proposed EWM and action plan reflect feedback received from relevant stakeholders during consultations at local, county and central levels. The EWM and the methodology for data collection will be tested in ten communities facing high ESL risks to inform further piloting exercises to be considered by the Ministry of National Education before scaling up at national level.	Both the operation and impact of EWM depend on the participation, collaboration and coordination of a wide number of actors at local, county and national levels. However, key EWM institutions do not have common methodologies and mandatory work procedures. Moreover, none of these institutions or organizations holds the leverage needed to reach an inter-institutional agreement on a common draft proposal or its actual implementation. Therefore, the first six months of EWM implementation should be focused on: (i) setting up an institutional support structure for EWM, and (ii) finalizing rules and procedures needed for effective EWM implementation. The proposed EWM includes an integrated comprehensive package of measures grouped by interventions category and phase	This best practice is very relevant for KALIS, as The proposed EWM includes a coherent methodological framework for detection/identification and intervention measures and, an institutional architecture of specialized human resources able to provide efficient services and an action plan to coordinate and implement the interventions.

	reduction measures at national level.	Importantly, based on this EWM, a national program for addressing ESL is promoted.		(identification, assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring), a toolkit containing EWM document templates and examples of activities, and an action plan to coordinate and implement the interventions.	
<b>Computer or teacher: Who predicts dropout best?</b> <a href="https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/computer-or-teacher-who-predicts-dropout-best">https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/computer-or-teacher-who-predicts-dropout-best</a>	Machine learning algorithms use data to identify at-risk students early on such that dropout can be prevented. Teachers, on the other hand, may have a perspective on a student's chance, derived from their observations and previous experience. Are such subjective perspectives of teachers indeed predictive for identifying at-risk students, and can these perspectives help increase the prediction performance of machine learning algorithms?	This study puts 9 teachers in an upper secondary vocational education program to the test. For each of the 95 freshmen students enrolled in the program, these teachers were asked whether a student would drop out by the end of their freshman year. Teachers answered this question at the beginning of the program and again after the first 10 weeks of the program.	This study was performed at an upper secondary vocational education program in the Netherlands. Teachers predicted dropout better than the machine learning algorithms at the start of the program, in particular, because they were able to identify students with a very high likelihood of dropout that could not be identified by the algorithms. However, after the first period, even though prediction accuracy increased over time for both algorithms and teachers, algorithms outperformed the teachers. A ranking, combining the teachers composite and the random forest algorithm, had better sensitivity than each separately, though not better precision. Administrative school data, responses to an expectations questionnaire, a cognitive and personality intake test, prevocational grades and GPA, vocational grades and GPA, and attendance data were input for	The study addressed predicting student dropout for targeting interventions. Whether this is of any use to students or institutions depends on whether interventions are successful, which was not studied here. Identifying struggling students as early as possible could lead to such a student being stigmatized and limited in their process of academic capital formation. This would be particularly painful because algorithms and teachers can label students wrongly as at risk. However, early targeting might also lead to students being helped before it is too late. In Dutch vocational education, there is a large safety net for students who appear to have problems during the program. Students, therefore, are already targeted for interventions. With algorithms, counsellors could have at-risk (but probably also a few potential successful) students earlier in sight and start guidance or other help earlier to help the student within the program or to	This study has shown that teachers can, with some accuracy, predict student dropout right at the start of the program and that their gut feeling can increase the accuracy of predictions using machine learning algorithms. For KALIS this perspective is highly important as it implies, that teachers' perspective has to be used while developing the ESL warning tool.

			the machine learning model. The algorithms used are described in Egdeman et al. (2022). It yielded, for every student, a likelihood of dropout given what was known about him or her at the onset of the program and after each of the four periods.	find another more suitable program.	
<b>Café Hanco</b>	This innovative project was designed to re-engage youth aged 16 to 24 who had drifted away from traditional high school education.	Targeting those who had either dropped out, were missing credits, or were unemployed.	The initial group of youths, alongside the founding team, dedicated themselves to renovating the space, turning it into a functional and inviting environment. The café's approach was holistic and multifaceted. It focused.	Café Hanco	This innovative project was designed to re-engage youth aged 16 to 24 who had drifted away from traditional high school education.
<b>Mestringskurs mot depresjon</b>	Students who have tendencies of depression are offered a mastery course against depression to improve the desire to drop out of school.	Students 16-19 years old	Over 200 pupils in upper secondary schools between the ages of 16 and 19 participated in the project. All were in their first or second year of high school. They had reported mild to moderate symptoms of depression. They also had their symptoms confirmed when they were screened before they were invited to the study. Then the group was split in two. One group received a group-based intervention over 14 weeks through the mastery course,	The group of students who participated in the mastery course had fewer signs of depression after the intervention period compared to the group that did not receive the intervention. The researchers also saw differences in the desire to drop out of school six months after completing the course. The mastery course makes young people more willing to finish school. It was proven that this method has had a good effect, both against depression and	For KALIS is obvious that depression, even in small scope is today's generation Alpha students. Knowledge about strategies for how to deal with depression and knowledge about depression as part of the school environment and how it effects students is crucial knowledge.



			<p>named depression coping for adolescents.</p> <p>The course consisted of ten sessions. The trainer emphasised the adolescents' own reflections and active participation. The idea was that young people would learn to see a connection between thought patterns and low moods.</p> <p>Through the course, the young people learned to change their own thought patterns and master their own everyday lives. The adolescents learned strategies that the researchers know work, based on previous research. The goal was to reduce and prevent symptoms, as well as prevent recurrence of depression.</p> <p>They also gained knowledge about what increases the risk of low mood and depression. They were also taught coping strategies to cope with the symptoms on their own. The course was led by a trained course leader and an auxiliary trainer.</p>	for the participants' desire to finish school.	
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<p><b>Marín et al. (2013).</b></p> <p><b>Reflection and analysis on the Initial Professional Qualification programs as a measure of social inclusion and education in Andalucía (Spain)</b></p>	<p>To make a review and analysis of the Initial Professional Qualification Programs (PCPI) in Andalusia, understanding them as an effective measure for educational, social and employment inclusion of those students who complete compulsory education without a certification.</p>	<p>Teenagers from 15 years old.</p>	<p>PCPI appears in order to avoid early school leaving, opening expectations for training and subsequent qualification and facilitate access to working life. They have a more professional vision and aspire to provide students with the basic skills that will open, in a more real and effective way, the doors to new studies such as the Vocational Training Courses.</p> <p>These were created to combat the deficiencies found in Social Guarantee Programs (PGS), due to now students could enter in this programme a year earlier, when they are 15.</p> <p>Finally, the extension to two years of the current PCPI and the professionalization of the teachers involved in this type of programs are actions that improve the educational inclusion objectives of the PGS.</p>	<p>PCPI is an effective measure to prevent the high rate of school failure recorded. This measure of attention to diversity is shown positively by reducing the gap between early abandonment of compulsory education, insertion into the labor market and post-compulsory studies.</p> <p>The climate at PCPI is very positive and the students are, in general, very motivated at the school.</p> <p>In short, PCPI have partially improved the content, scope of application and professional opportunities of the first (PGS).</p> <p>The number of students enrolled is an indication that it is a valid tool, otherwise, we would find that all these young people with special characteristics would not find an alternative, they would not have a second chance, with the consequent increase in school dropout rates and increase in cases of school conflicts and violence due to the tensions that would be caused if the educational system only offered a single path to these students.</p>	<p>This study demonstrated that, in spite of an existing measure to prevent drop out is valid, we can take into account and improve them with the challenges and gaps detected with experts.</p>
<p><b>Martín et al. (2015)</b></p>	<p>To know the effectiveness of the "Vivir la adolescencia</p>	<p>654 mothers.</p>	<p>This program consists of 20 sessions divided into 5 modules.</p>	<p>This program seems to be effective due to:</p>	<p>This programme invests other point of view due to</p>

<p><b>Parental education and parental competences to prevent early school leaving.</b></p>	<p>en familia" program in a different context, with parents whose children are at risk of early school leaving, and with different instructors, teachers. Likewise, to know how their parental skills improve and to analyze how these changes affect the improvement of their children's skills.</p>	<p>In the experimental group, we find 438 participants, the rest, 216 women, belong to the control group whose children were in risk of early school leaving.</p> <p>Mean age: 42 years old.</p> <p>At the same time, students' skills were evaluated. 538 students, 372 of them belong to the experimental group (68,8% boys).</p> <p>Mean age: 14 years old.</p>	<p>Each session lasts 90 minutes.</p> <p>Modules deal with topics related to knowledge of adolescence as an evolutionary stage, conflict in adolescence as an opportunity for learning; lifestyles in adolescence and two modules related to school continuity and parental involvement in schools. It is a program that combines the acquisition of educational skills and personal development.</p>	<p>-Mothers involved in the program developed some skills. We can highlight skills of Personal Development and Resilience and the skill of Seeking Formal Support. They've got an important impact in their children's skills. Moreover, the relationship with teachers decreases the dropout.</p> <p>-All students involved in the program developed all the measured skills. We can highlight their Personal Development and Resilience skill and cognitive skill, which directly influence the risk of dropping out.</p>	<p>the fact that the participants involved in the intervention were mothers of students in risk of dropping out. So the population to which we can intervene is varied because benefits from parents reverse in their children, they could be a protective factor if we work with them.</p>
<p><b>Rambla &amp; Fontdevila (2015).</b></p> <p><b>An opportunity to evaluate theories of change: the</b></p>	<p>Compare the proposal to prevent, intervene and compensate for early school leaving, launched by the Council and the European Commission, with the proposal to offer diversified and pre-</p>	<p>This scholarship is destined to students who, after successfully completing their stage in</p>	<p>These proposals are reviewed:</p> <p>-“Las becas 6000”.</p> <p>-Politics against ESL from “Consorti d'Educaió de Barcelona”.</p>	<p>The 6000 scholarship activates the mechanisms that affect attendance and school performance. Thus, students do not have the need to enter the world of work right after completing their studies in the compulsory stage. Furthermore,</p>	<p>Throughout the project we will have to take into account those students who do not want to participate in the program or whose families need them as resources to obtain</p>

<b>European strategy against ESL</b>	professional pathways to students with the highest risk of leaving early, adopted by the governments of Spain.	Compulsory Secondary Education, opt for continuing their studies enrolling in the first year of Baccalaureate or in an Vocational Training Course whose families have very low incomes .		the perception of poor families has improved.  There is no significant impact in the cases of bright students or the most vulnerable students.	financial means and they do nt assist to school. Perhaps if we offer some type of incentive, we will have more participants within our program and, at the same time, they may be more motivated.
<b>Tarabini et al. (2016).</b>  <b>The politics of educational success: a realist evaluation of early school leaving policies in Catalonia.</b>	The aim of the article is to examine the logics and assumptions explaining the design of the policies aimed at combating ESL in Catalonia, analysing the hypotheses about the meaning and the causes of the phenomenon and how political decisions in this field are legitimised.  The objective is to understand why and how policies in the Catalan context have been launched, what the logic for intervention has been and how it has been justified.	In each case, systematic documentary analysis has been conducted as well as in-depth interviews with educational experts and policymakers: 10 interviews with key education stakeholders.  In the case of the Catalan Department of Education, the analysis is mainly based	According to Albaigés (2008), the perspectives for improving school success are the following:  -Academic performance. -Educational equity. -Educational attachment. -Education transition. -Educational impact.	Comparative analysis of the Catalan Department of Education and the Barcelona Education Consortium in their work to support school success has demonstrated the usefulness of a realist evaluation to properly understand education policies, specifically ESL policies.  An analysis is required which is capable of escaping from widely held positivist conceptions of education policies and reforms that address them exclusively from the logic of a ‘problem-solving approach’, without asking about their origin, logic and nature.	It presents the problem of decentralization, when we sometimes adapt policies to our Community Autonomy we can obtain different results.

		<p>on the Catalan Plan for School Success encompassing all of the regional programmes to combat ESL.</p> <p>Interviews were conducted with 3 stakeholders with important responsibilities for the design and implementation of this Catalan Plan.</p> <p>In the case of the Barcelona Education Consortium, a systematic analysis of three key programmes was conducted: the 'Youth Job-Training Plan' (focused on providing guidance), 'Success</p>			
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## Updated report on the existing ESL policies and challenges from partner countries and Europe

		<p>Programme 1' (providing academic reinforcement support) and 'Success Programme 2' (curriculum diversification).</p> <p>In addition, in-depth interviews were held with the personnel responsible for all three programmes, as well as the person responsible for the Area of Secondary Education.</p> <p>In total, seven interviews were conducted in the Consortium.</p>			
<p><b>Bellés-Fortuño &amp; Garrido-Campos (2019).</b></p> <p><b>Pro educate programme:</b></p>	<p>To highlight how a specific programme, PROEDUCAR, tries to accompany secondary students, not early learners, and monitors their learning</p>	<p>A small group of Secondary Education students of the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, aged between 13</p>	<p>They attend 2 hours of supporting lessons after school every day in order to reinforce the content from different language subjects through a variety of additional support</p>	<p>- Students had a positive opinion about the PROEDUCAR programme and the activities and tasks carried out in the sessions. Hence, participants find</p>	<p>It provides a detailed list of activities carried out with students centered in an innovative methodology thanks to</p>

Effective practices to promote educational success and avoid school early leaving	process and acquisition to acquire the minimum curriculum requirements for compulsory education	and 15 years old.	activities. (Specially in English and Spanish subjects).  Textbooks are replaced by innovative techniques:  -Talking pictures activities. -Picture dice storytelling/writing activity -DIRT task	PROEDUCAR sessions beneficial as well as enjoyable.  -The most popular activity among them was Picture Dice Story telling/writing.  -Grammar Auction activity was not very useful.  -These tasks seem to be less popular than the previous activities among the students. Peer-assessment gathers a 75% of positive and no negative answers, whereas DIRT task is seen by some as not useful for their learning process.	which the programme was successful.
Ruiz-Mosquera & Palma-García (2019).  Prevention of Early School Leaving contributions from Social Work.	To know the influence of the intervention on ESL .	6 students from Secondary Education whose ages were between 15 and 17 years old.	Development of different interventions, designed according to the individual characteristics, family situation and school and social development of each subject.  -Individualized intervention project. -Individualized educational guidance project. -Referral to social services and design of a family support intervention plan. -Emotional intelligence workshop at the school. -Social skills workshop.	When faced with ESL, there are reasons internal or external to the subject, and even though the final decision may correspond to each student, the intervention of the environment (family, professionals from the educative center and other protection systems) will be decisive on it, as shown the results.  Firstly, to prevent school dropouts, it is essential that the Psychosocial Intervention Team carries out individualized monitoring of students from their beginning in compulsory secondary education, knowing their previous school career. Only	It highlights the importance of having a social worker in the school as the key of the intervention.

				<p>in this way is it possible to anticipate and detect in time indicators related to the process that leads to ESL (school absenteeism, grades, psychosocial circumstances, etc.).</p> <p>Complete abandonment of school occurs after a process of progressive “disengagement” in which opportunities for intervention always appear.</p>	
<p><b>No-Gutiérrez et al. (2020).</b></p> <p><b>Peer tutoring in Intercultural Education Environments projects INTO &amp; E-EVALINTO.</b></p>	<p>To promote the peer tutoring technique in a context of intercultural education, to help immigrant students improve their academic results, their integration into the host society and reduce their levels of early school leaving, absenteeism, grade repetition, among others aspects.</p>	<p>Immigrant teenagers living in Spain.</p> <p>Mean age: not informed.</p>	<p>Although the project is international, each country adopts its generalities to its specific characteristics. This article presents the case of Spain with the University of Salamanca.</p> <p>An intervention plan is carried out from intercultural education contexts trying to promote peer tutoring with the main objective of helping the immigrant group to improve both, their academic results and their integration in general.</p> <p>Here, competencies and interaction skills are promoted between the tutor and the apprentice pairs and with the professionals involved (communication skills, interaction, among others). In</p>	<p>Tutors involved, in both projects, indicated their preference for a longer duration of the pilot program to be able to help the students more. They also pointed out that this program helped them to further base their knowledge and skills, while at the same time, to better understand the feelings and emotions of the student-learners.</p> <p>In Spain, its “radius of action” was expanded to any student at risk. The student-apprentices, in the INTO Project, showed their satisfaction with the program and their interest in continuing it in subsequent courses. They also indicated that they felt more understood by their classmates thanks to the intervention of the tutors and that they were more interested in continuing their</p>	<p>The study is part of an Erasmus+ program, but they adapt the research to Spain, so it could be a guide to follow by us.</p>

			<p>addition, during the training courses various activities are worked on (role-playing, watching videos, debates, work in pairs and small groups, among others).</p> <p>It is a cross-age programme in which tutors are older than students, and it seems to be an effective practice.</p>	<p>studies. Regarding the E-EVALINTO Project, at the time of writing this article no results were found on the development of the pilot program application.</p>	
<p><b>Olmos &amp; Gairín (2021)</b></p> <p><b>Understanding and intervening in the personal challenges and social relationships risk categories to early leaving</b></p>	<p>To contribute to the development of initiatives addressed to early leaving through orientation and tutorial action – as key points of intervention by schools, colleges, and training providers.</p>	<p>A total of 711 educational agents participated – 80 members of school leadership and administration teams, 237 teachers/instructors and 394 students – from 48 educational institutions at the compulsory secondary and post-secondary educational level from 5 countries: Spain, Portugal, Romania, Germany and the United Kingdom</p>	<p>The program is called <b>Orienta4YEL</b>. Strategies to prevent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Individual planning or Personalized Plans.</li> <li>-Blended media mentoring.</li> <li>-Bridge building motivation activities to learn/personal development activities to engage young people in learning.</li> <li>-Peer to peer learning and support.</li> <li>-Family support and school-family engagement.</li> <li>-Support for young people's learning outside the formal curriculum.</li> <li>-Curriculum guidance.</li> <li>-Responsive services or responsive crisis resolution services for young people.</li> <li>-Teacher training: didactic strategies and practices for educational success.</li> </ul>	<p>This article gives us a basis for creating an effective intervention program with scientific validity.</p>	<p>It highlights the importance to work with all components of the educational system workers, not only with teachers in isolation.</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Support with mid-term and end of key-stage educational transitions.</li> <li>-Promoting quality inclusive learning environments and alternative learning arrangements.</li> <li>-Support in building and navigating healthy peer relationships.</li> </ul>		
<b>Puerta &amp; Guerrero (2021)</b>  <b>Could gamification be a protective factor regarding early school leaving? A life story.</b>	To find out how the use of game-based teaching techniques affects the well-being of students at risk of Early School Leaving.	A boy (Hércules)- who was chosen as part of a wider investigation about school-to-work transitions in which his contact with gamification prior to dropping out was targeted	Gamification.	As would be seen below, the life story of Hercules shows us that gamification as a technique can have a positive effect on the well-being of adolescents at risk of leaving school early and could act as a protective factor against the decision to leave.	This article develops and evaluates a learning game to improve the drop out of a single boy.
<b>Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2021).</b>  <b>Identifying factors and inspiring practices for preventing early school leaving in diverse Spain: teachers' perspectives.</b>	To contribute to the discussion about how teachers construct the causes of ESL as part of a wider, international dimension of the study of teachers beliefs to inform inclusive practices.	15 interviews with teachers (5 form Primary, 5 from Secondary and other 5 from Baccalaureate) and 3 focus groups.  Conditions:	Interviews with teachers to understand how teachers conceptualize the causes of failure and the best-perceived practices to prevent ESL. During the interviews, teachers also were asked to talk about their views regarding best practices to prevent/reduce ESL.  Teachers first mentioned practices related to improving	Many teachers attribute ESL to two major explanatory factors: students' traits and family deficits, whereas the institutional causes of a school culture, which are associated to the school structure, attitudes, and behavior remained unmentioned. Furthermore, the teachers associated students at risk of abandonment largely with	In addition to knowing the vision of the teachers who are at the center of the educational system to which the students must be hooked, it highlights the importance of prevention or intervention programs being carried out by professionals other than the teachers themselves,

		<p>1) Teachers working in schools with more than 20% of ESL, 2) teaching experience for at least three years, and 3) the representativeness of the three educational levels-Primary, Compulsory Education and Baccalaureate-had 170 to be represented in the overall sample of the three schools.</p>	<p>academic outcomes and the need to bridge the gap. To this end, in theory, they defended inclusive practices, whilst in practical terms one teacher proposed having special classrooms for 'special students' for the good for all and categorized this situation as 'problematic', not only for themselves but also for the success of all the students.</p> <p>To a great extent, the students that the teachers were thinking of when asked about teaching practices were immigrants or ethnic minorities. Likewise, measures for fostering relationship-based interventions were oftentimes considered.</p> <p>As can be seen above, there were representations of students as 355 'better or worse students' depending on their behaviour. Such categorisation can lead students to fail to connect to the school, creating further problems and resulting in poor academic performance. Unfortunately, this teacher suggested that the methodologies were appropriate and that, therefore, it was the student who was failing and therefore the teachers' ideas</p>	<p>difficulties and viewed students' personality traits as 'problematic'.</p> <p>Oftentimes they mentioned that many of these students had a migrant background and 'lack Spanish' or that they had a gypsy background. The study showed that teachers' image of the 'at-risk student' was closely linked to their origin.</p> <p>Teachers' identification of these students with 'problems or learning difficulties' tended to intersect with their implicit understanding of their ethnicity.</p> <p>Baccalaureate teachers in Spain were rarely confronted with the negative impact of at-risk students, who they assumed were not in their schools at all, 265 but at different levels of schooling.</p> <p>Most of the interviewed teachers associated failure at school with family, background, environments, or other factors outside their responsibility and influence.</p>	<p>but rather people who are experts in the field so that they are effective.</p>
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			<p>about successful students 360 seemed related to how fast students adjusted to the school. The assumption was that students 'decide' to quit their schooling.</p> <p>Again, while talking about practices, interviewees tend to easily displace the practices into specialist teachers or other professionals (counsellors, social work, 380 language therapists, etc.).</p>		
<p><b>Social-emotional skills in students from grades 1-12. Mentorship Program</b></p>	<p>Helping students understand and manage their emotions, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.</p>	<p>Students from grades 1 through 12, which likely means children and adolescents aged approximately 6 to 18 years.</p>	<p>Various elements that the program implies are important for the development of social-emotional skills. This includes the role of mentorship, the structured process for setting and achieving targets, and the focus on identifying and applying students' strengths in life.</p>	<p>It empowers students by improving their social-emotional competencies, which can lead to better academic performance, improved relationships, and better mental health. Additionally, it boosts the self-esteem and confidence of students. Students are expected to be able to set targets, define steps for achievement, and analyze results with the guidance of their mentors. They should be able to apply their strengths effectively in various aspects of life, be it in school or in personal situations.</p>	<p>The KALIS project aims to create inclusive environments and address barriers that lead to students dropping out, which aligns with social-emotional skills development programs. These programs often target similar barriers related to engagement and motivation, which are critical for emotional and social well-being. By integrating ESL strategies, the KALIS project complements the objectives of social-emotional programs by ensuring students not only develop necessary life skills but also remain engaged in their</p>

					educational journey, reducing the risk of early school leaving.
<b>"Help me thrive" Platform</b>	It offers additional support resources throughout Bulgaria, especially during a pandemic. It is a free online resource to assist teachers, parents, and professionals in applying ESL activities.	Teachers, parents, and professionals who are involved in the educational and developmental processes of children and adolescents.	The platform is designed to bridge gaps in support that may have been exacerbated by the pandemic, ensuring that the educational and developmental needs of children and adolescents are met. It aims to offer resources that help educators and parents in enriching the learning environment for students, even in the face of disruptions like a pandemic.	It enables teachers, parents, and professionals to have free access to a wide array of support resources. This should facilitate better educational outcomes, provide guidance for parents, and offer professional development tools for educators and other professionals. It's a resource designed to help stakeholders adapt to challenging circumstances and ensure that children's growth and education continue uninterrupted.	The platform could integrate KALIS project's tools and strategies to expand its resource base, thereby aiding teachers, parents, and professionals in monitoring and supporting at-risk students more effectively.
<b>"School Makes Sense" Program</b>	The program focuses on making school subjects more relevant to students' lives and has managed to engage 70% of participating children more motivated to learn. The program's goal is to bridge the gap between academic learning and real-life applications, making education more relevant and meaningful for students.	The primary beneficiaries of this program are students in the two Bulgarian schools from the countryside where the program has been implemented.	There is a need for educational content to be more directly linked to practical applications in real life. This relevance is believed to be crucial in fostering student engagement and motivation. The results for the target group are quite positive. About 70% of participating children have become more effectively engaged with their education.	It includes a significant increase in learning motivation among children and a decrease in unauthorized absences. This suggests that when students find the curriculum relevant to their lives, they are more likely to be engaged and attend school.	This program addresses the relevance of school subjects to real-life applications, which can increase student engagement and reduce absences. The KALIS project's focus on preventing early school leaving through engagement and personalized strategies can enrich the "School Makes Sense" program by providing additional resources and methodologies. This can help in identifying students who are disengaged due to the

					curriculum's perceived lack of relevance, thus preventing early school leaving.
<p>Career Entry Support (Berufseinstiegsbegleitung)</p> <p><a href="https://www.bildungsketten.de/bildungsketten/de/schule/individuelle-begleitung/individuelle-begleitung.html">https://www.bildungsketten.de/bildungsketten/de/schule/individuelle-begleitung/individuelle-begleitung.html</a></p>	<p>This initiative provides individualized guidance and support for students at risk transitioning from school to work.</p>	<p>High risk students, drop outs, special needs students</p>	<p>Support services for young people begin during their school years, including individual guidance. Career entry guides support students continuously and individually from pre-graduation classes through to vocational training. They particularly help students achieve their school diploma and make a direct transition into training.</p> <p>Career entry guides personally mentor young people, analyze their strengths and weaknesses, and increase motivation. From the results of the potential analysis, they derive support plans to individually guide the youth through each stage of the career choice process. If needed, they organize additional support services.</p>	<p>This initiative is an official program provided by the Federal Employment Agency (§49, Social Code, Book III), co-financed by third parties. After years of trial and federal co-financing, several federal states now co-finance and offer the program in their schools. Over 100.000 students have participated with success in this initiative.</p>	<p>The concept of potential analysis and individual support plan could be a crucial part in tackling early school leaving for high risk students. As in Kalis this initiative focuses on the individual strengths and weaknesses of students at risk of dropping out and gives them personalized guidance and a reliable support plan towards a successful professional future.</p>
<p>Productive Learning (School project in Saxony Anhalt)</p>	<p>The "Productive Learning" project gives pupils who fall through the "school system" a second chance to graduate. Practice and school are combined here.</p>	<p>Drop out students, at risk students facing mobbing, problems at</p>	<p>The focus of the project is on the real world. School assignments are based on the type of business.</p>	<p>Around 80 percent of all pupils in the project in the 2021/22 school year completed their secondary school certificate, which was a result of the project "Productive Learning".</p>	<p>It is a good example of combining practice and theory for high risk students by giving them a second chance to graduate.</p>

<a href="https://mb.sachs-en-anhalt.de/themen/schule-und-unterricht/produktives-lernen">https://mb.sachs-en-anhalt.de/themen/schule-und-unterricht/produktives-lernen</a>		home or at school	Students are working around 3 days a week in a company and 2 days they have normal lessons at school.		
Every school day counts (Jeder Schultag zählt)  <a href="https://www.pit.sachsen.de/schulabsentismus-praeventiv-begegnen-das-hamburger-modellprojekt-jeder-schultag-zaehlt-5484.html">https://www.pit.sachsen.de/schulabsentismus-praeventiv-begegnen-das-hamburger-modellprojekt-jeder-schultag-zaehlt-5484.html</a>	This project was conducted at 4 schools in Hamburg between 2019 until 2022 had the aim to develop effective and practical strategies against school failure and thus demonstrably reduce truancy and school dropout as well as other manifestations of school failure. The project was an initiative of two foundations, a university and an official entity.	Drop out students, ESL students, NEETS students	A practical hand book of 137 pages was created with several modules for prevention and intervention for teachers. The most important results were 1. Strategic expansion of attendance and participation promotion, 2. Implementation of the handout/guideline for  Dealing with violations of compulsory school attendance, 3. Data based action in schools, 4. Promoting monitoring at schools, 5. Strengthening cooperations, 6. Optimize personal conditions, 7. Promotion of diagnostic procedures and funding programs	The project developed many practical for each of the seven modules, like a “check list of warning signals” or “behavior contracts”. They can be found under the following link: <a href="https://www.heimspiel.org/materialien-jeder-schultag-zaehlt">https://www.heimspiel.org/materialien-jeder-schultag-zaehlt</a>	Many results of this initiative are valuable for KALIS as well. There are a lot of good examples like the behavior check list, buddy concepts or the warning signals check list that could be useful for KALIS as well.
Come on Tour – Join In (Komm auf Tour – Mach mit)  <a href="https://komm-auf-tour.de/projekt/">https://komm-auf-tour.de/projekt/</a>	This program targets primary school students to foster self-confidence, motivation, and social skills. It includes workshops, team-building exercises, and interactive activities aimed at	Primary school students, 7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> graders	The objective of this best practice is to provide experiential and action-oriented impulses to support early, gender-sensitive career orientation and life planning for youth.	The activities usually help students to discover their strengths, to offer guidance for internships, to introduce realizable career opportunities or to integrate age-appropriate personal life topics. Also it includes events for parents,	Promoting individual strengths and preferences from an early stage seems like a good way to prevent early school leaving. This project gives an example of early prevention even

<a href="#">projektbeschreibung- ung- staerkeansatz/</a>	empowering students to actively engage in their educational journey. Schools partner with youth organizations to implement this initiative.			teachers, the public, and businesses.  This best practice is developed by the Federal Center for Health Education (BZgA) and the Federal Employment Agency and co-developed and implemented nationwide by Sinus – Büro für Kommunikation GmbH (cf. komm-auf-tour.de).	though our target group in KALIS are students about to drop out.
School without Racism – School with Courage (Schule ohne Rassismus – Schule mit Courage)  <a href="https://www.schule-ohne-rassismus.org">https://www.schule-ohne-rassismus.org</a>	This initiative promotes a school culture of tolerance, diversity, and inclusion. Students participate in workshops, events, and projects to address discrimination, bullying, and social exclusion. Schools collaborate with NGOs, local authorities, and educational experts to create a supportive and respectful environment.	All students facing discrimination, bullying and other disruptive behaviour	The "School without Racism – School with Courage" program was initiated in 1995 by Aktion Courage e. V. in Germany to encourage children and youth to participate in society. The first award was given on June 21, 1995, and from 1995 to 2000, the program was mainly active in North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony. In 2000, Sanem Kleff took over the project leadership, moved the office to Berlin, and expanded the project to combat all forms of discrimination based on Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.  The program provides a framework for children and youth to engage in socio-political participation and human rights education and has received	As of April 2018, around 2,600 schools with over 1.5 million students were part of the network, making it the largest school network in Germany.	As students with migration background have a three times higher risk to fail at school than non-migrants, it should not be underestimated to teach young people a culture of tolerance and diversity, especially in immigration countries like Germany. For KALIS it might be important pay attention to such risk factors as migration background, nationality, minority, etc.

			several awards, including "Ambassador of Tolerance."		
<p>Class 2000 (Klasse 2000)</p> <p><a href="https://www.klasse2000.de/">https://www.klasse2000.de/</a></p>	<p>This health education program focuses on primary school students, teaching them about healthy living, social skills, and self-esteem. It involves interactive lessons, activities, and materials to empower students to make informed choices. Schools work in partnership with health educators and organizations to implement this program.</p>	<p>Primary school students</p>	<p>Klasse2000 is the largest nationwide program in Germany for health promotion, violence prevention, and addiction prevention for elementary school-aged children. It accompanies children from grades 1 to 4 and promotes important health and life skills. The program is offered in elementary and special needs schools, as all children can be reached here regardless of their social background.</p>	<p>The studies show numerous positive effects in primary school and adolescence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a more favorable development of nutritional and physical activity behavior at primary school age,</li> <li>• less smoking and alcohol consumption in 4th and 7th grade,</li> <li>• less consumption of hashish and marijuana in the 9th grade.</li> <li>•</li> </ul> <p>When the program is fully implemented, many other positive effects can be seen, e.g. on quality of life, self-esteem, health behavior and classroom climate.</p>	<p>This program is also offered by many special needs schools in Germany. Like in the above mentioned program "Come on Tour – Join In" the early stage approach is crucial when it comes to prevention of ESL.</p>
<p>Student Companies (Schülerfirmen)</p> <p><a href="https://unternehmergeist-macht-schule.de">https://unternehmergeist-macht-schule.de</a></p>	<p>Schools support the establishment of student-run businesses within the educational setting. This initiative provides students with practical entrepreneurial experiences, fostering teamwork, creativity, and business skills. Schools</p>	<p>Students in all school forms</p>	<p>Student companies (or student enterprises or junior companies) are not real business enterprises that are actually subject to market laws. Rather, they are practice companies within the framework of school projects. There is no uniform concept for such student companies. However, all practiced</p>	<p>Promoting entrepreneurial thinking and action at school is important, both for the pupils' lives and from an economic point of view.</p> <p>The then Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) therefore commissioned Kienbaum Consultants</p>	<p>It might be helpful to promote similar ideas of student school companies in the KALIS framework to foster entrepreneurial thinking which in return leads to more vocational orientation and prevents ESL.</p>



## Updated report on the existing ESL policies and challenges from partner countries and Europe

	collaborate with local businesses and mentors to guide and support these student ventures.		approaches share the common feature that students plan, produce, and sell products and/or offer services. While they are modeled after corporate forms such as GmbH (limited liability company) or AG (public limited company), they only deal with small amounts of capital, sales, and profits	International GmbH to conduct a study on "Entrepreneurship in schools - current trends and developments, sustainability of projects, transparency and success indicators".	
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### *Challenges and Gaps:*

Challenges and barriers faced in ESL reduction efforts.

Reducing Early School Leaving (ESL) in Europe is a complex endeavor marked by multifaceted challenges rooted in socioeconomic, cultural, and systemic factors. This academic narrative explores the prominent challenges and barriers faced in the concerted efforts to mitigate ESL across European nations.

Gairín, J. y Olmos, P. (2022) highlight that the primary barriers influencing efforts to reduce school dropout are primarily family support and social/environmental factors affecting students. It's evident from numerous studies that there's a higher incidence of dropout in families facing economic challenges or dealing with structural issues.

Additionally, Sanuy et al. (2017) add that language difficulties among students and lack of familiarity with our educational system, both by students and their families, become determining factors in countering school dropout. Another obstacle, as per their findings, is the lack of parental involvement in their children's education. Sometimes, parents don't know how to track progress or don't follow educational protocols correctly. Conversely, overprotectiveness could also be a hindrance.

Among individual student factors, the main barriers to keeping students within the educational system are primarily lack of interest and motivation, often stemming from family conditions. Furthermore, inadequate training or late enrollment of many students contributes to this issue (Sanuy et al., 2017).

Within the school and the educational system itself, barriers and challenges exist. For instance, the constant changes in educational legislation force schools to adapt their structures, sometimes sidelining previously established practices with students. This occurs alongside high student-to-teacher ratios that prevent individualized attention and a lack of resources to address all the demands (Sanuy et al., 2017).

#### a. Socioeconomic Disparities:

**Poverty and Social Inequality:** The persistent challenge of socioeconomic disparities continues to cast a long shadow over ESL reduction initiatives. Students hailing from economically disadvantaged backgrounds encounter formidable obstacles, including limited access to educational resources, financial constraints, and a dearth of extracurricular opportunities. These factors collectively contribute to an environment conducive to ESL.

**Rural vs. Urban Disparities:** Geographical discrepancies exacerbate the issue, with rural areas facing distinct challenges. The scarcity of educational resources, coupled with a lack of diverse job prospects, renders rural environments more susceptible to elevated dropout rates compared to their urban counterparts.

#### b. Cultural and Linguistic Diversity:

**Language Barriers:** Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity poses a formidable barrier, particularly for immigrant students and those belonging to linguistic minority groups. The inability to comprehend the language of instruction emerges as a critical impediment, fostering academic struggles and disengagement.

Cultural Sensitivity: The inadequacy of educational systems to address the rich tapestry of cultural diversity within classrooms further compounds the challenge. Insufficient cultural sensitivity may contribute to feelings of alienation and exclusion among students.

### 3. Educational System Challenges:

Inflexible Educational Systems: Rigidity within educational systems presents a considerable challenge. The inability to adapt to evolving student needs and employ innovative teaching methodologies may fail to cater to diverse learning styles, thereby fostering an environment conducive to ESL.

The aim to reduce ESL in Europe is an intricate journey fraught with challenges emanating from socioeconomic inequalities, cultural diversity, and systemic rigidity. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach, encompassing policy reforms, targeted interventions, and a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of ESL across diverse European contexts.

#### *Gaps in the existing literature where further research is needed.*

The existing literature on Early School Leaving (ESL) in Europe provides valuable insights into the myriad factors influencing dropout rates, intervention strategies, and the socio-cultural dynamics at play. However, within this extensive body of research, certain notable gaps emerge, underscoring areas where further investigation is warranted.

While numerous studies explore individual factors contributing to ESL, there is a discernible gap in the literature concerning the intersectionality of these factors. Research often examines socioeconomic status, linguistic background, or academic performance in isolation. A more comprehensive understanding requires investigations that delve into the complex interplay and cumulative impact of multiple factors. For instance, how do socioeconomic disparities intersect with cultural and linguistic challenges, and how do these intersections influence dropout patterns?

The effectiveness of ESL intervention programs is a recurrent theme in the literature, yet there is a dearth of longitudinal **studies that track the sustained impact of these interventions over time**. Long-term assessments are crucial for discerning whether interventions yield enduring benefits or if there are potential relapse patterns in students who initially benefited from targeted programs. A comprehensive understanding of the temporal dynamics of intervention success is integral to designing sustainable strategies.

The literature predominantly reflects an external perspective, often **overlooking the voices and experiences of students themselves**. A critical gap exists in understanding the subjective narratives of students who navigate the precipice of leaving school early. Exploring their lived experiences, aspirations, and the contextual nuances that influence their decisions provides a more nuanced comprehension of the psychosocial dimensions surrounding ESL.

While ESL is recognized as a pervasive issue across Europe, there is a limited focus on comparative analyses between different regions. Each European nation boasts a unique socio-cultural context, and understanding regional variations is essential. Research should delve into the **specific challenges and effective strategies** that emerge in diverse educational landscapes, acknowledging the contextual nuances that shape ESL experiences.

The contemporary educational landscape is increasingly shaped by technology and digital learning platforms. However, the literature on ESL has not comprehensively explored the role of technology in preventing dropout rates. **Investigating the efficacy of digital tools, online learning platforms, and e-mentoring programs in engaging students at risk of ESL** could offer innovative insights into tailored intervention strategies.

Addressing these gaps in the existing literature is pivotal for advancing our understanding of ESL in Europe. Future research endeavors should prioritize a holistic and multifaceted approach, embracing diverse perspectives, longitudinal analyses, and nuanced examinations of regional variations to inform comprehensive strategies for ESL reduction.

After an exhaustive literature review, we identified two research lines that require further exploration. Firstly, the absence, on the part of educational administrations, of an organized and systematized post-tracking system for students who complete the PCPI (Initial Vocational Qualification Programs). This absence hinders understanding the actual scope of this instrument through objective data, impeding the implementation of improvements and corrections. Secondly, the lack of a teacher evaluation system to determine the specific profile demanded by these students. The way teachers work and properly address the situation can lead to either success or failure for this student demographic (Marín et al., 2014).

### *Cross-Country Comparisons:*

The examination of strategies and interventions aimed at reducing early school leaving (ESL) across partner countries underscores the multifaceted nature of addressing this complex issue.

**Common strategies** deployed in various educational contexts include individualized student support, transition facilitation, establishment of early warning systems, and fostering inclusive educational environments.

Individualized student support stands out as a cornerstone strategy implemented across partner countries. This approach recognizes the diverse needs and challenges faced by students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with specific learning difficulties. For instance, countries like Spain have implemented programs such as the "Becas 6000" scholarships, aimed at providing financial aid to high school and vocational training students from low-income families. Similarly, Romania's "Second Chance" initiative offers tailored education and training opportunities for early school leavers, ensuring that each student receives personalized support to address their unique needs and circumstances.

Transition facilitation emerges as another critical strategy in mitigating ESL, particularly during pivotal educational transitions such as the move from primary to secondary school. Partner countries have implemented measures to ease the transition process and provide additional support to students during these critical periods.

Establishing early warning systems represents a proactive approach to identifying students at risk of ESL and intervening promptly. Nations like Romania have implemented comprehensive early warning mechanisms in education, encompassing methodological coordination structures and specialized units for intervention. By monitoring key indicators such as attendance, academic performance, and behavioral patterns, these systems enable schools to detect warning signs early and implement targeted interventions to support at-risk students before they disengage from education.

Furthermore, fostering inclusive educational environments is integral to reducing ESL and promoting equitable access to education for all students. Countries such as Spain and Portugal have implemented policies and programs to promote social inclusion and address socio-economic disparities within the education system. Initiatives like Spain's "Beca Adriano" scholarships and Portugal's "Qualifica" program aim to alleviate financial barriers to education and provide opportunities for marginalized students to re-engage with learning and skill development.

**Contrasting findings and practices** across partner countries in their efforts to reduce early school leaving (ESL) reveals variations in approaches, policy frameworks, and implementation strategies. While common strategies such as individualized student support and transition facilitation are prevalent, differences emerge in the specific initiatives adopted and their effectiveness across different educational contexts.

One notable point of contrast lies in the diversity of policy frameworks and interventions implemented to address ESL. For example, Spain has pioneered initiatives like the "Becas 6000" scholarships and "Second Chance Schools," aimed at providing financial assistance and alternative learning pathways for at-risk students. In contrast, Romania's "Second Chance" initiative focuses on adult education and vocational training, catering to the unique needs of early school leavers and individuals seeking to re-engage with learning later in life.

Additionally, variations in the effectiveness and reach of early warning systems highlight disparities in data collection, monitoring, and intervention mechanisms across partner countries. While Romania has established comprehensive early warning mechanisms in education, other nations may face challenges in data reliability and timely intervention due to resource constraints or institutional barriers. This discrepancy underscores the importance of investing in robust data infrastructure and capacity-building initiatives to support effective ESL reduction strategies.

Furthermore, differences in the emphasis on inclusive education practices and social inclusion initiatives contribute to varying outcomes in ESL reduction efforts. Countries like Spain and Portugal prioritize policies and programs aimed at addressing socio-economic disparities and promoting equal access to education for marginalized students. In contrast, other nations may lag behind in implementing comprehensive inclusive education strategies, resulting in persistent gaps in educational attainment and higher rates of ESL among disadvantaged populations.

Moreover, the level of cross-national collaboration and knowledge exchange varies among partner countries, influencing the adoption and adaptation of best practices in ESL reduction. While some nations actively participate in European initiatives like the Lifelong Learning Programme and Erasmus+, others may rely more heavily on domestic policy frameworks and resources. This divergence in collaborative efforts can impact the transferability and scalability of successful interventions, hindering progress in addressing ESL on a broader scale.

Thus, while partner countries share common goals and challenges in reducing ESL, differences in policy frameworks, implementation strategies, and collaboration mechanisms contribute to variations in outcomes and effectiveness. By acknowledging these contrasts and fostering greater exchange of knowledge and best practices, nations can enhance their capacity to address the complex issue of early school leaving and promote inclusive and equitable education systems for all students.

### *Methodological Limitations:*

The cultural dimension plays a significant role in shaping educational experiences, yet the literature often offers limited exploration of cultural nuances. Studies that neglect the cultural context may fail to capture the unique challenges and facilitators that influence ESL within specific cultural and ethnic groups. Future research should strive for a more culturally sensitive approach, considering the diverse landscapes across European nations.

In relation to the limitations found in the studies examined throughout the present project we will mention the following: In some studies, the sample size is small, from a single boy selected for the study to six adolescents and, for this reason, distancing ourselves from the intention of making generalizable claims (Ruiz-Mosquera & Palma-García, 2019; Puerta & Guerrero, 2021). However, other studies center their sample into specific populations, such as teenagers at risk, families with few resources, immigrants, so it is difficult to know if we apply the same practices to students without these characteristics will be successful or not (Rambla & Fontdevila, 2015; Bellés-Fortuño & Garrido-Campos, 2019; Ruiz-Mosquera & Palma-García, 2019; No-Gutiérrez et al., 2020).

Martín et al., (2015) highlighted the lack of information about other independent variables which could influence the results of the studies, they found improvements in their participants but they did not know if the success of the intervention was linked only with the programme. For future studies, it would be a good idea to control the majority of variables if it is possible to know the real effect of these practices.

On the other hand, researches emphasize the importance of counting on specialized workers inside the school who carry out the programmes, at the same time, they must be included as extended practice around all the school to guarantee the same opportunities to all students (Ruiz-Mosquera & Palma-García, 2019; No-Gutiérrez et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2021). At the same time, the decentralization that we find when putting interventions into practice in each autonomous community means that there is no consensus on practices nor can a real comparison be made (Tarabini et al., 2016).

Furthermore, no article mentions that, after the intervention had been effective, it would be performed with the control groups or other students from the center involved in the intervention for ethical reasons.

To finish with this point, we would like to mention that it has been difficult to find prevention or intervention programmes related to Early School Leaving, so we find a lack of information related to this topic in our country, only the 40% of good practices have been carried out from 2020, the other 60% were developed from 2010 to 2020.

### *Summary and Conclusions:*

All good practices articles reviewed achieved their objectives in spite of some limitations mentioned before, so it gives us the energy to continue our project related to the same topic, reducing the early school leaving of students.

We highlight the importance of carrying out the programme inside the school context, either during school lessons or out of them, in which all stakeholders must be involved and motivated to be effective for the participants. (Ricoy & Feliz, 2002; Marín et al., 2013).

We think that in addition to working with students, it is very important to work with teachers since many times they do not feel guilty about their own students dropping out of school (Rodríguez-Izquierdo,



(2021). They must count on a toolkit with a lot of resources to leave aside textbooks and focusing the sessions on activities whose methodology is interactive, it is a point in favor for the intervention to be effective (Bellés-Fortuño & Garrido-Campos, 2019). Nevertheless, it is true that teachers have a huge amount of work inside and outside the school, and they do not have enough time to prepare innovative materials for pupils. For this reason, in addition to bear in mind those studies that point out the importance of including other professionals within the school such as social workers so that they focus their work on this type of interventions are not far from reality, we consider that it would be very important to teachers feel the support of the government or through a toolkit with creative materials divided into courses and subjects which they can apply during their lessons, or maybe publishers can provide teachers this needed material instead of textbooks to engage students in the school system.

Even so, taking into account the objective of our Erasmus+ project, it would be a good idea to create a game for increasing the engagement to the educative system to all students, not only for those who are at risk and, at the same time, we would be helping teachers to develop their class in a attractive way.

Knowing some of the good practices and gaps found during their applications in our countries, gives us a base to be able to create a programme that can be effective for our sample with similar characteristics.

### *Recommendations for Further Research or actions:*

Based on the identified gaps, we propose areas where further research or action are needed.

Few studies have been found that, once finished and proven their effectiveness, transcend or are spread in order to be implemented in a different sample.

We propose the implementation of these programs to be carried out with all students and not only with those at potential risk of dropping out.

There is a lack of a monitoring system in the medium/long term for the beneficiaries of these programs that allows us to know the real scope of the programs in order to implement corrections and improvements in them.

We cannot continue to support every student throughout Europe if the structural factors that may be a prime cause of ESL, for example, are ignored. This points to future research which can identify the weighting that we might give the various factors/levels in the model. The question then is how to study the interactions between the different elements in the model. It would clearly need to be undertaken in a series of highly focused case studies across countries, comparative contexts since the argument is that context is likely to be crucial. Reflecting and continuing research on this matter represents a significant advance in a field such as this.

Strengthening the bond between family and school can indeed be crucial in reducing school dropout rates. Feeling like they are part of the educational community and participating in it daily, knowing that their input matters, helps create a bond of trust with the school. Working together enhances the chances of academic success, as it fosters a collaborative environment that benefits both students and educators.

It would be interesting to know how to support and to accompany new students when they arrive at the new school during a few months afterwards in order to promote their engagement properly.

### *Data Collection within the Case Study Method:*

This section includes information about the research model, selection of the study group, data collection tools, and data collection.

#### Model of the Research

Within the scope of this study, the case study design, which is a design belonging to the qualitative research method, was used. A case study is a design that can be used to conduct an in-depth study by considering one or more situations and the factors affecting the situation together (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). In this study, this research design was chosen to determine the effectiveness of various educational practices and interventions aimed at reducing school dropout rates. By focusing on multiple educational institutions across different countries, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to successful dropout prevention strategies.

According to Yin (2014), case study research is a comprehensive method that involves a detailed and systematic examination of a single case or multiple cases within a real-world context. “This method allows researchers to explore complex phenomena within their contexts, using multiple sources of evidence to ensure a thorough understanding of the subject matter (Hollweck, 2016)”.

#### Working Group

The working group for this study consisted of 31 teachers, inspectors, educational experts and headmasters from five different countries: Romania, Bulgaria, Norway, Spain, and Germany. These participants were selected based on their involvement in educational practices and interventions aimed at reducing school dropout rates. The diversity of the group in terms of geographical location and type of educational institution provided a broad perspective on the issue.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Characteristics

Participant ID	Country	Region/Province	Type of Educational Institution	Area
1	Romania	Gorj, Targu Jiu	Secondary School	Urban
2	Romania	Gorj	Secondary School	Urban
3	Romania	SV Oltenia	Directorate of School Education	Urban
4	Romania	Gorj	Vocational/Technological High School	Urban
5	Romania	Gorj	Secondary School	Suburban
6	Romania	Targu Jiu	Secondary School	Urban
7	Bulgaria	Sofia	High School	City
8	Bulgaria	Blagoevgrad	Early Stage	Rural

## Updated report on the existing ESL policies and challenges from partner countries and Europe

9	Bulgaria	Sofia	High School	City
10	Bulgaria	Sofia	Other	City
11	Bulgaria	Blagoevgrad	High School	City
12	Bulgaria	Blagoevgrad	Other	Rural
13	Bulgaria	Blagoevgrad	Early Stage	Rural
14	Bulgaria	Sofia	Early Stage	City
15	Bulgaria	Targovishte	Early Stage	City
16	Bulgaria	Plovdiv	High School	City
17	Bulgaria	Blagoevgrad	Other	Rural
18	Bulgaria	Sofia	High School	City
19	Norway	Østfold	Upper Primary School	Urban
20	Norway	Trøndelag	Upper Primary School	Urban
21	Norway	Trøndelag	Vocational School	Rural
22	Norway	Oslo	Secondary School	Urban
23	Norway	Trøndelag	Vocational School	Rural
24	Spain	Málaga	Secondary School	City
25	Spain	Spain	Secondary School	Urban
26	Spain	La Rioja	Primary School	Rural
27	Spain	Málaga	Secondary School	Urban
28	Spain	Madrid	Secondary School	Urban
29	Germany	Brandenburg	Secondary School	Rural
30	Germany	Brandenburg	Secondary School	Rural
31	Germany	Brandenburg	Secondary School	Rural

### Data Collection Tools

The primary data collection tool used in this study was a comprehensive survey. The survey was designed to gather detailed information on best practices, implementation details, main stakeholders, results and impact, and specific focuses such as teacher training, online tools, and educational games. The survey included various sections to capture a wide range of insights:

- **Description of Best Practices:** Participants were asked to describe the best practices implemented in their institutions to reduce school dropout rates.
- **Implementation Details:** This section focused on how these practices were implemented, including the resources and stakeholders involved.
- **Results and Impact:** Participants provided information on the outcomes of these practices, including any measurable benefits and challenges faced.
- **Specific Focus Areas:** Questions were included to gather insights on specific areas such as teacher training, the use of online tools, and educational games.
- **Additional Information:** An open-ended section allowed participants to share any other relevant information or comments.

### Reliability of the survey and the questionnaire

The survey was then administered in a standardized manner to all participants, ensuring that they received the same instructions and conditions for completing the survey.

The questionnaire used in this study was designed to gather detailed information on various aspects of educational practices and interventions. To ensure its reliability, the questionnaire was carefully designed to include clear, concise, and unambiguous questions. Each question was reviewed by experts in the field to ensure that it accurately captured the intended information. The content validity of the questionnaire was established by consulting with subject matter experts and reviewing relevant literature, ensuring that the questionnaire covered all necessary aspects of the research topic and was comprehensive in scope.

### Data Collection Process

Clear instructions were provided to ensure that all participants understood the purpose of the survey and the importance of their responses. The survey was distributed electronically, allowing participants to complete it at their convenience within a specified timeframe.

Data collection was conducted through the administration of the survey to the 31 participants.

To better illustrate the distribution of respondents by country, the following pie chart is provided:

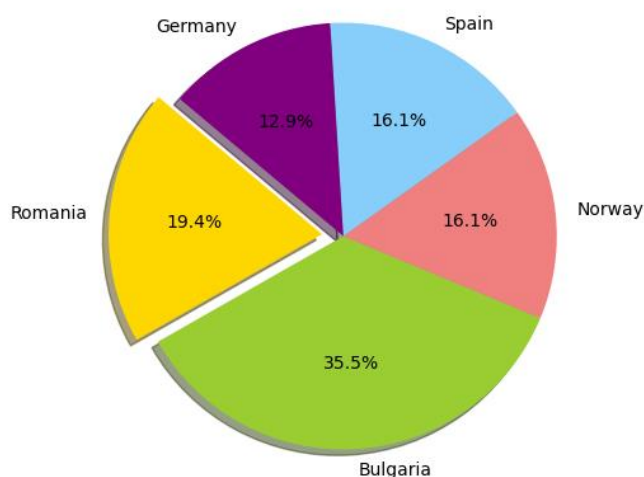


Figure 5 Pie chart with respondents by country

The survey responses were collected and analyzed to identify common themes and patterns in the data.

The collected survey responses were then compiled and analyzed to identify common themes and patterns. This analysis focused on understanding the effectiveness of different educational practices and interventions, the challenges faced by educators, and the impact of these practices on reducing school dropout rates. The analysis also included an examination of the specific focus areas, such as teacher training, the use of online tools, and educational games.

#### Analysis of data

Content analysis, a widely preferred method in qualitative research, was employed to analyze the collected data. The primary objective of using content analysis is to identify themes that make the subject more concrete and understandable through systematic coding, and to uncover meaningful relationships between these themes (Krippendorff, 2018). This method allows researchers to interpret the data by categorizing and summarizing the content, thereby revealing the underlying meanings related to the research problem.

To conduct the content analysis, the following steps were undertaken:

- **Data Organization:** The initial step involved organizing the survey responses into a coherent dataset. This included categorizing the data based on the different sections of the survey, such as best practices, implementation details, results and impact, and specific focus areas.
- **Coding:** The next step was to code the data. Coding involves assigning labels or codes to different segments of the data that represent specific themes or concepts. This process was carried out manually, with each response being carefully reviewed and relevant codes assigned. The coding process facilitated the identification of recurring themes and patterns across the responses.
- **Theme Extraction:** After coding, the codes were grouped into broader themes that encapsulated the essence of the data. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes related to the effectiveness of educational practices, the challenges faced by educators, and the impact of these practices on reducing school dropout rates. This step was crucial in making the data more concrete and understandable.
- **Interpretation:** The final step in the content analysis was interpreting the themes and patterns identified. This involved making sense of the data by understanding the relationships between different themes and drawing conclusions based on the findings. The interpretation process was guided by the research questions and objectives of the study, ensuring that the analysis remained focused on addressing the research problem.

#### Findings

The analysis of the survey responses provided a comprehensive understanding of the various educational practices and interventions aimed at reducing school dropout rates. The findings are categorized into several key themes, each representing a significant aspect of the efforts undertaken by the participating institutions.

#### Best Practices

The survey revealed a range of best practices implemented by the institutions to address the issue of school dropout. These practices were diverse and tailored to the specific needs of the students and the community.



Figure 6 Educational Strategies Identified as Best practices

The analysis of responses revealed that while there are common themes such as parental involvement, counseling, and academic support, each country also implements unique strategies tailored to their specific educational needs. Romania and Bulgaria emphasize remedial and vocational training, Norway focuses on reducing bureaucracy and providing holistic support, Spain prioritizes individualized tutoring and motivational activities, and Germany integrates early vocational orientation and professional support.

In this section we examined the educational strategies employed by schools from Romania, Bulgaria, Norway, Spain, and Germany, identifying common practices and unique approaches. The aim is to later provide a framework for other countries to adopt and adapt these strategies to enhance their educational systems.

### Parental Involvement

In Romanian schools, parental engagement is facilitated through lectures and school counseling, which aim to involve parents actively in their children's education. Similarly, Bulgarian schools emphasize the interaction between students, parents, and teachers, promoting effective communication to foster a supportive educational environment. Norwegian schools take a holistic approach, fostering good relations among pupils, teachers, parents, and school leaders, thereby creating a cohesive community focused on student well-being. In Spanish schools, parental involvement is increased through greater contact and engagement, ensuring that parents are integral to the educational process. German schools also involve parents in various school activities, recognizing their role in supporting student success. These practices



highlight the importance of parental involvement in creating a supportive and effective educational environment.

### Counseling and Academic Support

In Romanian schools, counseling and academic support are provided through school counseling and remedial activities to support students academically and emotionally. Bulgarian schools offer counseling for at-risk students and informal conversations to prevent dropout, ensuring that students receive the support they need to stay in school. Norwegian schools implement systematic student follow-up and behavior monitoring, providing a structured approach to student support. Spanish schools provide individualized tutoring and support programs for vulnerable students, addressing their specific needs and helping them succeed academically. German schools integrate job counseling and professional support from social workers and psychologists, offering comprehensive support to students as they prepare for their future careers. These strategies demonstrate the importance of providing targeted support to address the diverse needs of students.

### Remedial and Academic Support

In Romanian schools, remedial and academic support are provided through remedial activities in specific disciplines, such as Romanian and mathematics, and the introduction of remedial hours to provide additional support. Bulgarian schools provide general and additional support, including vocational training, to help students succeed academically and prepare for their future careers. Norwegian schools adapt tasks and everyday life to individual student needs, ensuring that each student receives the support they need to succeed. Spanish schools enhance student motivation through methodological principles, creating an engaging and supportive learning environment. German schools emphasize early vocational orientation, helping students develop the skills they need for their future careers. These strategies highlight the importance of providing targeted academic support to help students succeed.

### Teacher Training and Development

In Romanian schools, teacher training and development are facilitated through training courses in workshops, coaching, and digital competences, providing teachers with the tools they need to succeed. Bulgarian schools encourage joint efforts among stakeholders, fostering a collaborative approach to teacher development. Norwegian schools ensure that teachers have access to expertise from various occupational groups, providing comprehensive support to educators. While Spanish and German schools do not explicitly mention teacher training and development, the practices in Romanian, Bulgarian, and Norwegian schools highlight the importance of providing continuous professional development for teachers.

### Student Engagement and Extracurricular Activities

In Romanian schools, student engagement and extracurricular activities are promoted through extracurricular activities and excursions, providing students with opportunities to explore their interests and develop new skills. Bulgarian schools involve students in activities of interest and extracurricular initiatives, creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. Norwegian schools focus on motivation, well-being, and coping with life, ensuring that students receive the support they need to succeed. Spanish schools offer motivated activities, thematic contests, and peer sponsorship, creating an engaging and supportive learning environment. German schools provide a variety of extracurricular

activities to maintain student interest, ensuring that students remain engaged and motivated. These strategies highlight the importance of providing diverse opportunities for student engagement.

### Special Programs and Projects

In Romanian schools, special programs and projects are implemented through initiatives like “Second chance” Educated, Erasmus+ VET, and “After School and Hot Meal,” providing targeted support to disadvantaged students. While Bulgarian, Norwegian, and German schools do not explicitly mention special programs and projects, Spanish schools create school gardens and thematic contests, providing students with unique opportunities to explore their interests and develop new skills. These strategies highlight the importance of providing targeted support to address the unique needs of students.

These diverse approaches highlight the importance of context-specific strategies in addressing educational challenges and promoting student engagement and success. The key lies in understanding local needs, engaging stakeholders, and continuously evaluating and refining the implemented strategies.

### Implementation Details

The implementation of these best practices varied across institutions from different European countries, reflecting diverse strategies tailored to local needs and resources.

Romanian schools emphasize securing financing through various channels such as the PNRR, European funds, and external sponsorships. The management team and administrative departments played crucial roles, supported by contractual personnel for training activities. Partnerships with organizations providing teaching materials aimed to reduce school dropout rates. Additionally, funds allocated by municipalities covered program costs, with teachers and educators volunteering for after-school activities. Essential resources included books, supplies, computers, and modern teaching methods.

Bulgarian schools focused on resource teachers and offices, with initiatives involving multiple countries. The implementation relied on materials and funding from schools and external sources. Strict sanctions for non-compliant parents ensured participation. Contracts with municipal companies provided vocational training materials, and a well-equipped base supports educational activities. Trained staff and comprehensive financing were pivotal for successful implementation.

Norwegian schools adhere to the Education Act section 13-10, ensuring sufficient resources to meet legal requirements. Despite challenges in resource availability, some students benefit from small group settings. Strengthening resources for contact teachers and aligning them with necessary work was crucial. The socio-economic gains of successful implementation are significant, though everyday time constraints pose challenges.

Spanish schools integrated modern teaching methods such as gamification and the use of technology in classrooms. The programs included regulations for educational therapeutic classrooms and support for families. Material resources addressed students’ basic needs, including food, housing, and school supplies. Collaboration with local companies aided in restoring facilities, and careful planning of time and space is essential.

German schools highlighted the importance of professional staff and solid funding as foundational elements. Besides financial resources, supportive parents and motivated students were crucial for successful implementation. The combination of good funding, resources, and trained staff ensured a robust educational framework.

### Stakeholders

The analysis of the main stakeholders involved in the educational programs aimed at reducing dropout among students from schools in Romania, Bulgaria, Norway, Spain, and Germany reveals both similarities and differences in the composition and roles of these stakeholders.

Across all countries, teachers, students, and parents were consistently mentioned as key stakeholders, highlighting their central role in the educational process. However, the structure and additional stakeholders vary:

Romanian and Bulgarian schools show a more hierarchical and structured approach with multiple administrative layers and external partners.

Schools from Norway emphasized inclusivity and community involvement, with a focus on small-group and personalized instruction.

Spanish schools highlighted the role of specialized governmental and administrative bodies in addition to the core educational stakeholders.

Schools from Germany balanced a structured approach with the involvement of external professionals and a strong emphasis on the role of parents and teachers.

### Results and Impact

The analysis of the results and impact of educational initiatives across schools from Romania, Bulgaria, Norway, Spain, and Germany revealed a range of outcomes and challenges, reflecting the diverse educational landscapes and socio-economic contexts of these countries.

In Romania, the focus has been on improving school attendance among students at risk of dropping out and increasing the rate of success in national assessments. Initiatives have led to a 25% increase in attendance and a reduction in school dropout rates, in some schools. Programs like “After School and Hot Meal” have had significant benefits, including higher grades, improved health, and better performance in national exams. However, challenges such as parents’ awareness, disorganized families, children in foster care, and poverty remain obstacles. The lack of funding has also led to the discontinuation of beneficial programs.

In Bulgaria, the results show a mixed impact. While there is a lack of free time for teachers and parents, initiatives have seen great participation and increased interest in school, especially among students of Roma origin. Efforts to make more children literate and ensure regular attendance have been noted. However, there are still challenges, particularly with the Roma community, where drastic measures are needed to influence parents. The overall impact includes minimal absences and a sense of purpose in staying in school.

Norway’s educational initiatives have led to positive outcomes for both individuals and society. There are fewer dropouts, and students experience better everyday school life with predictable routines and a sense

of well-being and security. Although the exact impact is not always measurable, there is a strong belief that these initiatives have averted dropouts and improved mastery in everyday life.

In Spain, the results are varied. In some cases, there has been a reduction in the rate of school failure and dropout, but obstacles related to the social environment of students persist. Positive results have been observed, although families from disadvantaged contexts did not always respond favorably. Initiatives have led to improved relationships within educational centers and more continuous attendance in lower grades, though the impact in higher grades is still limited.

Germany has seen positive impacts from educational initiatives, with students feeling more supported and interested in school. The presence of a tight network of support around students, including parents and extracurricular activities, has led to increased engagement and better grades. The importance of a comfortable and supportive classroom setting is emphasized, as it directly correlates with student success.

Across these countries, common themes include the importance of support networks, parental involvement, and structured programs to improve attendance and reduce dropout rates. However, each country faces unique challenges:

- Romania struggles with socio-economic issues and the sustainability of beneficial programs due to funding constraints.
- Bulgaria faces cultural challenges, particularly with the Roma community, requiring targeted measures.
- Norway benefits from a highly inclusive and supportive educational environment, though the exact impact is sometimes hard to quantify.
- Spain deals with social disparities that affect the success of educational initiatives.
- Germany emphasizes the role of a supportive environment and extracurricular activities in student engagement and success.

### Specific Focus Areas

The survey also gathered insights on specific focus areas, such as teacher training, the use of online tools, and educational games:

#### Teacher Training

In Romania, the emphasis on teacher training is multifaceted, reflecting the diverse needs of the educational system. Teachers have identified workshop courses, digital skills, and coaching courses as crucial areas for their professional development. These workshop courses are designed to provide hands-on training, enabling teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills through practical experience. The focus on digital skills is particularly significant, as many teachers have expressed a lack of familiarity with online tools. This gap in digital literacy is a critical issue that needs to be addressed to ensure that teachers can effectively integrate modern teaching technologies into their classrooms.

Moreover, there is a recognized need for the exchange of good practices, particularly regarding the implementation of practical training courses at economic agencies. This exchange aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, preparing students for the labor market. However, the responses also reveal a mixed perception of the necessity of training, with some teachers indicating that it is not necessary or applicable. This divergence in views highlights the need for a more

tailored approach to professional development, one that considers the varying levels of experience and expertise among teachers.

In Bulgaria, the focus areas for teacher training are shaped by several challenges, particularly those related to parental involvement. Teachers have reported a lack of interest and cooperation from parents, which poses a significant obstacle to the educational process. Additionally, issues with minority parents and resistance from families further complicate the situation. Despite these challenges, there is a concerted effort to use interactive methods and involve parents as partners in the educational journey. Training programs that emphasize these interactive methods aim to make learning more engaging and effective for students.

Motivating students is another critical focus area for teacher training in Bulgaria. Teachers are seeking strategies to inspire and encourage students to participate actively in their education. This focus on motivation is essential for fostering a positive learning environment and improving student outcomes. However, the high cost of training and resistance from families remain significant barriers that need to be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of these initiatives.

In Norway, the approach to teacher training is comprehensive and inclusive, reflecting the country's commitment to high-quality education. Teachers have identified the need for relevant teaching on all important topics encountered in everyday life, with a particular emphasis on adapted training and special pedagogical competence. This specialized training is crucial for addressing the diverse needs of students and ensuring that teachers are equipped with the skills necessary to provide inclusive education.

Systematic student follow-up is another key area highlighted by Norwegian teachers. There is a call for this practice to be included in teacher education, ensuring that teachers are trained to monitor and support students' progress effectively. Additionally, training on recognizing signs and signals of changes in students' everyday lives is seen as vital for early intervention and support. The need for more knowledge on how to individualize instruction for large groups of students further underscores the importance of tailored teaching approaches in Norway's educational system.

In Spain, the responses suggest that teacher training is influenced by external factors and parental involvement. Teachers have reported challenges related to the lack of interest from parents, which affects the success of educational initiatives. Additionally, external conditions such as drought have impacted teacher collaboration, highlighting the need for adaptive strategies in teacher training.

While specific focus areas for teacher training are not explicitly mentioned, the responses indicate that engaging parents and addressing external conditions are critical for improving educational outcomes. Training programs that equip teachers with strategies to involve parents and adapt to changing conditions are essential for fostering a supportive and effective learning environment.

In Germany, the focus on teacher training is centered on addressing the challenges faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers have identified the need for strategies to support students from families with a migratory background and financial instability. These students often face significant barriers to education, and teacher training programs must equip educators with the skills to provide targeted support.

Engaging students and preventing them from feeling left alone is another critical focus area. Teachers have emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment to foster

student engagement and motivation. Addressing the lack of interest in school from students for various reasons is also seen as essential for improving educational outcomes. Training programs that focus on these areas are crucial for ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Across these five countries, several common themes emerge in teacher training. The need for digital skills and familiarity with online tools is highlighted in Romania, reflecting the growing importance of technology in education. Parental involvement is a recurring theme in Bulgaria and Spain, indicating that teacher training should include strategies for engaging parents and addressing external challenges. Specialized training, as emphasized in Norway, underscores the importance of equipping teachers with the skills to address diverse student needs. Finally, the focus on student engagement in Germany highlights the need for training programs that foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

This analysis underscores the diverse priorities and challenges in teacher training across different countries, reflecting the unique educational contexts and needs of each region. By addressing these specific focus areas while designing the **KALIS teacher training programs**, we can better equip educators to meet the demands of modern education and improve student outcomes.

### Online Tools

Across the five countries, several common themes and challenges emerged regarding the use of online tools in education:

Both Romanian and Spanish respondents highlighted a need for increased awareness and training on the effective use of online tools. Teachers in these countries recognize the potential benefits, but lack the necessary support and resources to implement them effectively.

Responses from Bulgarian teachers indicate a lack of developed materials and resources to support the use of online tools. This suggests a need for investment in digital content facilitate their integration.

Norwegian teachers' cautious approach underscores the importance of using technology as a complement to traditional methods rather than a replacement. This balanced perspective can guide the thoughtful integration of online tools.

Germany's focus on broader educational challenges such as social media distractions and language barriers highlights the need for any technological integration to be aligned with addressing these issues.

### Educational Games

Romanian respondents generally indicated that educational games are not widely integrated into their educational practices. However, there is an acknowledgment of their potential benefits, with one respondent noting that learning through play has been and will remain an effective method of capturing students' attention. This suggests an understanding of the value of educational games in engaging students and enhancing their learning experiences. The overall sentiment points to a need for greater awareness and structured implementation of educational games to maximize their potential benefits.

Bulgarian respondents presented a more varied perspective on educational games. While some indicated that educational games are not widely used, others mentioned specific tools and platforms such as Kahoot, YouTube, and live worksheets. Interactive games and role-playing games were also highlighted, showing



an interest in using engaging methods to enhance learning. These suggest that while the overall adoption of educational games may be limited, there is a foundation upon which to build more widespread use.

Norwegian respondents reflected a cautious but thoughtful approach to the use of educational games. There is an emphasis on using familiar situations and recognizable contexts to benefit students. This suggests that while there may not be a formal emphasis on educational games, there is an understanding of the value of relatable and engaging learning experiences. The cautious approach indicates a need for careful consideration of how educational games can be integrated into the curriculum in a way that complements traditional teaching methods.

Spanish respondents highlighted a gap in training and implementation of educational games. Teachers reported not receiving adequate training on this topic, which is seen as necessary for its effective use. Despite this, there are instances where teachers have taken the initiative to train themselves by reading books, consulting websites, and collaborating with the guidance team. This self-directed learning indicates a recognition of the potential benefits of educational games, but also a need for more structured and formal training programs. The responses suggest that while educational games are not widely implemented, there is an interest in exploring their use to improve educational outcomes.

German respondents suggested a limited but growing interest in educational games. Teachers mentioned using quiz tools to keep students interested, although there is uncertainty about how these tools prevent dropout. This indicates a recognition of the engaging nature of educational games but also a need for more evidence on their effectiveness in addressing broader educational challenges. The responses imply that while educational games are being used to some extent, there is a need for more research and structured implementation to fully realize their potential benefits.

The analysis of the use of educational games across Romania, Bulgaria, Norway, Spain, and Germany reveals a diverse landscape of adoption and perceived importance. While some countries show limited integration of educational games, others highlight specific tools and platforms that support gamified learning. The responses indicate a recognition of the potential benefits of educational games in engaging students and enhancing their learning experiences.

Given these insights, it is evident that there is a significant need for developing an educational game specifically designed to help reduce dropout rates. Such a game should be tailored to address the unique challenges and needs identified in each country, providing engaging and interactive learning experiences that can capture students' attention and motivate them to stay in school. This development would not only enhance teaching and learning outcomes but also contribute to reducing dropout rates, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and effective educational landscape.

### Additional Insights

The survey responses provide valuable insights into the efforts and challenges faced by different countries in reducing early school leaving. These insights highlight the importance of community involvement, teacher training, and innovative educational methods.

Romanian respondents emphasize the significant challenge posed by the Roma ethnic community's general reticence towards education. School dropout rates are particularly high among female students from this community, starting from the age of 12. To address this issue, it is crucial to attract and engage parents from the community, raising their awareness about the importance of education. The "Second

Chance” education program, which is predominantly applied to the Roma community, could work synergistically with the national program to reduce school dropouts if these initiatives intersected. This approach suggests that parents should complete their obligatory studies to set a positive example and prevent abandonment among students. Additionally, the lack of school mediators is noted as a barrier to effectively forming target groups. Respondents also highlight that teamwork and modern methods are essential to making school more attractive.

Bulgarian respondents provide several insights into reducing early school leaving. Increasing students’ motivation for learning and success is seen as a key factor. Children are noted to love learning through play, and interactive learning methods that make students feel part of the lessons, rather than passive recipients, have a positive effect on their motivation and behavior. Training teachers to work confidently with students at risk of dropping out is also emphasized. When students are interested and engaged, they are less likely to be absent. Educational games are highlighted as a new and interesting tool that helps retain and reach students, raising awareness and engaging their attention. Additionally, new forms of training or dual education at a younger age might be beneficial.

Norwegian respondents stress the importance of understanding and addressing neurodivergent needs in schools. Many students may struggle due to sensory sensitivities, anxiety, or difficulties at home. It is essential to see the whole person and adapt the educational environment to prevent exacerbating these issues. Providing mastery experiences at school is crucial for student engagement and success. Teachers emphasize the importance of individual knowledge of the students.

Spanish respondents highlight the need for motivating activities and greater contact with families to reduce early school leaving. Engaging families and creating a supportive environment for students are seen as critical factors in keeping students in school.

German respondents note that the reduction of dropouts has been primarily achieved through strong human support, with learning games playing a minor role. Individual talks set up in informal settings outside of school are seen as helpful in allowing students to focus on themselves, as individual matters can sometimes get lost in the classroom. Keeping students engaged is crucial to reducing dropout rates, which in turn helps prevent extremism, addiction, or abnormal behavior.

The insights gathered from the survey responses underscore the importance of a multifaceted approach to reducing early school leaving. Engaging parents and communities, providing targeted teacher training, and using innovative educational methods such as interactive learning and educational games are essential strategies. Additionally, understanding and addressing the individual needs of students, particularly those with neurodivergent conditions, is crucial for creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

### Conclusions

The findings from the KALIS Best Practice Report on Early School Leaving (ESL) underscore the critical need for a coordinated and collaborative approach among partners from European countries to effectively address the issue of early school leaving. The diverse strategies and insights gathered from schools in Romania, Bulgaria, Norway, Spain, and Germany highlight the importance of shared learning and joint efforts in developing comprehensive solutions.

A key recommendation is the establishment of a platform for the regular exchange of best practices and successful interventions. This platform would facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences, enabling countries to learn from each other and adopt proven strategies.

Integrated teacher training programs are also essential. By developing joint training initiatives that focus on digital skills, interactive teaching methods, and strategies for engaging parents and communities, countries can enhance the professional development of educators. Facilitating the exchange of knowledge and expertise of educational experts across borders would further foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement, enriching the educational landscape. Promoting inclusive and supportive educational environments is essential for catering to the diverse needs of students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. By fostering strong community and parental engagement, schools can create a supportive environment where all students feel valued and supported. This approach would help reduce dropout rates and contribute to the overall goal of fostering equitable and high-quality education for all students.

The development and implementation of an educational game tailored to the unique challenges and needs of students in different countries is another crucial recommendation. Such initiatives would provide engaging and interactive learning experiences that capture students' attention and motivate them to stay in school.

Implementing and standardizing early warning systems across countries is another key recommendation. These systems would identify and support students at risk of dropping out, ensuring timely and effective interventions. Robust data collection and analysis would underpin these systems, enabling schools to monitor students' progress and address issues before they lead to early school leaving.

In conclusion, by adopting a joint approach, European countries can leverage their collective strengths and resources to create a more inclusive and effective educational landscape. This collaborative effort will not only help reduce early school leaving but also contribute to the broader objective of fostering equitable and high-quality education for all students. Through enhanced collaboration, integrated teacher training, and the development of innovative educational tools, European countries can address the complex issue of early school leaving in a holistic way and ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

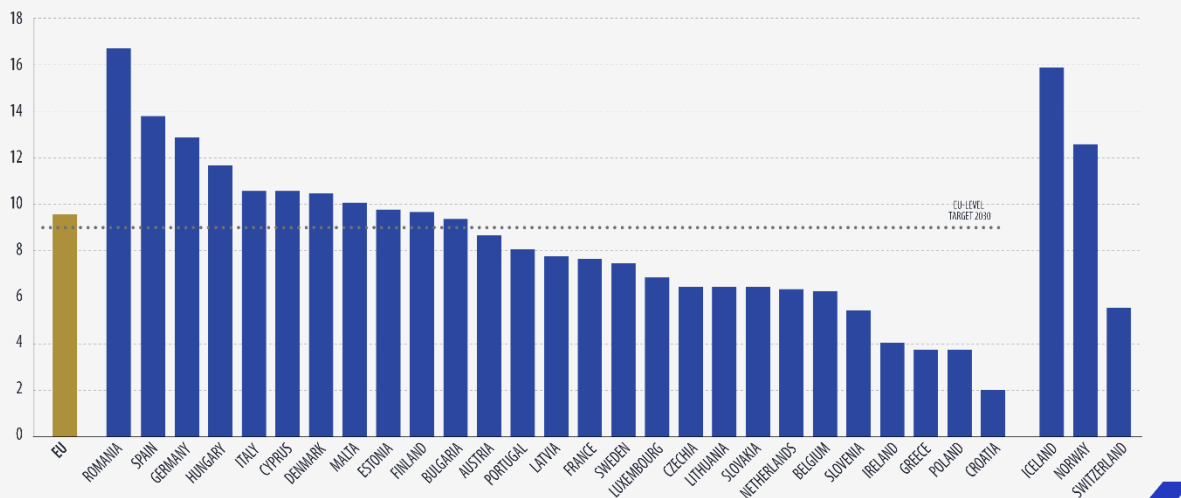
## Understanding and Addressing the Changes in Dropout Rates in Romania, Germany, Spain, Norway, and Bulgaria

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the recent increase or decrease in dropout rates in Germany, Romania, Spain, Norway, and Bulgaria. By examining the current trends, identifying contributing factors, and presenting detailed case studies, we seek to understand the underlying causes of this issue. Additionally, the chapter will offer policy recommendations to address these challenges and propose strategies to reduce dropout rates, thereby improving educational outcomes and socio-economic conditions in these countries.

In 2023, Romania had the highest dropout rate in the EU at 16.6%, followed by Spain at 13.7%, and Germany at 12.8%. Norway's dropout rate decreased to 12.5%, while Bulgaria saw a decrease to 9.3%. Compared to the European trend, where the average dropout rate was 9.5% in 2023, these figures indicate that several countries are struggling to keep students in school. This chapter will explore the specific factors contributing to these trends and propose targeted policy interventions to mitigate the issue.

### Early leavers from education and training, 2023

(% of population aged 18-24)



Croatia and Slovenia: break in time series; Croatia and Luxembourg: low reliability.

eurostat

Figure 7 Early leavers from education and training, 2013 and 2023

Understanding dropout rates is essential for comprehending the broader socio-economic landscape of a country. High dropout rates can have profound and far-reaching consequences, affecting not only the individuals who leave school early but also society and the economy as a whole.

These implications can be categorized into several key areas:

### Unemployment and Economic Disparities

One of the most immediate consequences of dropping out of school is the increased likelihood of unemployment. Without a high school diploma, individuals often find it challenging to secure stable and well-paying jobs. This leads to higher unemployment rates among dropouts, which in turn exacerbates economic disparities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, “between 1972 and 2001, 11% of young people (16 to 24 years of age) were not enrolled in or had not yet graduated from any type of high school”. This persistent dropout rate contributes to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break.

### Increased Dependency on Social Welfare Programs

Dropouts are more likely to rely on social welfare programs, such as unemployment benefits, food assistance, and housing subsidies. This increased dependency places a significant financial burden on government resources and taxpayers. The cost of supporting individuals who have not completed their education can be substantial, diverting funds from other critical areas such as healthcare, infrastructure, and education itself.

### Higher Crime Rates

Research has shown a correlation between high dropout rates and increased crime rates. Individuals who do not complete their education are more likely to engage in criminal activities, either out of economic necessity or due to a lack of opportunities. This not only affects the safety and well-being of communities but also leads to higher costs associated with law enforcement, legal proceedings, and incarceration. Sociological theories of delinquency offer rather divergent predictions concerning the effect of dropping out of high school on subsequent delinquent and criminal behavior. For example, strain theory suggests that dropping out decreases such behavior, especially for lower class youth, while social control theory suggests that dropping out should increase the chances of criminal activity. Moreover, empirical studies provide support for each of these views with the most influential study (Elliott and Voss, 1974) presenting evidence consistent with a strain perspective. The study by THORNBERRY, TERENCE & MOORE, MELANIE & CHRISTENSON, R.. (2006), named The Effect of Dropping out of High School on Subsequent Criminal Behavior. *Criminology*. 23. 3 - 18. 10.1111/j.1745-9125.1985.tb00323.x highlights the link between education and criminal behavior.

### Health and Well-being

Education is closely linked to health outcomes. Individuals who drop out of school are more likely to experience poor health, both physically and mentally. They are at a higher risk for chronic illnesses, substance abuse, and mental health issues. This can lead to increased healthcare costs and a greater burden on public health systems. Moreover, the stress and challenges associated with low educational attainment can negatively impact the overall well-being and quality of life of individuals and their families. According to Zajacova A, Lawrence EM. The Relationship Between Education and Health: Reducing Disparities Through a Contextual Approach. *Annu Rev Public Health*. 2018 Apr 1;39:273-289. doi: 10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031816-044628. Epub 2018 Jan 12. PMID: 29328865; PMCID: PMC5880718. adults with higher educational attainment live healthier and longer lives compared to their less educated peers. The disparities are large and widening.

### Social and Civic Engagement

Education plays a crucial role in fostering social and civic engagement. Individuals who complete their education are more likely to participate in community activities, volunteer, and engage in the democratic process. Without a strong education, individuals often face significant obstacles in actively participating in policy-making and ensuring their voices are heard in the democratic process. Education provides the foundation for understanding complex political issues, recognizing one's rights, and effectively advocating for change. When people lack this foundation, they are less likely to engage in civic activities, contribute to community decisions, or influence the policies that affect their lives. This challenge is particularly pronounced in certain demographics, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds or marginalized communities, who may encounter barriers to completing their education due to socioeconomic factors, limited access to quality schools, or systemic inequalities. As a result, these groups are often underrepresented in democratic processes, leading to a cycle of disenfranchisement and limited influence over the policies that shape their future. This lack of engagement can weaken the social fabric and reduce the overall cohesion and resilience of communities.

### Intergenerational Effects

The implications of high dropout rates extend to future generations. Children of individuals who did not complete their education are more likely to face similar challenges and are at a higher risk of dropping out themselves. Parental literacy significantly impacts children's academic performance. Literate parents are more likely to engage in educational activities with their children, such as reading together, helping with homework, and fostering a positive attitude towards learning. Hochschild and Scovronick (2003) emphasize that "parents' educational levels are strongly correlated with their children's academic success"<sup>1</sup>. This correlation is evident in various studies that show children of literate parents tend to perform better academically compared to their peers whose parents have lower literacy levels. This perpetuates a cycle of educational disadvantage and limits opportunities for upward social mobility. A literate home environment provides children with access to books, educational materials, and a culture that values education. This environment encourages children to develop strong reading and writing skills from an early age. According to Tsolou and Babalis (2020), "family factors such as parental professional encouragement and support in low school performance significantly impact students' decisions to stay in school". Literate parents are better equipped to provide this support, thereby reducing the likelihood of their children dropping out. Addressing dropout rates is therefore essential not only for the current generation but also for breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage for future generations.

### *Regional Disparities and Trends in Dropout Rates in Germany*

The German education system is under significant strain, as highlighted by the National Education Report released on June 17, 2024. Despite increased investments and personnel in areas like daycare, the system struggles to meet growing demands.



### School dropouts in Germany 2022

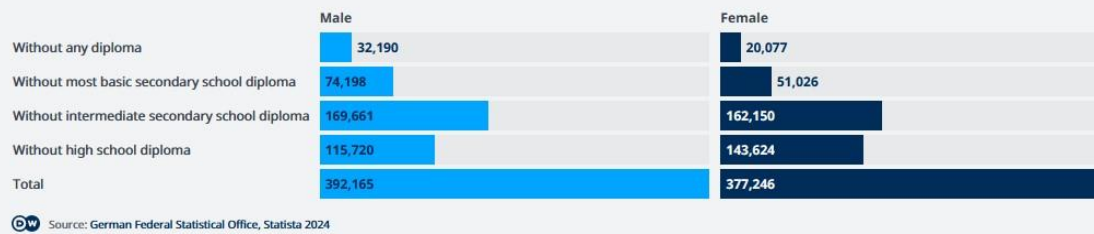


Figure 8 School dropouts in Germany 2022

In 2022, 52,300 young people left school without a diploma, with the dropout rate rising to 6.9% from 6.2% in the previous year. The actual number of dropouts is likely even higher, as young people who leave school during the school year are not counted. The issue of school dropouts is persistent and has been worsening over the years, except for a temporary decrease during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Education spending increased by 46% over the last decade to 264 billion Euros in 2022. Despite this increase, the proportion of education expenditure relative to Germany has only risen slightly, indicating that financial needs are not being fully met.

The recruitment of skilled personnel remains challenging, leading to a reliance on career changers in schools. The report counted a total of 2.7 million people employed in daycare centers, schools, and universities in 2022. Of the 35,000 new teachers hired in the previous year, 12% did not have traditional teacher training.

The number of daycare centers has grown significantly, reaching over 56,000 in 2023. Although there has been an increase in daycare places, the demand continues to outstrip supply, especially in Western Germany. The long-standing trend of increasing academization has come to a halt, with demand for higher education stagnating. There are unmet needs for professionals in fields like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Educational success in Germany is strongly influenced by social origin and age at immigration. Older immigrants have poorer educational outcomes, with half of those arriving between ages 14-18 lacking vocational qualifications or higher education entrance qualifications.

Researchers recommend increased efforts and support in early childhood education to address disparities in educational outcomes, particularly in math and German. The report criticizes the inconsistency among states in conducting preschool language proficiency tests.

### Regional Disparities and Trends in Dropout Rates in Norway

Figures from June 2024 show that 72 per cent of students who started upper secondary school in the autumn of 2017 completed their studies on time. Among pupils who started upper secondary school one

year earlier, i.e. in 2016, the corresponding proportion was 69 per cent and the increase from 2016 to 2017 is 3 percentage points in just one year. The proportion of students completing the programme on time has increased by as much as 10 percentage points in nine years; among those who started upper secondary school in 2010, 62% completed the programme on time.

To understand the total drop out rate in Norway, it's important to have the extended right to upper secondary education (VGO) in mind. [The extended right to upper secondary education](#) means that all pupils have a lifelong right to participate in upper secondary education until they achieve academic or vocational competence. Key components include:

- **No time limit:** Previously, students had to complete the VGO within a certain time frame, but this restriction has now been removed. This gives students greater flexibility to complete their training at their own pace.
- **The right to return:** Adults who have exhausted their initial entitlement to upper secondary education now have the option to return to the education system to complete their education.

However, the 2024 statistics show that the proportion of students who have completed more than the standard time has fallen from 12 per cent to 10 per cent, from the 2016 to the 2017 cohort. We can therefore say that upper secondary students are completing their education earlier. The overall completion rate when we include those who completed within 5/6 years has increased by 1 percentage point, from 81 per cent for the 2016 cohort to 82 per cent for the 2017 cohort.

#### Increase in the proportion of immigrants who complete their studies on time

Completion on time has increased by 3 percentage points, but the increase is even stronger when we look at immigrants separately. Among immigrants, 52 per cent of those who started upper secondary school in 2017 completed their studies on time, compared with 48 per cent of those who started in 2016. This is an increase of 4 percentage points in one year. The corresponding increase among Norwegian-born to immigrant parents was 5 percentage points, from 69 per cent to 74 per cent.

#### General studies vs VET studies

Completion on time is highest among students who started general studies, with 86 per cent completing on time among those who started general studies in 2017, compared with 82 per cent of those who started in 2016, an increase of 4 percentage points. The same figures for those who started vocational programmes were an increase of 2 percentage points, from 51 per cent to 53 per cent.

The completion rate for vocational students is highly dependent on the availability of apprenticeships and there are therefore regional differences, with the three northernmost counties in particular having a lower completion rate than the rest of the country. This is explained by the fact that an apprenticeship arises in an interaction between student and company. This means that apprenticeships are created and that they are mainly local, not county or national. Fluctuations and changes in the local business community therefore greatly affect the completion rate, and the smaller communities found in the north are therefore more vulnerable than the larger centers in the rest of the country.

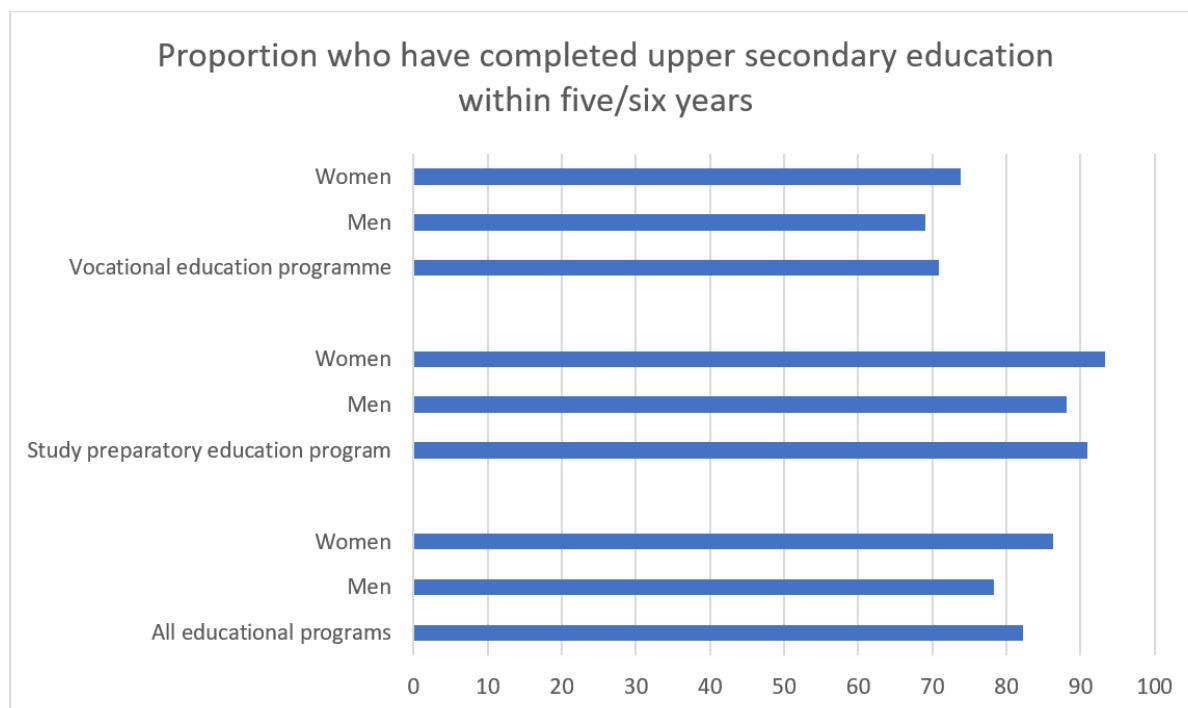


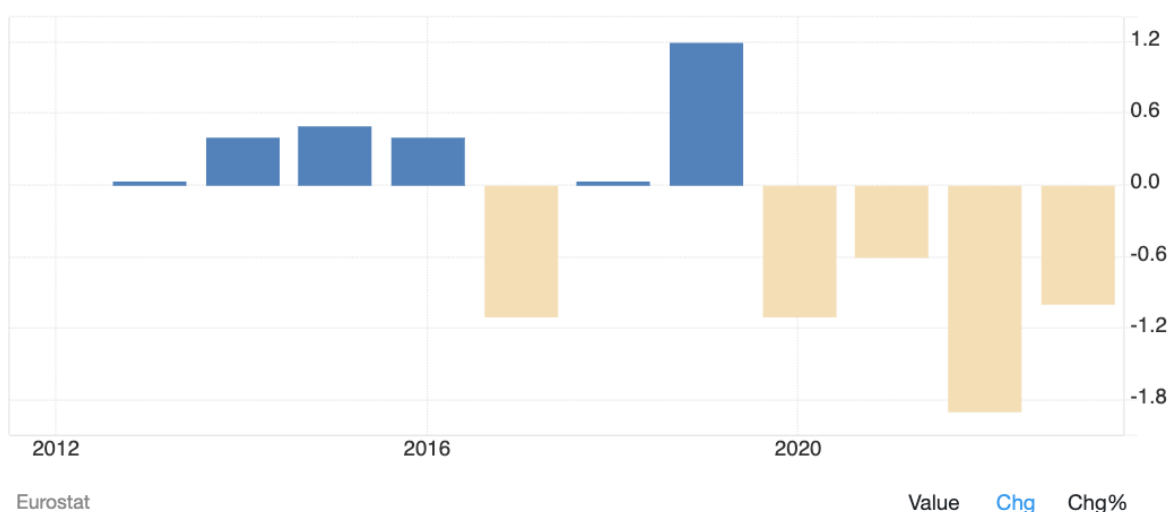
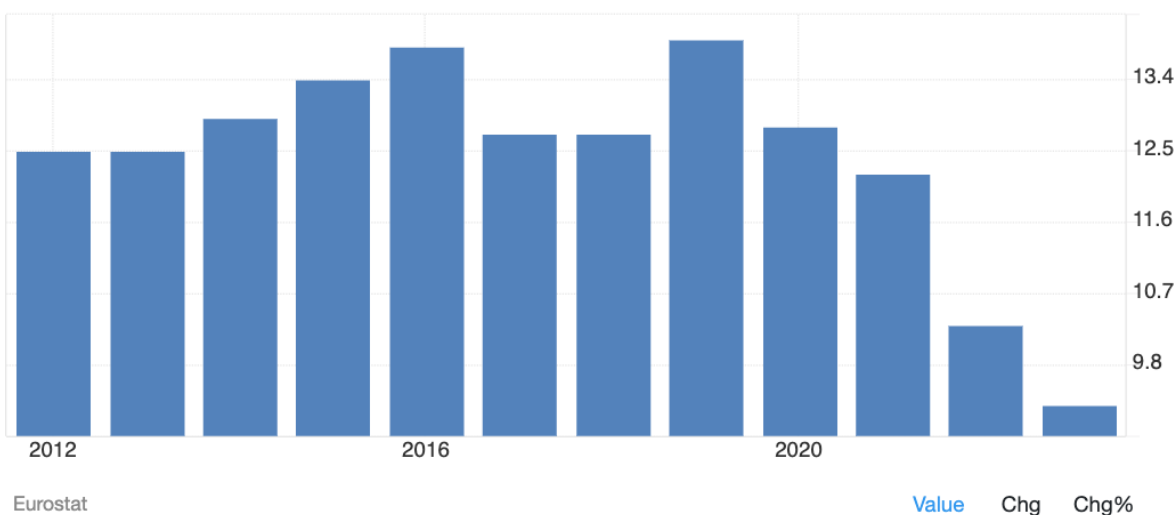
Figure 9 Completion rates in upper secondary education

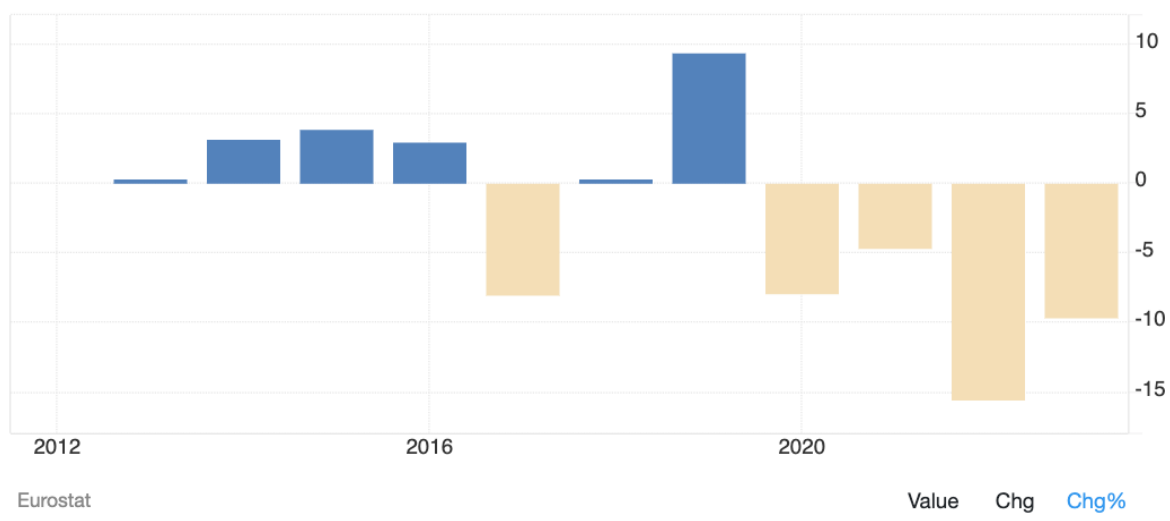
Source: <https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/videregaende-utdanning/statistikk/gjennomforing-i-videregaende-opplaering>

### Regional Disparities and Trends in Dropout Rates in Bulgaria

Bulgaria - Early leavers from education and training was 12.80% in December of 2020, according to the EUROSTAT. Trading Economics provides the current actual value, an historical data chart and related indicators for Bulgaria - Early leavers from education and training - last updated from the [EUROSTAT](#) in August of 2024. Historically, Bulgaria - Early leavers from education and training reached a record high of 21.90% in December of 2003 and a record low of 11.80% in December of 2011. Data from this year's National external evaluation reveals worsening results for students completing IV grade which further deepens the so-called learning poverty measured through percentage of children at the end of IV grade not able to read and understand simple text. (World Bank, October 2019). Data for students completing VII grades reveals insignificant progress on Bulgarian language and average result of 35 points on mathematics – just above the threshold of 30 points. Though the Ministry of Education and Science reports a 40% decrease in dropout rates through the Mechanism for Inter-institutional work on enrolment and inclusion, still the latest NSI data shows that 11.2% of children 3-6 and 5.7% of children 7-10 are out of school.

## Updated report on the existing ESL policies and challenges from partner countries and Europe





### Regional Disparities and Trends in Dropout Rates in Spain

Official data from the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training, and Sports show that in 2023, the early school leaving rate in Spain stood at 13.7%, representing a decrease of 0.2 percentage points compared to the previous year (13.9% in 2022). Comparing this with 2013, a decade ago, when the dropout rate was 23.6%, there has been a reduction of 9.8 percentage points, with the proportion of early leavers decreasing by 41.7%. This has narrowed the gap with the European Union average (9.5%) to 4.2 points, compared to an 11.8-point gap in 2013.

In 2023, there remains a significant difference between the rate for men (16.0%) and that for women (11.3%).

Despite this decline, Spain remains the second country in the EU with the highest number of young people who do not continue their studies, only slightly better than Romania (16.6%) and followed by Germany (12.8%). The EU-27 average in 2023 was 9.5%. The dropout rate of 13.7% in Spain in 2023 still leaves us far from the EU Education and Training target for 2030, which aims to reduce this figure to 9%.

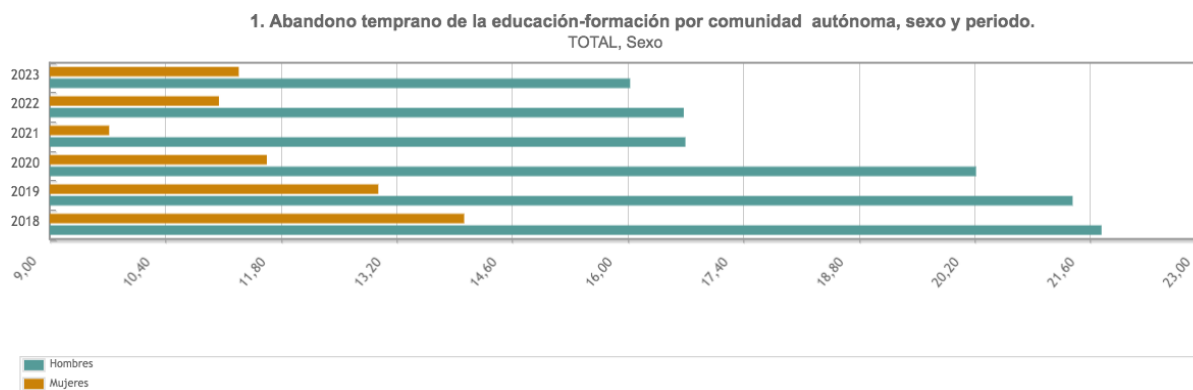


Figure 10 Early school leaving by region, gender and year. Total, gender (green, male; yellow, female)

## Updated report on the existing ESL policies and challenges from partner countries and Europe

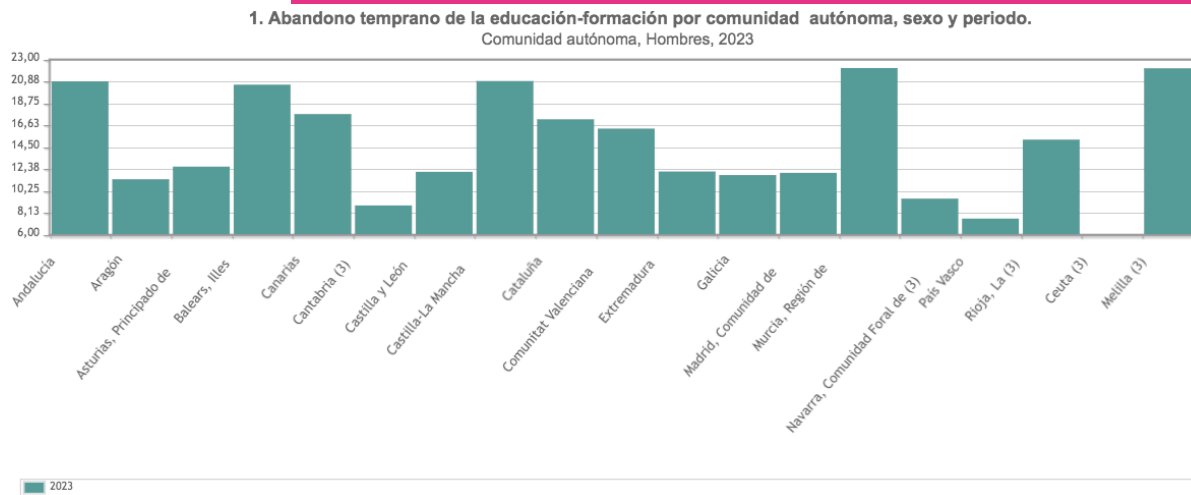


Figure 11 Early school leaving by region, gender and year. Region, male, 2023

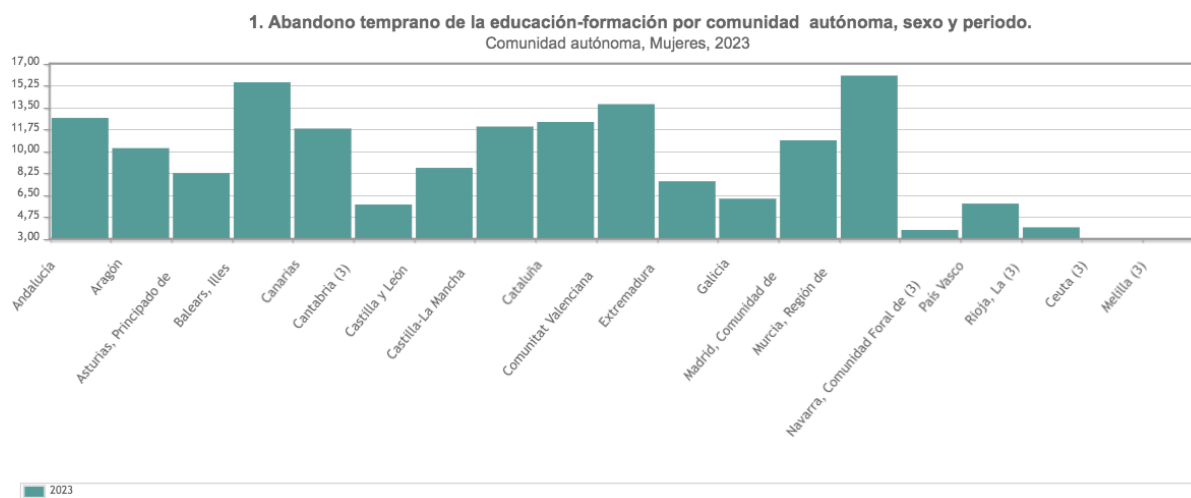


Figure 12 Early school leaving by region, gender and year. Region, female, 2023

### National strategy

November 19, 2020 was approved in Congress Organic Law 3/2020, which ends Organic Law 8/2013 called LOMCE. The new organic law is also known as Law Celaá or LOMLOE. This law understands the difficult scenario that Spain has regarding school dropouts. It therefore raises a number of changes, such as adapting the school curriculum to pupils, in such a way that the content given is not an element that encourages abandonment (Article 6). Therefore, it seeks to generate greater autonomy in the centers. In addition, this law also introduces the opinion of the teacher as the main criterion regarding the possibility of repeating grades, when, with the LOMCE, it depended only on the qualifications obtained by the student. The hope is that this will help reduce dropout as students feel more motivated and their effort and not only their grades are taken into account.

It also includes the prevention of this phenomenon and the cooperativity of the different entities in this problem (Article 70a). The problem of dropping out is not an individual problem, but a social problem that



many institutions are going through. In this way this organic law aims to create contexts of equity that allow students to continue with their school trajectory.

As mentioned above, prevention is one of the points that it considers to be paramount. This is why it is promoted by education of 0-3 years creating more than 21,000 places.

In turn, the PROA + programme was implemented in 2020, which wanted to reduce school leaving, and €125 million was allocated. The latest update is in progress.

On the other hand, a number of changes have been made in the system of grants and grants. The budget for the summits has been increased by 35%, making a total of 2,090 million euros. It's the largest scholarship budget ever.

In the same way this law takes into account the new current context: digitalization. To this end, it aims to incorporate technology in classrooms, as well as for teachers to have greater technological skills.

A modernisation plan for accreditation of competences has been approved for vocational training. The National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications has also been revised to address current needs, with a particular focus on digitisation and sustainability. On the other hand, the aim is to create 200,000 new vocational training places to give greater support to the Modernization Plan. In addition, a new Vocational Training Act regulating Dual VET has begun to be drafted. As regards the accessibility of vocational training, a sectoral conference on the national system of qualifications and VET for Employment has been set up.

The Spanish National Reform Programme 2023 (Programa Nacional de Reformas de España 2023, PNR) sets out several education objectives. One of them is Objective 3, social and territorial cohesion and policies for future generations. This objective understands the need for social capital and investment in education, and therefore urges the creation of more places in both early childhood education and FPs.

### **Formal education: main policy measures on ELET**

The timetable for the implementation of LOMLOE has ranged from its entry into force in January 2021 to the modifications made for the course 2023-24.

The first ones, 2021-22 modifications were an environment to create greater autonomy in the schools, also to modify the selection of the direct ones and the admission of the students.

In turn, the rules of revalidations were changed. In all basic education only two courses can be repeated except for a quarter of ESO, which can be more often if teachers consider it. In addition, the ESO recovery exams are abolished, but not at Bachelor's. In ESO, therefore, you can skip the course with two suspended subjects.

These measures were intended to avoid the stagnation of minors in certain courses and to promote their educational development, without the obstacles that can be caused by the traditional rigidity of educational cycles.

In the course 2022-23 the changes in the curriculum were implemented, the Ministry of Education fixes the basic subjects, but the Education Councils of each community elaborates them. It also disappears the division of subjects' trunk, specific and of free economic configuration. In turn, the evaluation of students

is "global, continuous and formative" and will focus on key development competencies. As for Bachelor there are changes oriented to its flexibility and openness. The types of Bachelor's Degree are expanded, with the following: Sciences and Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences, Plastic Arts, Image and Design, Music and Performing Arts and General.

In the course of 2022-23, the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents Act is implemented (Ley Orgánica 8/2021), which ensures the protection of minors. This leads to the establishment of a protection delegate. In turn, it emphasizes the educational nature of education between the ages of 0 and 3 (formerly it was considered only healthcare). Finally, FPs link dual education that combines training with paid practices.

### Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work

Regarding measures to prevent ELET through informal and non-formal education, the Eurydice report (2014:60) states that Spanish students receive educational support outside the classroom from members of the teaching staff, boosting learning and school performance, thereby improving students' social integration. However, measures as concrete as these have not been implemented by top-level authorities, as its functions are more general, in order to frame the education system. In fact, specific actions have been carried out by sub-national and local entities, as they have also educational competences preventing ELET, such as "monitoring the fulfillment of the compulsory education" (art. 25.2n of the Law 7/1985), in the case of the local bodies.

Here are various examples of projects from a sub-national level:

- Castilla La-Mancha – V Plan for Educational Success and Prevention of Early School Leaving (PEEPAET):

This regional plan will be composed of 3 different plans to address ELET, which began the 2022-23 course. The three Prepara-T, Ilusiona-T and Titula-S programs are aimed at developing inclusion in both the classroom and the school, therefore, it aims to ensure that students have problems in the subjects taught from Primary to Bachelor. This programme is funded by the European + Fund and aims to be a tool to reduce school leaving and to increase social and educational inclusion in the classroom. It therefore seeks to strengthen the compulsory educational stages.

- Catalonia – "New Opportunities" Programme (Programa "Nuevas Oportunidades"):

This programme is targeted at young people, from 16 years old to 24 years, who do not own any degree. The programme offers a flexible schedule for the youngsters who seek to enter the labor market or want a formation in basic and transversal competences.

- Region of Murcia – Strategy for the Educational Success 2022-23 (Estrategia para el Éxito Educativo):

This strategy aims to tackle ELET and scholar absenteeism by implementing over 50 measures in all cycles of compulsory education (ISCED 0-2). The intervention measures offer alternative education and promoting vocational training, as well as innovative actions such as peer tutoring and the creation of mobile apps to give personalized orientation to the youngsters. Since this strategy has been implemented, the school dropout rate in the region of Murcia has been decreasing. Since 2017 the school dropout rate

has been decreasing in the region of Murcia, in 2017 the rate was 23.1% and in 2021 the rate had decreased 5.8%, being at 17.3%.

### **Cross-sector coordination and monitoring of ELET interventions**

Within the framework of the Plan for the reduction of ELET, the Autonomous Regions inform all the activities in progress and, together with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, they carry out the monitoring and evaluation of the program. The Sectoral Education Conference (Conferencia Sectorial de Educación) is responsible for overseeing actions related to early school dropout.

The package of measures in the field of school leaving is carried out with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. Funding is still pending, as it is recalled that the organic law of LOMLOE still continues.

However, since a new educational law has been approved in November 2020, called LOMLOE (Ley de Orgánica de Mejora de la LOE) and will probably come into force in 2021, it is very likely that some issues related to ELET in Spain may suffer some changes. For instance, this law eliminates optative subjects in CSE so all students study the same contents until they are 16, unifying the national level of the high schoolers and postponing important irreversible career choices until they are more mature. Furthermore, this law also introduces the teacher's opinion as the main criteria when it comes to the possibility of repeating grades, when, with the LOMCE, it only depended on the grades obtained by the student. The hope is that this will help reduce the ELET as students feel more motivated and their effort and not only their grades are taken into account.

The National Program of Reforms of Spain 2023 (Programa Nacional de Reformas de España 2023, PNR) establishes in its Objective 4 on education, actions directed to the reduction of the AET. The main measures introduced in the PNR are, in addition to the abovementioned Plan, the gradual implantation of the Education Law in the different stages of the educational system, as well as the the Royal Decree 293/2016, 15th of July, which establishes the thresholds of income and family patrimony and the amounts of the scholarships and grants to study for the academic year 2019-2020 (Real Decreto 430/2019, de 12 de julio)

For its part, the Educational Support Project (Proyecto Apoyo Educativo), by the National Center of Innovation and Educational Research (Centro Nacional de Innovación e Investigación Educativa, CNIIE), coordinates the special educational attention to those students who present special education needs so they can achieve the maximum possible development of their personal capacities and, in any case, the Objectives established in general for all students..

These needs can be specific learning difficulties, high intellectual capacities, and late entry into the educational system or personal conditions.

### ***Regional Disparities and Trends in Dropout Rates in Romania***

Romania has been grappling with high dropout rates for several years, and recent data indicates that this trend continues to be a significant challenge. In 2023, Romania's dropout rate was 16.6%, one of the highest in the European Union.

### **Analysis of dropout rates by degree of urbanization**

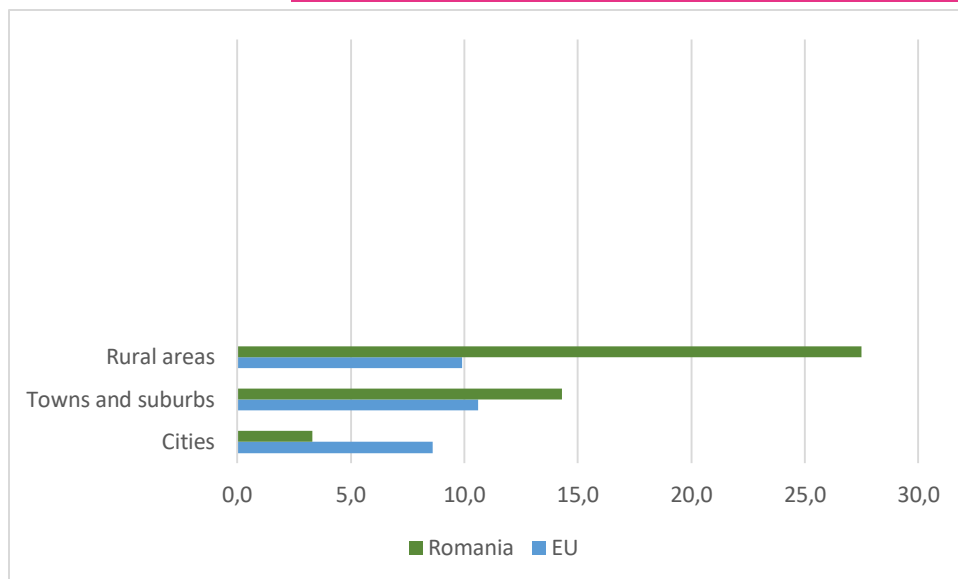


Figure 13 Dropout Rates by Degree of Urbanization in Romania and EU

The rural-urban divide in Romania significantly impacts the educational landscape, creating disparities in access, quality, and outcomes of education. This divide is rooted in historical, socio-economic, and infrastructural differences between rural and urban areas. Understanding these disparities is crucial for developing effective policies to bridge the gap and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Access to education in rural areas of Romania is often limited by several factors, including geographical isolation, inadequate transportation, and insufficient educational infrastructure. Many rural communities lack nearby schools, forcing students to travel long distances or relocate to urban centers for better educational opportunities. This logistical challenge can discourage school attendance and contribute to higher dropout rates in rural areas, according to Cismaru, DM., Corbu, N. (2019). The Multiple Impact of Education Gaps in Romania. In: Dobrescu, P. (eds) Development in Turbulent Times. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11361-2\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11361-2_12)

The quality of education in rural areas is generally lower compared to urban centers. Rural schools often face shortages of qualified teachers, limited access to educational resources, and outdated facilities. According to a study by Voicu and Vasile (2020), "rural-urban inequalities of access to higher education occasionally come on the top of the Romanian agenda of education debate". These inequalities are exacerbated by the concentration of well-equipped schools and experienced educators in urban areas, leaving rural schools at a disadvantage.

Socio-economic disparities between rural and urban areas further contribute to the educational divide. Rural families typically have lower incomes and less access to educational support services, such as tutoring and extracurricular activities. This economic disadvantage can limit students' academic performance and aspirations. In 2023, 94.6 million people in the EU (21% of the population) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Romania has one of the highest shares at 32%. Additionally, 41.5% of children in Romania are currently at risk of poverty and social exclusion, which is double the EU average.

This high rate of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas negatively impacts educational outcomes, as children from these backgrounds face additional barriers to academic success.

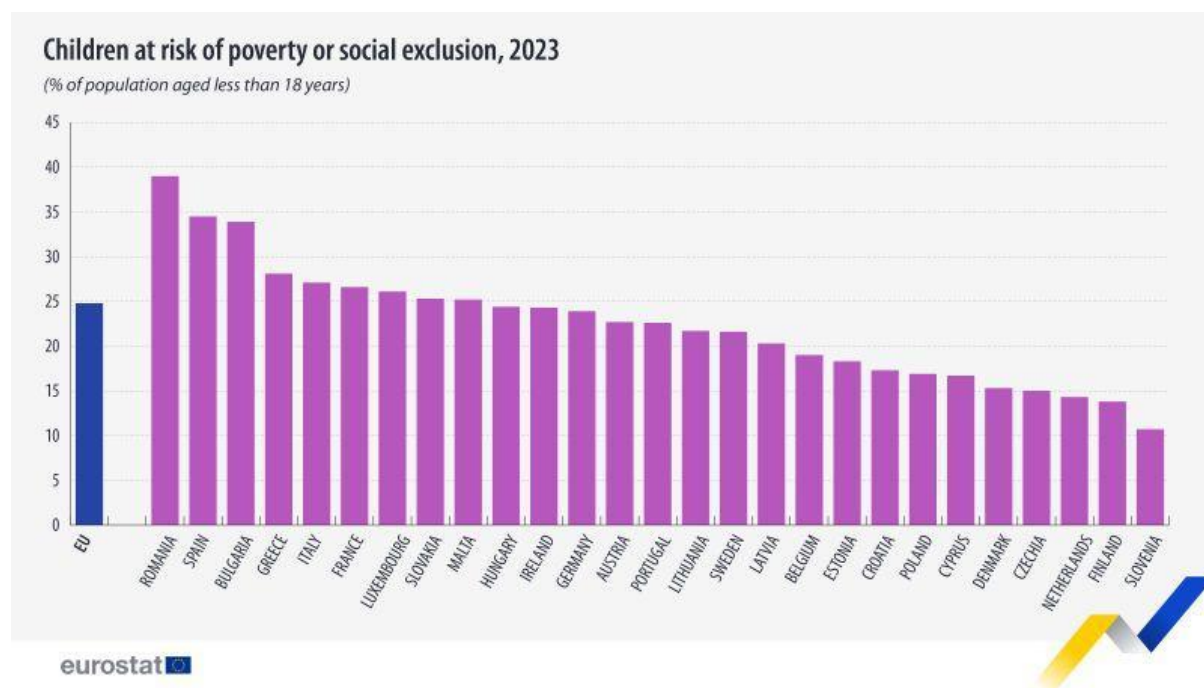


Figure 14 Children at risk of poverty

The digital divide between rural and urban areas also affects education. Urban schools are more likely to have access to modern technology, including computers, internet connectivity, and digital learning tools. In contrast, many rural schools lack these resources, hindering students' ability to engage with digital learning platforms and acquire essential technological skills.

### Analysis of dropout rates by Labour Status

The labor status of individuals plays a critical role in understanding dropout rates. Several factors influence the likelihood of dropping out, including employment opportunities, economic conditions, and the availability of vocational training.

High unemployment rates and poor economic conditions can drive students to leave school early in search of work. In regions with limited job opportunities, young people may perceive education as less valuable, opting instead to enter the labor market prematurely. This trend is particularly evident in rural areas, where economic opportunities are scarce.

Access to vocational training and employment opportunities can reduce dropout rates by providing practical skills and job prospects. However, the availability and quality of vocational training programs vary across Romania, with urban areas generally offering more robust options compared to rural regions.

Students who engage in part-time employment while studying are at a higher risk of dropping out. Balancing work and education can be challenging, leading to increased stress and reduced academic performance. This is especially true for students from low-income families who need to contribute to household income.

The relationship between labor status and dropout rates also varies by region. Counties with higher unemployment rates tend to have higher dropout rates. For example, regions in the top quintile for dropout rates often face multiple educational and economic challenges<sup>3</sup>. Conversely, areas with better economic conditions and more job opportunities tend to have lower dropout rates.

### Analysis of dropout rates by Sex

The dropout rates in Romania show a small difference between males and females. In 2023, the dropout rate for males was 16.7%, while for females it was 16.5%. This minimal disparity indicates that the dropout rates for young men and women in Romania are almost equal, contrasting with the broader EU trend where males typically have higher dropout rates.

Socio-economic conditions play a significant role in influencing dropout rates among both sexes. However, young men are often more affected by economic pressures to enter the labor market early, which can lead to higher dropout rates. In contrast, young women may face different socio-economic challenges, such as early marriage or caregiving responsibilities, which can also impact their educational attainment.

The availability of labor market opportunities can influence dropout rates differently for males and females. Young men may be more inclined to leave school early if they perceive immediate job opportunities, particularly in manual or low-skilled labor sectors.

Minority groups, including the Roma community, face additional challenges that contribute to higher dropout rates. Studies have shown that Roma children, especially girls are significantly more likely to leave school early due to factors such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to quality education.

The analysis of dropout rates in Romania, segmented by labor status and sex, reveals a complex interplay of socio-economic, educational, and cultural factors that influence early school leaving. Romania's high dropout rates, significantly above the EU average, underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address this issue.

### Insights from the “Raport privind starea învățământului preuniversitar 2022-2023”

The “Raport privind starea învățământului preuniversitar 2022-2023” provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by the Romanian education system, particularly in rural areas. This report highlights several critical issues that contribute to the high dropout rates in the country, including inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, and significant socio-economic disparities.

#### Inadequate infrastructure

Aware of the inadequate infrastructure in many educational units, the Ministry of Education launched the largest call for equipping educational units and related units in December 2022. This initiative encompasses milestones/targets 482-483; 489-492; 496 and 497 within Investments 9, 11, 13, and 14 from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). A total of €1,068,260,200 (excluding VAT) was allocated for equipping all pre-university educational units and related units with furniture, IT equipment, science and computer labs, school offices, and practice workshops, in line with the vision of the “Educated Romania” project.



### Shortage of Qualified Teachers

In the 2022/2023 school year, the proportion of qualified teaching staff showed a slight downward trend (ranging from 0.1 to 1.3 percentage points), with the exception of high school education. This decline is particularly notable in vocational education, driven by a significant reduction in qualified teaching staff in rural vocational schools. The overall trends in qualified teaching staff, based on the type of residence (urban vs. rural), reveal the following:

**Primary, Gymnasium, and High School Education:** The difference in the proportion of qualified teachers between urban and rural areas is less than 1 percentage point.

**Post-secondary Education:** The largest difference in qualified teaching staff is observed in post-secondary schools, favoring rural areas. However, it is important to note that the number of qualified teachers in rural vocational schools is extremely low.

**Preschool and Post-secondary Education:** In these levels of education, the proportion of qualified teachers in rural areas is higher than in urban areas.

**Vocational Education:** The largest difference in favor of urban areas is observed in vocational education, with a gap of 2.2 percentage points.

### Socio-economic disparities

The 2022/2023 report on the state of pre-university education in Romania sheds light on the profound socio-economic disparities that permeate the educational landscape. These disparities manifest in various dimensions, significantly influencing access to education, the quality of learning, and overall student outcomes.

Economic barriers play a crucial role in shaping educational opportunities and outcomes. Students from low-income families often face numerous challenges, including insufficient learning materials, lack of extracurricular support, and financial pressures that may compel them to leave school prematurely to support their families. These economic constraints are a significant determinant of educational attainment and future prospects.

Health and nutrition are additional factors influenced by socio-economic disparities. Students from low-income families often face health and nutritional challenges, which can adversely affect their ability to learn. Poor nutrition and health issues can lead to higher absenteeism and lower academic performance, further entrenching the cycle of disadvantage. In Romania, the prevalence of malnutrition among children remains a concern, with significant implications for their cognitive development and academic success. According to a report by World Vision Romania, 22% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds go to bed at night without dinner, and two out of ten children say that their family provides them only sometimes or never enough food. This alarming statistic highlights the severe food insecurity faced by many children, which directly impacts their health, well-being, and ability to perform academically.

The report also highlights the impact of socio-economic status on educational outcomes. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to exhibit lower academic performance and higher dropout rates. These trends are closely linked to the lack of resources and support available to them, which undermines their ability to succeed academically.

The PISA index of economic, social, and cultural status provides a comparative measure of students' socio-economic backgrounds across different countries. In Romania, 26% of students were in the top international quintile of the socio-economic scale, indicating they were among the most advantaged students who took the PISA test in 2022. Their average score in mathematics was 498 points.

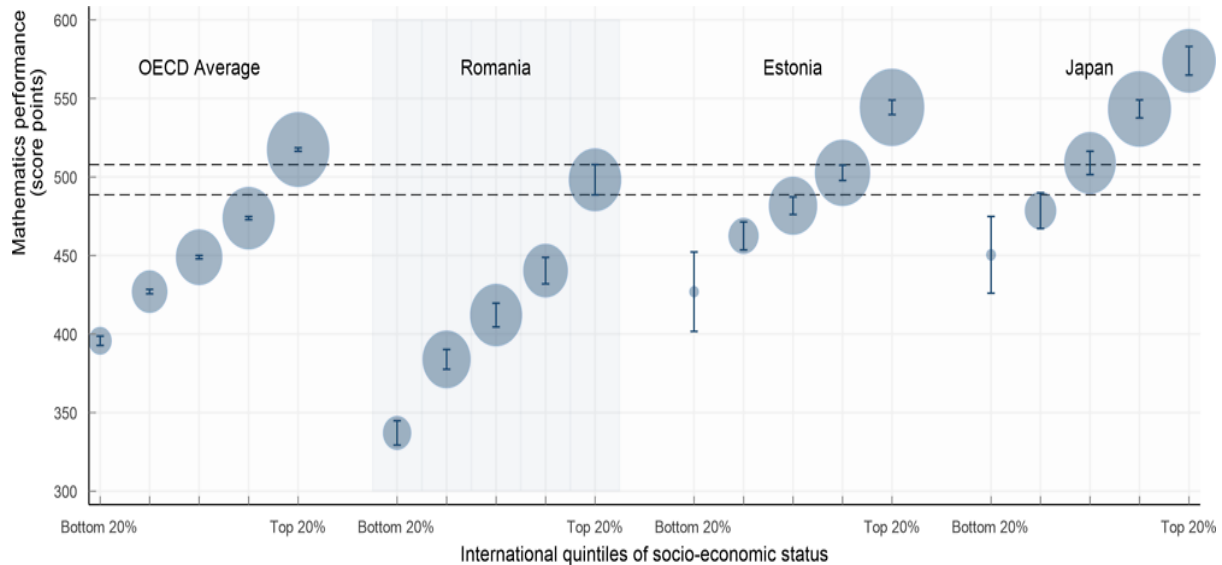


Figure 15 Mean performance in mathematics, by international quintiles of socio-economic status

The PISA index also allows for the categorization of students within each country into four groups of equal size, from the most disadvantaged to the most advantaged. In Romania, socio-economically advantaged students (the top 25%) outperformed disadvantaged students (the bottom 25%) by 132 score points in mathematics, a gap larger than the OECD average of 93 points. Between 2012 and 2022, this performance gap widened in Romania, while it remained stable across OECD countries.

Socio-economic status accounted for 26% of the variation in mathematics performance in Romania's PISA 2022 results, compared to 15% on average across OECD countries. Despite these challenges, 7% of disadvantaged students in Romania scored in the top quarter of mathematics performance, demonstrating academic resilience. This is slightly below the OECD average of 10% for disadvantaged students achieving top performance in their own countries.

## Policy Recommendations

To address the high dropout rates and improve educational outcomes in Romania, Germany, Spain, Norway, and Bulgaria, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

### Enhancing Early Childhood Education

Enhancing early childhood education is a critical strategy for improving long-term educational outcomes and reducing dropout rates. This approach involves several key components and strategies that can significantly impact children's development and future academic success.

Firstly, expanding access to early childhood education is paramount. Governments should aim to provide universal access, ensuring that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, have the opportunity to attend preschool. This can be achieved through policies that mandate and fund early childhood education programs. Special attention should be given to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those from low-income families, rural areas, and minority groups. Targeted programs can help bridge the gap and provide these children with the support they need to succeed.

Improving the quality of early childhood education is equally important. Developing a comprehensive and age-appropriate curriculum that focuses on cognitive, social, and emotional development is essential. The curriculum should include activities that promote critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, investing in the training and professional development of early childhood educators is crucial. Teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to create engaging and supportive learning environments. This includes training in child development, classroom management, and inclusive education practices. Creating a stimulating and safe classroom environment is also important for young learners. Classrooms should be equipped with age-appropriate learning materials and resources that encourage exploration and play-based learning.

Supporting families and communities plays a vital role in enhancing early childhood education. Encouraging parental involvement in early childhood education can have a positive impact on children's learning and development. Schools and early childhood centers should provide opportunities for parents to engage in their children's education, such as parent-teacher meetings, workshops, and home-based learning activities. Building partnerships with community organizations can enhance the support available to young children and their families. Community programs can offer additional resources, such as health services, nutrition programs, and family support services.

Monitoring and evaluation are essential components of a successful early childhood education program. Implementing assessment tools to monitor children's progress and development is important for identifying areas where additional support may be needed. These assessments should be used to inform teaching practices and ensure that all children are meeting developmental milestones. Regular evaluation of early childhood education programs can help identify strengths and areas for improvement. This includes collecting data on program outcomes, such as children's readiness for primary school, and using this information to make evidence-based decisions about program enhancements.

Finally, increased funding and policy support are necessary to sustain and improve early childhood education programs. Governments should allocate sufficient funding to support the expansion and improvement of these programs. This includes funding for infrastructure, teacher salaries, training

programs, and learning materials. Developing a strong policy framework that outlines the goals, standards, and regulations for early childhood education is essential. Policies should promote equity, quality, and accessibility, and provide clear guidelines for program implementation and evaluation.

### Improving Teacher Training and Support

Improving teacher training and support is a fundamental strategy for enhancing educational outcomes and reducing dropout rates. Teachers are pivotal in shaping students' academic experiences and success, and thus, investing in their professional development and well-being is essential.

Firstly, comprehensive training programs for teachers are crucial. These programs should equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address diverse student needs effectively. Training should encompass various aspects, including inclusive education practices, classroom management, and the integration of technology in teaching. Inclusive education practices are particularly important as they enable teachers to cater to students with different learning abilities and backgrounds, fostering an environment where all students can thrive. Classroom management training helps teachers create a conducive learning environment, minimizing disruptions and maximizing student engagement. Additionally, with the increasing role of technology in education, teachers must be adept at using digital tools to enhance learning experiences.

Ongoing professional development is another critical component. Education is a dynamic field, and continuous learning is essential for teachers to stay updated with the latest pedagogical strategies and educational research. Professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and online courses, should be readily available to teachers. These opportunities allow teachers to refine their skills, learn new methodologies, and share best practices with their peers. Furthermore, professional development should be tailored to address specific challenges that teachers face in their classrooms, ensuring that the training is relevant and practical.

Support systems for teachers are equally important. Mentoring programs can provide new teachers with guidance and support from experienced educators, helping them navigate the complexities of the teaching profession. Mentors can offer valuable insights, share effective teaching strategies, and provide emotional support, which can significantly enhance new teachers' confidence and competence. Additionally, access to teaching resources and materials is vital. Schools should ensure that teachers have the necessary tools and resources to deliver high-quality instruction. This includes access to textbooks, digital resources, and teaching aids that can enrich the learning experience for students.

Creating a supportive work environment is also essential for teacher retention and job satisfaction. Schools should foster a culture of collaboration and respect, where teachers feel valued and appreciated. This can be achieved through regular staff meetings, team-building activities, and opportunities for teachers to participate in decision-making processes. Recognizing and rewarding teachers' efforts and achievements can also boost morale and motivation. Moreover, providing adequate compensation and benefits is crucial in attracting and retaining talented educators.

Finally, addressing the workload and well-being of teachers is important. Teachers often face significant stress due to heavy workloads and high expectations. Schools should implement measures to manage teachers' workloads effectively, such as providing administrative support and reducing non-teaching responsibilities. Additionally, promoting teachers' well-being through wellness programs, counseling

services, and work-life balance initiatives can help prevent burnout and ensure that teachers remain passionate and committed to their profession.

By focusing on these key areas, countries can improve teacher training and support, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and reducing dropout rates. Investing in teachers is an investment in the future, as well-trained and supported teachers are better equipped to inspire and educate the next generation.

### **Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (VET)**

Strengthening Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a crucial strategy for reducing dropout rates and improving educational outcomes by providing students with practical skills and career pathways. VET programs offer an alternative to traditional academic education, catering to students who may thrive in hands-on learning environments and preparing them for the workforce.

Firstly, expanding and improving VET programs is essential. This involves developing a diverse range of vocational courses that align with the current and future needs of the labor market. By collaborating with industries and employers, educational institutions can ensure that VET programs are relevant and up-to-date, equipping students with the skills that are in demand. This collaboration can also facilitate the creation of apprenticeship and internship opportunities, allowing students to gain real-world experience and enhance their employability.

Moreover, integrating VET into the mainstream education system can help reduce the stigma often associated with vocational training. Promoting the value of VET to students, parents, and the broader community is important for changing perceptions and encouraging more students to consider vocational pathways. Schools should provide career counseling and guidance to help students understand the benefits of VET and make informed decisions about their education and career options.

Improving the quality of VET programs is another critical aspect. This includes developing rigorous curricula that combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills. VET curricula should be designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing for continuous updates based on industry advancements and technological innovations. Additionally, investing in modern facilities and equipment is necessary to provide students with a realistic and up-to-date learning environment. This ensures that students are trained on the latest tools and technologies used in their chosen fields.

Teacher training and professional development are also vital for the success of VET programs. Educators in vocational training need specialized skills and knowledge to effectively teach practical subjects. Providing ongoing professional development opportunities for VET teachers can help them stay current with industry trends and pedagogical best practices. This includes training in new technologies, industry standards, and innovative teaching methods. Furthermore, fostering partnerships between VET teachers and industry professionals can enhance the quality of instruction and provide students with valuable insights into their future careers.

Supporting students throughout their vocational education journey is crucial for their success. This includes providing academic and career counseling, mentoring, and support services to help students navigate their educational pathways and overcome any challenges they may encounter. Financial support, such as scholarships and grants, can also make VET programs more accessible to students from

disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment can help students feel valued and motivated to complete their training.

Finally, monitoring and evaluating VET programs is essential for ensuring their effectiveness and continuous improvement. This involves collecting data on student outcomes, such as graduation rates, employment rates, and job satisfaction, and using this information to make evidence-based decisions about program enhancements. Regular feedback from students, teachers, and industry partners can also provide valuable insights into the strengths and areas for improvement of VET programs.

### Addressing Socio-Economic Barriers

Addressing socio-economic barriers is essential for improving educational outcomes and reducing dropout rates. Socio-economic factors significantly impact students' ability to succeed in school, and targeted interventions can help mitigate these challenges.

Firstly, providing financial support to low-income families is crucial. Governments should implement policies that offer scholarships, grants, and subsidies for school-related expenses, such as tuition fees, textbooks, uniforms, and transportation. These financial aids can alleviate the economic burden on families and ensure that children have the necessary resources to attend school regularly and participate fully in their education. Additionally, providing free or subsidized meals at school can address issues of malnutrition, which can affect students' concentration and overall academic performance.

Addressing broader socio-economic issues, such as child poverty and inadequate housing, is also important. Governments should develop comprehensive social policies that aim to reduce child poverty and improve living conditions for disadvantaged families. This includes providing access to affordable housing, healthcare, and social services. Ensuring that children grow up in stable and supportive environments can create a more conducive learning environment and improve their chances of academic success.

Implementing programs that offer additional support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds is another key strategy. Schools can provide after-school care, tutoring, and mentoring programs to help students with their academic work and personal development. These programs can offer a safe and supportive space for students to receive extra help with their studies, build positive relationships with mentors, and develop important life skills. Additionally, schools can collaborate with community organizations to provide a range of support services, such as counseling, health services, and extracurricular activities.

Promoting inclusive education practices is essential for addressing socio-economic barriers. Inclusive education ensures that all students, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to quality education. Schools should implement policies that reduce discrimination and bias, provide support for students with disabilities, and create an inclusive school culture. This includes training teachers in inclusive education practices, developing inclusive curricula, and ensuring that school facilities are accessible to all students. By fostering a sense of belonging and respect within schools, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to feel valued and motivated to succeed.

Engaging parents and communities in the education process is also vital. Schools should develop strategies to involve parents in their children's education, such as regular communication, parent-teacher



conferences, and workshops on supporting learning at home. Building strong relationships between schools, families, and communities can create a supportive network that encourages students to stay in school and succeed academically. Community partnerships can also provide additional resources and support for students, such as tutoring programs, extracurricular activities, and mentorship opportunities.

Finally, implementing early warning systems can help identify students at risk of dropping out and provide timely interventions. These systems use data on attendance, academic performance, and behavior to flag students who may need additional support. Schools can then implement targeted interventions, such as counseling, tutoring, and mentoring, to address the specific needs of at-risk students. Regular monitoring and follow-up can ensure that these interventions are effective and that students receive the support they need to succeed.

### Promoting Inclusive Education

Promoting inclusive education is a fundamental strategy for ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or abilities, have access to quality education. Inclusive education fosters a sense of belonging and respect, which is essential for student engagement and success.

Firstly, creating inclusive school environments is crucial. Schools should be designed to accommodate diverse learning needs, ensuring that all students feel welcome and supported. This involves making physical modifications to school facilities to ensure accessibility for students with disabilities. Classrooms should be equipped with adaptive technologies and resources that cater to various learning styles and needs. Additionally, schools should implement policies that promote inclusivity and reduce discrimination and bias. This includes developing anti-bullying programs and fostering a culture of respect and acceptance among students and staff.

Teacher training is a key component of promoting inclusive education. Educators should receive comprehensive training in inclusive education practices, enabling them to effectively teach and support students with diverse needs. This training should cover strategies for differentiating instruction, managing inclusive classrooms, and using assistive technologies. Teachers should also be trained to recognize and address any biases they may hold, ensuring that all students are treated equitably. Ongoing professional development opportunities should be provided to help teachers stay current with best practices in inclusive education.

Developing inclusive curricula is another important aspect. Curricula should be designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing for modifications and accommodations that meet the needs of all students. This includes incorporating diverse perspectives and materials that reflect the backgrounds and experiences of all students. Inclusive curricula should also promote critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, providing opportunities for all students to engage meaningfully in their learning.

Supporting students with disabilities is essential for promoting inclusive education. Schools should provide specialized services and resources to meet the unique needs of these students. This includes offering individualized education plans (IEPs), access to special education professionals, and appropriate accommodations and modifications. Additionally, schools should work closely with families to ensure that students with disabilities receive the support they need both at school and at home. Collaboration between educators, parents, and specialists is key to developing effective support plans that enhance students' learning experiences.

Engaging parents and communities in the education process is vital for fostering inclusivity. Schools should develop strategies to involve parents in their children's education, such as regular communication, parent-teacher conferences, and workshops on supporting learning at home. Building strong relationships between schools, families, and communities can create a supportive network that encourages students to stay in school and succeed academically. Community partnerships can also provide additional resources and support for students, such as tutoring programs, extracurricular activities, and mentorship opportunities.

Implementing early intervention programs can help identify and support students with learning and developmental needs at an early stage. Early intervention can prevent minor issues from becoming significant barriers to learning. Schools should use assessment tools to monitor students' progress and identify those who may need additional support. Providing timely interventions, such as tutoring, counseling, and specialized instruction, can help address students' needs and promote their academic success.

Finally, fostering a positive school climate is essential for promoting inclusive education. Schools should focus on creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where all students feel valued and motivated to learn. This includes implementing policies that promote positive behavior, respect, and collaboration among students and staff. Providing opportunities for student voice and leadership can empower students and foster a sense of ownership and commitment to their education.

### Enhancing Parental and Community Engagement

Enhancing parental and community engagement is a vital strategy for improving educational outcomes and reducing dropout rates. Active involvement of parents and the community in the educational process creates a supportive network that fosters student success and well-being.

Firstly, schools should develop strategies to actively involve parents in their children's education. Regular communication between schools and parents is essential. This can be achieved through various means, such as newsletters, emails, and parent-teacher conferences. These communications should provide updates on students' progress, upcoming events, and ways parents can support learning at home. Schools can also organize workshops and training sessions for parents, focusing on topics such as effective parenting strategies, understanding the curriculum, and supporting homework and study habits. By equipping parents with the knowledge and skills to support their children's education, schools can enhance parental involvement and engagement.

Creating opportunities for parents to participate in school activities is another important aspect. Schools can invite parents to volunteer in classrooms, assist with extracurricular activities, and participate in school governance through parent-teacher associations or school boards. Involving parents in decision-making processes can help ensure that school policies and practices reflect the needs and perspectives of the community. Additionally, schools can organize events such as family nights, cultural celebrations, and open houses to foster a sense of community and strengthen the relationship between parents and the school.

Building strong partnerships with community organizations is also crucial. Community organizations can provide valuable resources and support for students and their families. Schools can collaborate with local businesses, non-profits, and government agencies to offer programs and services that address the diverse

needs of students. For example, partnerships with health organizations can provide access to healthcare services, while collaborations with local businesses can offer internships and job shadowing opportunities for students. Community organizations can also support after-school programs, tutoring, and mentorship initiatives, providing additional learning opportunities and support for students.

Engaging the broader community in the education process can also enhance student outcomes. Schools can involve community members in various ways, such as inviting guest speakers, organizing community service projects, and creating opportunities for students to engage with local leaders and professionals. These interactions can help students develop a sense of civic responsibility and connect their learning to real-world experiences. Additionally, community involvement can provide students with role models and mentors who can offer guidance and support.

Creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment is essential for fostering parental and community engagement. Schools should strive to create an atmosphere where all parents and community members feel valued and respected. This includes being mindful of cultural differences and ensuring that communication is accessible to all families, regardless of language or literacy levels. Schools can provide translation services, bilingual materials, and culturally relevant programming to ensure that all families can participate fully in the school community.

Finally, schools should regularly evaluate their efforts to engage parents and the community. Collecting feedback from parents, students, and community members can help identify strengths and areas for improvement. Schools can use this feedback to refine their engagement strategies and ensure that they are meeting the needs of their community. Additionally, recognizing and celebrating the contributions of parents and community members can help sustain their involvement and commitment to the school.

### Implementing Early Warning Systems

Implementing early warning systems is a crucial strategy for identifying students at risk of dropping out and providing timely interventions to support their academic success. These systems use data-driven approaches to monitor various indicators of student performance and well-being, enabling schools to address potential issues before they escalate.

Firstly, early warning systems rely on the collection and analysis of data related to student attendance, academic performance, and behavior. Regular monitoring of these indicators can help identify patterns that may signal a student is at risk of disengagement or dropping out. For instance, frequent absences, declining grades, and behavioral issues are common warning signs. Schools should establish protocols for systematically collecting and analyzing this data, ensuring that it is accurate and up-to-date.

Once at-risk students are identified, schools can implement targeted interventions tailored to their specific needs. These interventions may include academic support, such as tutoring and remedial classes, to help students catch up on missed work and improve their understanding of key concepts. Additionally, providing counseling and mentoring services can address underlying personal or social issues that may be affecting a student's performance. Mentors can offer guidance, support, and encouragement, helping students navigate challenges and stay motivated.

Parental involvement is also a critical component of early warning systems. Schools should engage parents in the intervention process, keeping them informed about their child's progress and involving them in

developing and implementing support plans. Regular communication between schools and parents can help ensure that interventions are consistent and effective both at school and at home. Workshops and training sessions for parents can also equip them with strategies to support their child's education and well-being.

Collaboration among school staff is essential for the success of early warning systems. Teachers, counselors, and administrators should work together to share information and coordinate interventions. Regular meetings and case conferences can facilitate this collaboration, allowing staff to discuss at-risk students and develop comprehensive support plans. Additionally, schools can establish multidisciplinary teams that include educators, mental health professionals, and social workers to provide holistic support to students.

Technology plays a significant role in the implementation of early warning systems. Schools can use specialized software and data management systems to track and analyze student data efficiently. These tools can generate reports and alerts, helping staff quickly identify students who may need additional support. Integrating technology into early warning systems can streamline the process and ensure that interventions are timely and data-driven.

Regular evaluation and refinement of early warning systems are necessary to ensure their effectiveness. Schools should collect feedback from students, parents, and staff to assess the impact of interventions and identify areas for improvement. This feedback can inform adjustments to the system, making it more responsive to the needs of students. Additionally, schools should track long-term outcomes, such as graduation rates and post-secondary success, to evaluate the overall effectiveness of their early warning systems.

### **Fostering a Positive School Climate**

Fostering a positive school climate is essential for creating an environment where students feel safe, supported, and motivated to learn. A positive school climate not only enhances student engagement and academic achievement but also contributes to the overall well-being of both students and staff.

Creating a safe and supportive environment is fundamental. Schools should implement policies and practices that ensure the physical and emotional safety of all students. This includes establishing clear rules and expectations for behavior, as well as consistent and fair enforcement of these rules. Anti-bullying programs and initiatives that promote respect and kindness can help create a culture of safety and support. Additionally, schools should provide resources and support for students who may be experiencing personal or social challenges, such as counseling services and peer support programs.

Promoting positive relationships among students, staff, and the broader school community is another key aspect. Schools should encourage collaboration and communication, fostering a sense of belonging and community. This can be achieved through team-building activities, group projects, and opportunities for students to participate in school governance and decision-making. Positive relationships between teachers and students are particularly important, as they can significantly impact students' motivation and engagement. Teachers should strive to build trust and rapport with their students, showing genuine interest in their well-being and academic progress.

Encouraging student voice and leadership is also crucial for fostering a positive school climate. Schools should provide opportunities for students to express their opinions and take on leadership roles. This can include student councils, leadership programs, and forums where students can share their ideas and feedback. Empowering students to take an active role in their education and school community can enhance their sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to increased engagement and motivation.

Creating an inclusive and equitable environment is essential for ensuring that all students feel valued and respected. Schools should implement policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion, addressing any forms of discrimination or bias. This includes providing support for students with diverse backgrounds and needs, such as those with disabilities, from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds, or from marginalized communities. Inclusive education practices, such as differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching, can help ensure that all students have access to quality education and opportunities for success.

Promoting positive behavior and social-emotional learning is another important component. Schools should implement programs and curricula that teach students important social and emotional skills, such as empathy, self-regulation, and conflict resolution. These skills can help students build positive relationships, manage stress, and navigate challenges effectively. Additionally, recognizing and celebrating positive behavior can reinforce these skills and create a culture of respect and kindness. Schools can use various strategies, such as positive reinforcement, awards, and recognition programs, to acknowledge and reward students' positive contributions.

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