European Commission

PATHWAYS TO SCHOOL SUCCESS



STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

ACCOMPANYING THE COMMISSION PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON PATHWAYS TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

European Education Area

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STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

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About this document

This **staff working document is intended to accompany and support the Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation Pathways to School Success, which will repeal and replace the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving.** The staff working document sets out in more detail and depth the concepts put forward in the Commission proposal by providing research evidence, findings from consultation activities, good practice examples and other information as a basis for both the text of the proposed Recommendation and its accompanying actions. This document is also intended as a practical guide/handbook to help policy makers and stakeholders to fully understand issues surrounding school success and to support positive change across systems and across Europe.

Chapter 1 provides an **introduction to the topic**, outlining a vision for achieving inclusive school success (success for all, regardless of their personal characteristics[1], family, cultural or socio-economic background), describing the reasons, scope and wider policy context for the Recommendation.

Chapter 2 presents in more detail the **concepts of early leaving from education and training and of underachievement** and the circumstances contributing to their persistence in European education systems. Understanding these is key to understanding the need for a more holistic, multidimensional and systemic approach to school success.

Chapter 3 gives an **overview of the main achievements obtained at EU level** through policy cooperation and Member States' measures/reforms in the area of early leaving from education and training. Chapter 4 describes the **main remaining challenges in the areas where specific policy efforts have been made** at EU and national level and introduces **new challenges** which have emerged in recent years and affect school success for all, but particularly more disadvantaged learners. It is based on research and evidence from studies and evaluations of past efforts.

Chapter 5 then outlines **key measures to address these challenges and promote better educational outcomes**. It describes key learnings and more detailed recommendations on what is needed with regard to learners, school leaders, teachers and trainers, parents and families, institutions and systems.

Chapter 6 sets out a number of **existing EU initiatives**, frameworks and tools that can inspire and help affect change at school, at regional, national and EU-level and **support the implementation of the Recommendation.**

Findings and suggestions in this document are underpinned by a strong research base, but also by input received from European ministry representatives, non-governmental organisations, social partners, teachers, students, youth representatives and other stakeholders and experts in the field, obtained through a number of consultation activities, including a 14 week open public consultation. They are also based on conclusions of extensive work carried out at European and national level. Annex I provides the link to the Open Public Consultation synopsis report.

Annex II consists of a glossary of certain important concepts for the purpose of this document.

Annex III lists all sources and input referred to throughout the document.

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[1] Personal characteristics include gender, racial or ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief,

Part 1

Introduction



1. Introduction

1.1 What is Pathways to School Success?

Educational outcomes, in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes developed during schooling, are strong predictors of a balanced, healthy and successful adult life and a key condition for social fairness, democracy and prosperity. Measured in terms of 'educational achievements' and 'educational attainments' (see below), they lay are fundamental for laying the foundations for adult life. The acquisition of basic skills (literacy, mathematics and science) is essential for students' academic and personal development, while the skills and competences gained in upper secondary education are increasingly seen as the minimum credentials for employment or the basis further learning and a fulfilling life. However, even today not all young European have equal opportunities to benefit from education. Socio-economic patterns and stratification exert a strong influence on the educational experiences of individuals; students from disadvantaged backgrounds are overrepresented among underachievers and are more likely to leave education and training without an upper secondary qualification.

Promoting better educational outcomes for all, irrespective of personal characteristics, family, cultural and socio-economic background, etc., through the fostering of inclusive and supportive learning environments is key to building more equitable and flourishing societies and economies. This is fully in line with Principle 1 of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**[2] and lays at the heart of the **Commission Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025**[3].

Tackling underachievement in basic skills and early leaving from education and training (ELET) have been EU political and strategic priorities for years and are recognised as an integral part of the political agenda to ensure good quality and more inclusive education, where all children and young people have equal opportunities to benefit from education.

In particular, since the adoption in 2011 of the **Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving**[4], extensive work has been conducted at European level and by Member States on this issue. In the attempt to promote a whole-school approach to counter early leaving from education and training[5], transformation has been encouraged within educational institutions and policies. **The reduction in the number of early leavers from education and training in the EU has been considerable**, which points towards the potential of EU-level cooperation and Member States' capacity to affect real change in education systems through targeted policy reforms and measures.

Nevertheless, despite sustained efforts and considerable improvements in regards to ELET in the last 15 years, **ELET rates are still higher than what would be acceptable** for European countries. Moreover, significant differences still exist across countries and inequalities persist

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2 Principle 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights reads: "Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market", https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en.

3 COM(2020)625 final

4 OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1–6

5 Shortly after the adoption of the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, the previously used concept of early school leaving (ESL) was slowly phased out and was substituted with the new and more inclusive concept of early leaving from education and training (ELET), which encompasses a broader group of learners, including those who take part in VET.

among specific population groups (e.g. third-country migrants and persons with migrant background, Roma, young men, persons with disabilities, learners living in rural and outermost areas). Today, **early leavers still represent 9.9% of young people in the EU and only 84.3% of young people have completed upper secondary education**[6]**.**

At the same time, although efforts were made to also reduce underachievement in basic skills[7], the results of the OECD's (Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 2018 actually revealed a **deteriorating trend in the performance in basic skills in 2009-2018**. Today still **one in five 15-year-old Europeans** cannot perform basic tasks in **reading, maths or science.** What is more, the results of the 2018 International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) [8] also show that **a fifth of young people in the EU do not possess basic digital skills**.

The socio-economic background of a learner and their family continues to be the strongest determinant of educational outcomes**.** Pupils with a disadvantaged background are much more likely to have poor education outcomes than their peers who have parents with higher salaries and/or a higher educational attainment. This points to a persistent risk of intergenerational transmission of disadvantage and reduced upwards social mobility.

Looking towards the future, the **Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)[9] features ELET and underachievement prominently and has set new EU-Level targets for 2030**: the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%, the share of low-achieving eighth -graders in computer and information literacy less than 15%, and the share of early leavers from education and training less than 9[10].

Lessons learnt from the past and recent political commitments point towards the **need for renewed and sustained action at EU and national level towards promoting school success for all learners** and to achieve these EU-level targets. Past efforts also confirm that ELET and underachievement are multi-faceted and complex issues that **cannot be solved separately or without a comprehensive and holistic approach to success.** This means that other emerging challenges must also be addressed. Among these challenges, there is well-being. The results of PISA 2018 revealed shortcomings in the education systems which may have a strong influence on educational outcomes: **pupils' sense of belonging at school is declining and bullying/cyberbullying is widespread**. Mental health in children and young people has become a major issue in Europe, with around 20% of children and adolescents experiencing mental health problems during their school years, in particular anxiety and depression[11].

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6 The data source is Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey.

7 Basic skills are to be understood according to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures 15 year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. Underachievers are therefore those 15-year-old pupils, still in education, who fail to reach OECD PISA proficiency level 2, which is considered to be the minimum level necessary to participate successfully in society

8 https://www.iea.nl/studies/iea/icils/2018

9 OJ C 66, 26.2.2021

10 This EU-level target is accompanied by an upper secondary completion indicator, which measures the share of the young population aged between 20 and 24 years with, at least, an upper secondary qualification (ISCED level 3-8), thus successful completion of formal education (ISCED level 3-8), through data made available by Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey.

11 WHO Regional Office for Europe, (2018), *Adolescent mental health in the European Region, Factsheet for World Mental Health Day 2018,* Copenhagen.

Research has also underlined that school bullying has devastating impacts on pupils' health and academic achievements. All this, of course, has serious consequences for students' development and their educational performance; it increases the risk of students leaving school prematurely and reduces their potential to live fulfilling lives. Again, the link between poverty and increased risk of mental health difficulties, disorders and suicide is well-recognised.

The **COVID-19 crisis** has made it even more urgent to address these challenges. Socio-economically marginalised children who already had lower than average achievements before the pandemic, are those that were likely to have suffered most during the lockdowns. Moreover, children and young people with no or limited access to relevant and quality learning resources and school-based support structures, with difficult home/family situations, or with pre-existing mental health difficulties or special educational needs, have also been affected disproportionately. At the same time, an increase in mental health difficulties has been observed, particularly amongst those already at risk[12]. A number of studies actually suggest that this crisis and the prolonged physical school closures have hindered the learning progression and increased the likelihood of at-risk for learners at risk of dropping out from school and eventually, drop out[13]. As a result, there are fears that **the share of underperforming students in Europe might have risen considerably during the pandemic**, especially among those that come from more disadvantaged backgrounds[14]**.** Similarly, the rate of early leavers from education and training is expected to increase in the coming years, even though this will only be reflected in statistics in a few years.

Analysis of these long-term and more recent trends and challenges, coupled with new insights from research, findings from peer learning and cooperation between Member States, and a detailed assessment of the policies adopted at European and national level in particular to reduce early school leaving[15], have highlighted **gaps and areas in which new and strengthened interventions are needed**. In simple terms, it is not enough to ensure that young people remain in education if, they do not acquire the level of basic skills and key competences necessary to thrive in work and in life. It is also not enough to retain young people in school if the school environment is not safe and supportive enough, since this can even have detrimental effects on their mental health and well-being and ultimately on educational outcomes.

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12 Cowie H, Myers C-A, (2020), "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of children and young people", *Child Soc. 2021*, 35:62–74.

13 European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Vuorikari, R., Velicu, A., Chaudron, S., Cachia, R.Di Gioia, R., (2020), *How families handled emergency remote schooling during the time of Covid lockdown in spring 2020: Summary of key findings from families with children in 11 European countries,* EUR 30425 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. For an estimation of learning time lost in Italy, France and Germany, see: European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Di Pietro, G., Biagi, F., Dinis Mota Da Costa, P., Karpinski, Z. and Mazza, J. (2020), *The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets*, EUR 30275 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

14 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET-EENEE Report, Koehler, C., Psacharopoulos, G., and Van der Graaf, L., (2022), *The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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

It is in this context that **Pathways for School Success emerges as a key initiative of the European Education Area** action plan I[16]. The initiative calls for a renewed and strengthened commitment towards promoting more inclusive education and better educational outcomes for all children and young people, taking into account their diverse situations and stories, and developing more inclusive, caring and supportive learning environments. Building on the experience of the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, the new initiative combines novelty with continuity, proposing new solutions as well as consolidating and updating measures which have proved successful.

What is new in Pathways to School Success?

First of all, as implied by the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving[17] focused only on one of two targets agreed in the EU strategic framework for cooperation in education and training. Given the persistent challenges in performance in the OECD's PISA surveys, it is time to address both the reduction of early leaving from education and training, and underachievement in basic skills, and in particular the strong impact of socio-economic background on education outcomes, in a renewed Council recommendation and the work following from that.

Secondly, we need to draw lessons from the implementation of the 2011 Recommendation. One of the points to be addressed is that policies on reducing ELET, have often taken a rather individualistic and deficit view of students at risk[18]. Quite often, while educational institutions and policymakers alike, whilst they verbally recognise the complexity of factors leading to ELET, they end up disregarding institutional and systemic flaws at the root of disengagement. As a result, **measures designed to tackle ELET often focus too much on learners' supposed deficits** and how these could be corrected, **and not enough on the changes that educational systems and institutions must make** in order to provide an education that inspires, motivates and encourages young people to reach their full potential. More attention must be paid **to what needs to be done at the institutional and systemic level to achieve school success for all**.

Thirdly, we see a shift from the traditional focus which is overwhelmingly on academic performance, to a more holistic view of education, acknowledging that children and adolescents need a balanced set of cognitive, social and emotional competences to achieve positive outcomes in school and in life more generally. Research and empirical evidence[19] has shown that learning is a relational and emotional process impacting academic achievement. Research has also shown that better academic results and a positive school climate for all students can be achieved without any adaptation or adjustment "downwards"[20]. **Hence the need to address 'school success' in a systemic way, including – along with academic**

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16 https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/#infographic-main

17 OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, p. 1–6

18 Nada, C. I., Santos, S. A., Macedo, E., & Araújo, H. C. (2020). *Can mainstream and alternative education learn from each other? An analysis of measures against school dropout and early school leaving in Portugal*. Educational Review, *72*(3), 365-385.

19 Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D. and Schellinger, K.B. (2011). *The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions*. Child Development, 82(1), 405–432;

20 Lieberman, M.D. (2013). *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*. New York: Crown Publishers; Liu, J.J.W., Ein, N., Gervasio, J., Battaion, M., Reed, M. and Vickers, K. (2020). *Comprehensive meta-analysis of resilience interventions*. Clinical Psychology Review, 82(September), 101919.

attainment and achievement, well-being, bullying prevention and promotion of social and emotional education.

As a consequence, Pathways to School Success is concerned not only with reacting to problems such as underachievement or ELET, but also with **preventing** them, by promoting positive change at system-level and combining universal, targeted and individualised measures to promote success for all learners. The initiative sees three intertwined conditions - **engagement**, **achievement** and **well-being at school –** which, when improved simultaneously, **promote better educational outcomes for all children and young people and also create favourable conditions for those in disadvantaged situations**, thus increasing their chances of succeeding in education and in life.

Figure 1. The three core issues tackled by 'pathways to school success'



Source: European Commission (2021), DG EAC internal elaboration

This approach is supported by an **inclusive, learner-centred and participatory vision of education**, which considers that education should allow all children and young people to achieve their full potential, irrespective of gender, racial or ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation or religion or belief, or migrant background or their personal, family or socio-economic situation. Countries should provide good quality education to all in mainstream settings with special attention paid to learners at risk of exclusion and underachievement, by actively seeking out to support learners and responding flexibly to their circumstances and needs, including through individualised approaches, targeted support and cooperation with the families and local communities"[21]. There is evidence of the positive impact on learning outcomes of adopting an inclusive approach in supporting those students who have traditionally been excluded from the classroom.

The proposals stresses that inclusiveness can be achieved through a **whole-system, whole-school approach**[22], which the Council endorsed in its 2015 Conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school[23]. A 'whole school approach' is an ecological

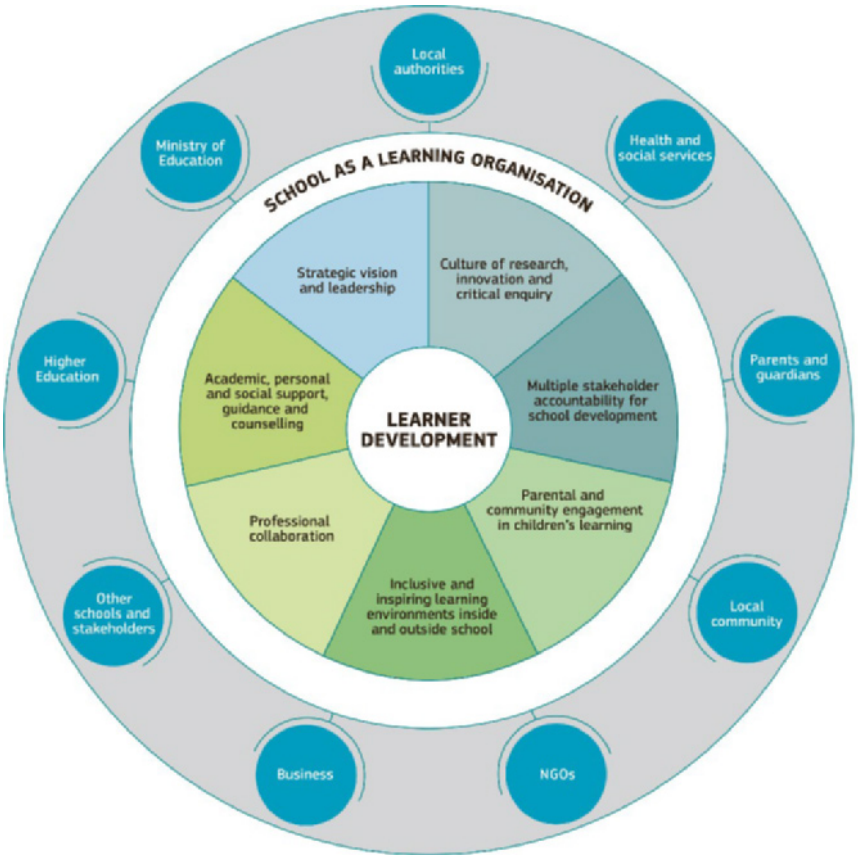
[21] Further guidance for fostering equity and inclusiveness in education and training has been set out in *Elements of a policy framework*, produced by the ET2020 Working Group on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination through Education 2016-18.

[22] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2015), *A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving – policy messages,* final report of the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Schools, . Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/early-school-leaving-group2015-policy-messages_en.pdf

[23] OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 36-40.

way of viewing a school[24], which acknowledges the role, relationships and interactions between a whole range of players (schools, families, communities, authorities, etc.) that can have an impact on the individual. The school is seen as a multidimensional and interactive system that can learn and change; an open learning hub which provides support to its neighbourhood and receives support from the community.

Figure 2. The school as a learning organisation



Source: ET 2020 Working Group Schools[25]

In a whole school approach to school success all members of the school community (school leaders, middle management, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families, and the local community) feel responsible and play an active role in tackling educational disadvantage and preventing underachievement and drop-out. The entire school community engages in **a cohesive, collective and collaborative action, based on multi-disciplinarity** and aimed at supporting each learner in the most appropriate way. It also implies a **cross-sectoral approach and stronger cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders** (social services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists, career guidance specialists, local authorities, NGOs, business, unions, volunteers, etc.) and the community at large, to deal with complex issues that schools do not (and cannot) have the relevant expertise for.

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[24] The underlying model is that which is presented in Bronfenbrenner, U., (1979), *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design.* Harvard University Press. His ecological model of development takes account of development in a range of different contexts and does not only focus on the individual characteristics of the child or young person.

[25] https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/governance-of-school-edu.htm

1.2 Key definitions and measurement

For the purpose of the present document, we propose a set of operational definitions and measurement strategies, **which are set out in the glossary** (Annex II). Some of the most important are outlined below.

Educational outcomes: attainment and achievement

The literature uses educational attainment and educational achievement as proxies to measure educational outcomes. Educational **attainment refers to the successful completion of specific education levels**, for example primary, lower or upper secondary education. In this definition, it is assumed that completion of a specific education level goes together with the acquisition of specific education level related competences[26]. The EU indicator on ELET clearly refers to a measure of educational attainment, since it measures the proportion of 18–24-year-olds with, at most, lower secondary educational attainment (i.e. UNESCO ISCED 0-2 levels) who are no longer in formal or non-formal education and training.

While the focus on educational attainment is helpful for understanding how children and adults have progressed in their country's specific education system, it is only partially helpful in understanding individuals' actual knowledge and skills. Therefore, any focus on children's learning progress or **achievement,** should also focus on their actual functional literacy,, i.e. their reading, writing and numeracy abilities. The most known cross-national educational achievement survey, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their **reading, mathematics and science knowledge** and skills to meet real-life challenges. PISA's measurement of **basic skills** has been used for the EU benchmark on underachievement under the ET 2020 strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.. It is the basis of the EU-level target on underachievement in basic skills established by the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030). In this context, underachievers are those 15-year-old pupils, still in education, who fail to reach OECD PISA proficiency Level 2, which is considered to be the minimum level necessary to participate successfully in society.

Well-being and mental health promotion in schools

Students' well-being can be defined as a state of overall mental and physical health, strength, resilience and fitness that allows them to function well at school and in their personal lives. International research[27] shows that the school environment is a fundamental determinant of good or poor mental health in children and adolescents. The World Health Organization

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[26] Countries' education systems differ in terms of what is required to complete a specific education level. For example, in European countries the duration for completing primary education ranges between 4 and 6 years of schooling, which is why the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designed the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which, while having some limitations, allows educational attainment outcomes to be compared across countries. See: UNESCO (2012), *International Standard Classification of Education – ISCED 2011*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

[27] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Simões, C., Caravita, S., Cefai, C., (2021), *A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU: analytical report*.

defines good mental health as a state of well-being, the realisation of one's own abilities and the ability to cope with the normal stresses of life[28]. A sense of well-being includes having a positive sense of identity and an ability to manage thoughts and emotions, to build social relationships, and to acquire an education that allows active citizenship as an adult.

The concepts of well-being, mental health and other interrelated concepts used in this document (such as social and emotional learning, bullying, school climate, etc.) are explained in the Glossary (Annex II). This document is based on a conceptual framework put forward in the 2021 report from the Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training (NESET) on "A systemic, whole school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU"[29].

Concerning data, the actual measurement of well-being is a challenge[30]. Comparability of cross-country data requires not only international surveys asking the same question in several countries, but also selecting the most 'unbiased' indicators, i.e. those that are more independent from country-specific cultural contexts[31]. Much of the data on well-being reported in this document come from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for 2018 and in particular from Volume III: What school life means for students' lives[32]. The OECD has developed a specific framework to analyse student well-being[33] and school climate which includes five dimensions: cognitive, psychological, physical, social and material. The main indicators refer to: students' life satisfaction and meaning in life, students' feelings, students' self-efficacy, fear of failure, and growth mind set. Indicators for school climate refer to student behaviour (bullying, disciplinary climate, truancy and lateness), teaching practices, teachers' enthusiasm and school community (student cooperation and competition, sense of belonging at school and parental involvement in school activities).

Key takeaway

- Reducing **underachievement in basic skills** and **early leaving from education and training** have been and continue to be key targets of European cooperation in education and training.
- Extensive work has already taken place at European and national level to address early leaving from education and training. Lessons learnt from past activities and new findings from research point to the **need for renewed and sustained action at EU and national level towards promoting school success for all**.
- Some **gaps and areas to be further addressed** have been identified: develop a more systemic approach, addressing in a coherent way all dimensions that can have an

[28] WHO, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, (2004), *Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice: Summary Report*. France.

[29] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Simões, C., Caravita, S., Cefai, C., (2021), *A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU: analytical report*.

[30] Selwyn, J. and Wood, M. (2015), *Measuring Well-Being: A Literature Review*. University of Bristol.

[31] Life satisfaction is a clear example of an indicator potentially suffering from severe cultural biases, which makes it unsuitable for international analyses. OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*. OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 36.

[32] OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives,* OECD Publishing, Paris

[33] Borgonovi, F. and Pál, J (2016), *A framework for the analysis of student well-being in the PISA 2015 study: Being 15 in 2015*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 140, OECD Publishing, Paris.

impact on the quality of learners' educational experience, including well-being at school; focus more on prevention and intervention; combine universal measures with more targeted interventions for groups more at risks; further promote cooperation and systematic dialogue with all relevant stakeholders at all levels.

- The new initiative 'Pathways to School Success' relies on a **broad and inclusive** notion of school success and proposes to address it in a **systematic and holistic** way.

Part 2

Understanding underachievement and early leaving from education and training



2. Understanding underachievement and early leaving from education and training

There is not one reason behind underperformance nor a single factor which can explain why a young person leaves education prematurely. Underachievement and early leaving from education and training are multi-faceted and complex issues, with multiple drivers which often interact with each other. The two phenomena are frequently intertwined: early leaving is the result of a process of progressive disengagement from education, often associated with mediocre educational results, whose roots may lie in early years.

Research has widely explored the academic success of pupils and paid particular attention to factors that can contribute to poor academic performance and ELET[34]. Many of these are linked to the effects of wider societal factors, such as socio-economic background, migrant status, parents' educational level, etc. It is widely acknowledged that both issues are most often the result of a **combination of individual, family-related, educational, social and economic factors**, strictly interdependent and leading to situations of cumulative disadvantage. Their triggers are not purely educational, however certain features of the education systems (such as limited access to quality early childhood education and care, early tracking, segregation, grade repetition, etc.)[35] can further aggravate their incidence, with a particularly negative impact on those belonging to more disadvantaged groups. People at risk, notably those of lower socio-economic status, often suffer from multiple disadvantages and are affected by a complex mix of the dimensions identified above.

This section provides an insight into factors that contribute to the educational success of children and young people and help understand the need for a comprehensive and systemic approach to school success and inclusion[36].

2.1 Individual factors

The academic literature offers a range of explanations on education al success which relate to the situation of the persons concerned, in particular to the role of socio-economic and migration background, gender, disability, family background, educational expectations, and peer groups.

Socio-economic background seems to be a fundamental element influencing underachievement[37]. Pupils with a low socio-economic background tend to be slower in

[34] For an overview of factors contributing to early school leaving see: Van der Graaf, A., Vroonhof, P., Roullis, G., and Velli, F., (2019), *Research for CULT Committee – How to tackle early school leaving in the EU.* European Parliament, Brussels; Cedefop (2016), *Tackling early leaving: putting VET centre stage. Volume I. Investigating causes and extent,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[35] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2020), *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[36] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2015), *Tackling early leaving from education and training in Europe: strategies, policies and measures,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[37] Volante, L., Schnepf S., Jerrim J. and Klinger D. eds, (2019), *Socio-economic Inequality and Student Outcomes: Cross-national Trends, Policies and Practices.* London, Springer; Lavrijsen, J, Nicaise, I.,

developing academic and linguistic skills. They display learning-related behaviour problems more often, show lower motivation towards learning, leave education and training earlier, and leave with lower qualifications and insufficient competences for full participation in society[38]. This is confirmed in a more recent study[39] which used international survey data on student performance and characteristics (PISA, PIRLS[40] and TIMSS[41]), and statistical data collected by Eurostat. The study finds a **significant impact of socio-economic disadvantage on educational outcomes in most European education systems.**

Socio-economic status also strongly affects pupils' **educational expectations**. In many EU Member States, more than 80% of pupils from advantaged families expect to complete tertiary education, while fewer than 50% of disadvantaged pupils do[42]. Reduced educational expectations and aspirations influence educational choices, can translate into a low level of actual achievements and increase the risk of intergenerational transmission of poverty. **Motivation and engagement** are increasingly seen as essential factors for pupils' educational success. Research indicates that positive academic self-expectations among high-risk students (low socio-economic status immigrants) are associated with higher achievement in mathematics[43].

Pupils from more socio-economically disadvantaged families may also experience a **lack of positive and supportive home environment**[44], with reduced access to educational resources at home (e.g. no quiet space for studying and doing homework[45]) In addition, in today's increasingly digital society, the lack of access to a computer, ICT resources and internet at home also makes integration with peers and active participation in school much harder[46]. Low

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(2015), *Social Inequalities in Early School Leaving: The Role of Educational Institutions and the Socioeconomic Context,* European Education, 47:4, pp. 295-310.

38 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Budginaitė, I., Sternadel, D., Algirdas Spurga, S., et al., (2016), *Policies and practices for equality and inclusion in and through education: evidence and policy guidance from European research projects funded under FP6 and FP7,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; Lavrijsen, J, Nicaise, I., (2015) *Social Inequalities in Early School Leaving: The Role of Educational Institutions and the Socioeconomic Context.* European Education, 47:4, pp. 295-310.

39 European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

40 The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study. Available at: https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pirls/pirls2006.asp

41 The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study. Available at: https://nces.ed.gov/timss/.

42 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2019), *PISA 2018 and the EU: striving for social fairness through education,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

43 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Spence, C., Donlevy, V., Cutmore, M., et al., (2019), *Against the odds: academically resilient students with a migrant background and how they succeed: final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

44 Banerjee, P. A., (2016), *A systematic review of factors linked to poor academic performance of disadvantaged students in science and maths in schools*. Cogent Education, 3.

45 Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., Kelly, D. L., & Fishbein, B. (2020), *TIMSS 2019 International Results in Mathematics and Science.*

46 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Melstveit Roseme, M., Day, L., Fellows, T., et al., (2021), *Enhancing learning through digital tools and practices: how digital technology in compulsory education can help promote inclusion: final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

income may also be accompanied by higher level of parental stress, tensions and violence in the households which, in turn, negatively impacts educational achievement. Some research also shows that in households where both parents work, or in single parent households, children and young people may be asked to contribute to looking after other young (or elderly) family members, or need to contribute to the household finances by getting a job alongside to their studies[47]. Therefore, access to high-quality education is of great importance for disadvantaged children to break the cycle of low achievement and poverty and support measures

Migrant or refugee status or belonging to an ethnic minority are often associated with greater educational vulnerability. In fact, evidence shows that **socio-economic status or family background are more strongly associated to students' performance than migrant background**[48]. Language also plays an important role, as the knowledge of the host country language can help to reduce the educational gap between immigrant and native learners.

Parents and families play a key role as regards children's and young people's learning and well-being related outcomes. If parents' positive attitudes towards school and high educational expectations has an impact on pupils' motivation, parental education remains one of the most important predictors of educational outcomes: children whose parents have lower education attainment are themselves more likely to underachieve and less likely to progress further in education[49]. Abundant research confirms the importance of **parental involvement in education**[50] as a key factor for educational success. In addition to the well-recognised positive effect on learner's academic results[51], parental involvement has a widely documented impact on reducing school absenteeism, preventing school burnout, improved social skills, behaviour at school and positive relations with schoolmates[52]. Parents and families also play a

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47 Van der Graaf, A., Vroonhof, P., Roullis, G., and Velli, F., (2019), *Research for CULT Committee – How to tackle early school leaving in the EU.* European Parliament, Brussels.

48 European commission, Joint Research Centre, Hippe, R. and Jakubowski, M., (2018), *Immigrant background and expected early school leaving in Europe: evidence from PISA*. EUR 28866 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*. PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris.

49 European Commission, Joint Research Centre, d'Hombres, B., Neher F. (eds.), (2020), *Beyond averages - Fairness in an economy that works for people*. EUR 29995 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

50 *Parental involvement* is a broad term that encompasses various types of parental behaviours and practices that support school learning and the academic progress of their children. Parental involvement can be further categorised into *school-based* and *home-based* activities. School-based activities include attending teacher-parent meetings at which a student's progress is discussed; participating in local structures, such as committees that contribute to school governance; as well as volunteering and fundraising for extra-curricular activities and events. Home-based activities include communication between parents and children about their school progress, cultivating academic aspirations (both of these activities are defined as *academic socialisation*); providing an environment conducive to learning at home, helping with homework and following the child's overall learning progress. See European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Ad hoc report no. 1/2021, Alieva, A. (2021), *Parental involvement in formal education*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

51 Hill, N.E. & Tyson, D.F., (2009), *Parental involvement in middle school: a meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement*. Developmental Psychology, 45(3), 740–763; Castro, M., Expósito-Casas, E., López-Martín, E., Lizasoain, L., Navarro-Asencio, E. & Gaviria, J.L., (2015), *Parental involvement on student academic achievement: A meta-analysis*. Educational Research Review, 14, 33-46.

52 Virtanen, T.E., Lerkkanen, M.-K., Poikkeus A.-M. & Kuorelahti M., (2018), *Student Engagement and School Burnout in Finnish Lower-Secondary Schools: Latent Profile Analysis*. Scandinavian Journal of

key role as regards children and young people's well-being. Therefore, policies and targeted measures that support and guide parents with regard to their child's nutrition, physical fitness, mental health and resiliency, engagement in risky behaviour, and safe use of technology, will have a positive effect on the general well-being of learners and their educational outcomes. However, the relationship between schools, parents and families may be challenging. A recent report has identified the following barriers[53]:

- **Barriers linked to parental and family situations**. Parents' own past negative memories and experiences may lead to mistrust and overall feeling of uneasiness when confronted to their children education[54]. Insufficient knowledge of how the education system works, or a lack of language skills may be a heavy obstacle for migrant families (especially first-generation), or parents with a low level of education[55].
- **Education systems and potential systemic bias.** Despite the existence of institutional settings for parent-school cooperation, the actual inclusion of parents in decision-making processes may still be challenging, especially for families from more disadvantaged backgrounds, owing to inconsistencies in legislation, inadequate or insufficient communication between school and parents, poor parent-teacher relationship, inflexible scheduling at school and unpreparedness of recently graduated teachers[56].
- **Structural and socio-cultural determinants:** Time constraints linked to professional engagements of working parents, declining family support in childcare (mainly offered by grandparents), and growing reliance on childcare services may negatively impact participation to both home-based and school-based activities, particularly for single-parent families.

Parents of children with physical and learning disabilities also face very specific educational challenges, often linked to the exclusion of their children from mainstream education and the difficulty to mobilise adequate support around the child.

Educational Research, 62(4), 519-537; Wang, M. & Sheikh-Khalil S., (2014), *Does parental involvement matter for student achievement and mental health in high school?.* Child Development, 85(2), 610-625.

53 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Ad hoc report no. 1/2021, Alieva, A. (2021), *Parental involvement in formal education*.

54 Harris, A. & Goodall, J., (2008), *Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning*. Educational Research, 50(3), 277-289; Hedlin, M., (2019). '*They only see their own child*': an interview study of preschool teachers' perceptions about parents. Early Child Development and Care, 189(11), 1776-1785.

55 Parental stress and burnout are gaining attention in research, policy and the media, due to its potentially highly detrimental consequences on the well-being and safety of children; increased stress level of families during the lockdown period are also documented. See Calvano, C., Engelke, L., Di Bella, J., *et al.,* (2021), *Families in the COVID-19 pandemic: parental stress, parent mental health and the occurrence of adverse childhood experiences—results of a representative survey in Germany*, in *European Child Adolescent Psychiatry*, 2021 Mar 1; 1-13.

56 For example, inconsistencies in, or a lack of formalisation of parent-teacher/school cooperation in legislation and in national education policy, as well as a lack of clearly outlined modalities of cooperation that are regularly communicated and shared with parents, can amplify the risk of parents being excluded from participation, especially among vulnerable families. The study proposes the following categorisation of schools found in US literature: "Fortress school", "Come-if-we-call school", "Open-door school", and "Partnership school". See: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Ad hoc report no. 1/2021, Alieva, A. (2021), *Parental involvement in formal education*.

It is important to stress that parents and families are not all equally well equipped to adequately support their children through their academic journey, especially when it comes to more home-based, learner-centred approaches. Lower-educated parents, families with low socio-economic status, migrant families, and single-parent families may be less able to provide support for their children, such as helping with homework or offering advice on school matters[57]. While middle and upper-class families engage actively with their children's learning, families with a more disadvantaged background may lack knowledge and tools from the start; they may face lack of support from educators, not consider themselves valuable partners in the process, or lack sufficient confidence to engage. As a result, they are often perceived by schools as not interested in their children's educational experience and labelled "hard to reach". This is confirmed by recent studies[58] on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, showing that parental participation in home-schooling, learning time and the types of activities carried out during the lockdown periods in Europe in 2020 and during early 2021 was highly dependent on the socio-economic situations of parents and families.

Other aspects of a family background can also play a role. The **geographical location** of a student's family home can have an impact on the likelihood of leaving school of training earlier. This may relate to the quality of education in more rural and outermost areas, or to difficulties in reaching schools. Within urban areas, there can also be discrepancies between areas. Research demonstrates that within urban areas, early leaving from education and training rates tend to be higher in disadvantaged areas.

Gender plays a considerable part in underachievement. Though the difference is relatively small in mathematics and science, it remains sizeable in reading, where girls strongly outperform boys in many countries. Boys are also more likely to be early leavers from education and training compared to girls. The causes of boys' underperformance at school are multidimensional and often mutually reinforcing. Research shows that a range of factors are at play, ranging from: a) individual attitudes and behaviours, such as reading habits, attitudes towards school, externalization of issues, disruptive behaviours; b) family factors, including parents' socio-economic resources or the perpetuation of gender stereotypes at home; c) school environment and wider education system factors, such as bullying, peer culture and toxic masculinity, teacher interaction and engagement in class or stereotyping in textbooks; and d) societal factors, related to how the wider society reflects back its gender stereotypes into education systems[59].

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[57] Davis-Kean, P.E., (2005), 'The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child Achievement: The Indirect Role of Parental Expectations and the Home Environment'. Journal of Family Psychology, 19 (2), pp. 294-304.

[58] European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Carretero Gomez, S., Napierala, J., Bessios, A., Mägi, E., Pugacewicz, A., Ranieri, M., Triquet, K., Lombaerts, K., Robledo Bottcher, N., Montanari, M. and Gonzalez Vazquez, I., (2021), *What did we learn from schooling practices during the COVID-19 lockdown*. EUR 30559 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[59] There is an apparent contradiction between the well-known trend of boy's underachievement and remaining gender imbalances in terms of women's presence in the labour market, especially in STEM fields. In fact, evidence shows, for instance, that while boys' lower performance in school education translates into lower participation rates in higher education and lifelong learning, on average across the EU, men still hold a more favourable position on the labour market compared with women (e.g. the employment rate for men was 12% higher than for women in 2019, and women earn less than men, with gender employment gap as high as 11.7% in 2019). Tertiary education subject choices are also strongly influenced by social gender stereotypes, contributing to the ongoing masculinisation and feminisation of different professions and sectors. On the other hand, there is an important sub-group of men with low levels of education in low-paid and low-

Finally, access to inclusive, quality, accessible and mainstream education remains problematic for many children with **disabilities**[60]. Evidence shows significant gaps between the educational outcomes of learners with disabilities and those without disabilities. In 2018, 19.9% young people with disabilities left education and training prematurely, as compared to 10.6% for pupils without disabilities (2018 data)[61].

A key concept in relation to inclusive education is the **intersectionality**, in order to identify the interaction of multiple factors that lead to discriminatory processes in schools towards different student groups[62]. Intersectionality asserts that all aspects of one's identity need to be examined as simultaneously interacting with each other and affecting one's perception within a society. These identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities. Intersectionality asserts that to comprehend truly an individual's identity and experience, one first needs to recognize that each identity marker is connected with all other markers within that individual

2.2 Institutional factors

Institutional factors, such as the school structures, school environment and the role of teachers can also have a great impact when it comes to students' achievement and engagement at school.

A study, which analyses PISA data from 2000-2009 in 42 countries, shows that **increased school autonomy** positively affects students and contributes to their greater academic achievements[63]. These effects seem to be the most pronounced when the increased autonomy affects decision-making related to academic content. Schools' advanced knowledge on specific local contexts can help them develop more effective actions towards school success than those that could be developed centrally. Increased autonomy also allows the schools to decide how to target the problems they face in a more efficient way as they may know much better than the central authorities what measures could be most effective for their students and as they do not have to wait for approval from the central authorities, they can implement them in a timely manner[64].

The literature has long highlighted that the **quality of school life** plays a crucial role in improving students' motivation and efforts, their emotional, behavioural and cognitive

skilled work. See: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Donlevy, V., Day, L., et al., (2021), *Study on gender behaviour and its impact on education outcomes (with a special focus on the performance of boys and young men in education),* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

60 The EU follows the approach of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, according to which persons with disabilities "include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others".

61 SWD/2021/62 final

62 ?" Bešić, E. (2020), 'Intersectionality: A pathway towards inclusive education?', *Prospects*, Vol. 49, pp. 111–122, doi: 10.1007/s11125-020-09461-6.

63 Hanushek, E. A., Link, S., & Woessmann, L., (2013), "Does school autonomy make sense everywhere? Panel estimates from PISA", in *Journal of Development Economics, 104*, 212-232.

64 At the same time, evidence suggests that a very high degree of school autonomy may lead to differences in the quality of provision and possibly create a hierarchy among schools, which can have a negative effect on equity. See: European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

engagement, performance and achievement. Students' perceptions on the quality of school life "may influence powerfully their motivation to learn, improve their behaviour and self-regulation, develop identity and positive attitudes towards success, enhance empathy and respect for diversity, contribute to better engagement in learning, improve academic performance and achievement, and prevent dropout" [65]. School and classroom practices, teachers' and staff's attitudes and teaching and learning styles affect children and young people's motivation and commitment towards education: an unfavourable school or classroom climate, a lack of learner centeredness, curricula and assessment that are perceived as irrelevant, inadequate awareness of educational disadvantage, violence and bullying, poor teachers-pupils relationships are some of the factors that can contribute to disengagement from education.

PISA 2018 shows that **school's positive learning environment** is directly connected to educational success[66]. Cohesion and cooperation among pupils, positive relationships with peers as well as with teaching and non-teaching staff have been shown to be particularly influential in impacting pupils' educational success. While a poor school climate can be linked to disruptive behaviour such as bullying, truancy and lateness, it can also be determined by institutional aspects such as the overall preparedness of teachers, pupils-teacher ratio, school governance and ethos, etc. This is confirmed by a recent study which, building on PISA framework on well-being, offers a structured model for measuring the quality of school life, focusing on students' sense of opportunity and achievement, the quality of their interpersonal relationships with their teachers, their exposure to a safe and cooperative learning, and their overall sense of belonging to the school and school community. The study shows that the quality of school life has a positive impact on academic results of EU students even after controlling for student gender and socio-economic background[67].

A key element which can affect school climate and lead to poor education outcomes is **bullying**. Bullying is correlated with lower scores on all PISA subjects[68]. Peer culture can also have a strong influence: a school-oriented, study-oriented culture as opposed to a "non-effort" culture will favour better performances; a recent study shows that boys feel more pressure than girls to conform to dominant peer cultures, and that girls more easily conform to a school-oriented study-oriented culture[69]. The importance of well-being at school and quality of school life is further explained in chapter 4.3.1.

Teachers are also key actors for pupils' educational success. They provide them with advice as well as emotional support for attaining positive academic outcomes. In this context, migrant students or students from disadvantaged backgrounds may suffer in particular as their personal background and experiences are less likely to align with those of a teacher. Students

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65 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Hristova, A., Tosheva, E., (2021) *Quality of School Life and Student Outcomes in Europe*. The report defines quality of school life (QSL) as reflecting "the attitudinal or emotional climate at school in terms of students' perceptions of well-being and satisfaction, determined by school-related factors and their educational experiences.

66 OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*. OECD Publishing, Paris.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Donlevy, V., Day, L., et al., (2021), Study on *gender behaviour and its impact on education outcomes (with a special focus on the performance of boys and young men in education),* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; RESL.eu, (2018), *Attitudes of School Personnel*. University of Middlesex.

who do not feel listened to nor understood by teachers face higher chances of disengaging and leaving school prematurely. On the contrary, positive relation with a teacher can help academically at-risk students overcome feelings of alienation or disconnection[70]. Analysis on PISA data indicates that teachers providing support for academically at-risk students (in particular low socio-economic background migrants), such as help with their homework, were associated with higher achievement levels[71]. **Teaching and learning practices**, teachers' attitudes, motivation and enthusiasm, and teachers' support can thus strongly influence students' educational success. Learning approaches and practices where students have less opportunity to engage with their peers or teachers can lead to feelings of isolation and affect motivation[72].

2.3 Education system factors

Specific aspects of the education systems can also explain the educational success of pupils, or lack thereof.

Educational success can be heavily impacted by the availability of and access to high-quality **early childhood education and care (ECEC)**, school-starting age and the number of contact hours in primary school. Participation in high quality ECEC is associated with later educational success and prevention of early leaving from education and training[73]. However, the 2019 Education and Training Monitor[74] notes that the 92.8% participation rate in ECEC for the general population (age 3) decreases to 77.8% in the group of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion; and the gap is even greater for children aged from birth to two. Participation is also weaker amongst children with disabilities, migrant children or children with a migrant background or Roma children[75].

According to PISA 2018, countries with high levels of **grade repetition** generally show lower mean performance in PISA[76]. Grade repetition is likely to have a negative impact on pupils' performance (and behaviour) and is associated with drop-out rates[77]. Socio-economically

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70 Schnell, P., Keskiner, E. and Crul, M., (2013), *Success against the Odds. Educational Pathways of Disadvantaged Second-Generation Turks in France and the Netherlands*. Education Inquiry, 4 (1).

71 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Spence, C., Donlevy, V., Cutmore, M., et al., (2019), *Against the odds: academically resilient students with a migrant background and how they succeed: final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

72 Van der Graaf, A., Vroonhof, P., Roullis, G., and Velli, F., (2019), *Research for CULT Committee – How to tackle early school leaving in the EU,* European Parliament, Brussels.

73 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2014), *Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in preventing early school leaving (ESL): final report,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

74 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2019), *Education and training Monitor 2019: executive summary*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

75 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2021), *Toolkit for inclusive early childhood education and care: providing high quality education and care to all young children*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

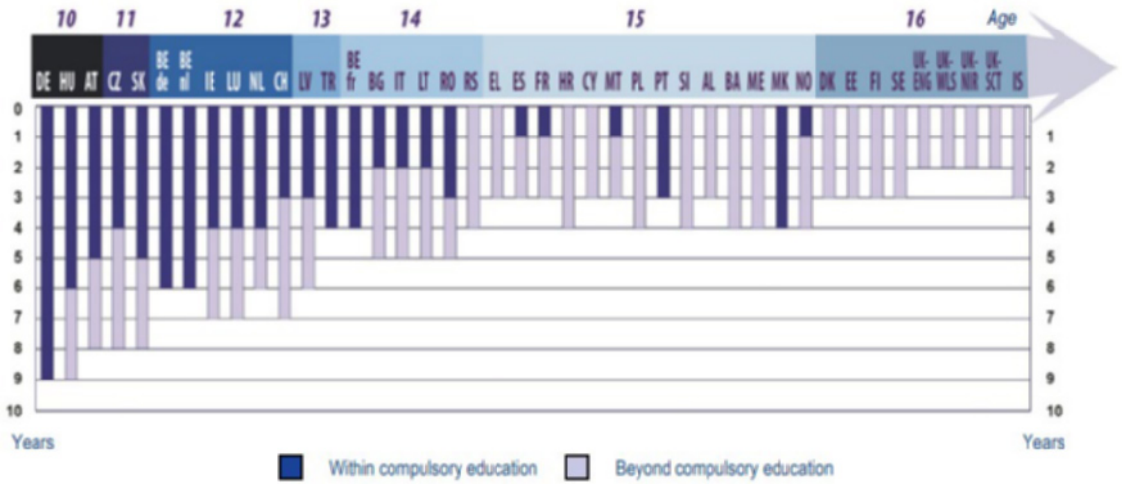
76 OECD (2020), PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 55.

77 European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

disadvantaged pupils are more likely to repeat a year then their affluent peers, leading to increased chances of becoming early leavers from education and training.

Early selection and **tracking** are also considered by many to have a negative impact, with a disproportionate effect on pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds. The earliest age at which students are assigned to tracks in the EU is 10, but more than half of the education systems start the process at or after 15. All education systems introduce some form of tracking by the age of 16 at the latest.

Figure 3. De facto starting ages of tracking and total years of schooling covered in a differentiated setting, 2018/19

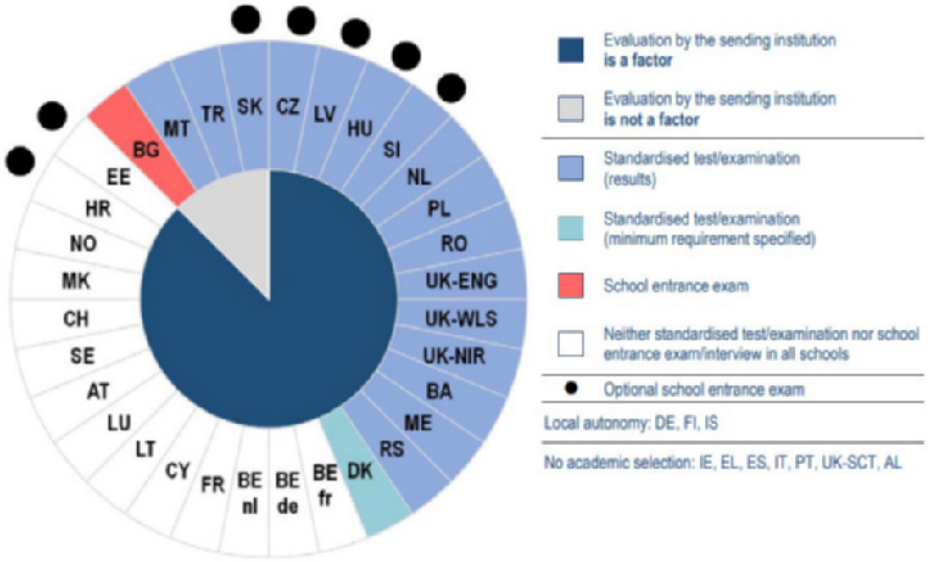


Source: Eurydice[78]

Many studies have found that the earlier tracking is introduced, the wider the gap between low and high performers gets, and the bigger the impact of socio-economic background on performance[79]. This is because early tracking magnifies early achievement, which is more influenced by socio-economic background than achievement in later years. Thus, there seems to be an adverse relationship between equity and the age at which students are channelled down different pathways. This is also related to the selection process on which the assigning of students to educational pathways is based.

[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

Figure 4. Evaluation of academic attainment in assigning students to higher level tracks, 2018/19



Source: Eurydice[80]

Almost all education systems rely on some form of performance-based selection when assigning students to different tracks. Although, in principle, performance based selection should not increase the impact of socio-economic background (because the more advantaged groups cannot gain access to the more academic tracks if they do not reach the required performance level), in systems where socio-economic inequality already exists in the lower levels of schooling, academic selectivity is likely to reinforce socio-economic differences[81].

The evidence is mixed regarding the link between **expenditure in education** and educational outcomes. Analyses have pointed out that countries with a comparable level of expenditure on education perform differently. Across the PISA rounds, no correlation appeared between cumulative expenditure per pupil and pupil performance among EU countries[82]. However, research shows that higher expenditure is associated with reduced education inequalities, even though the relationship is not linear. A recent study found that public funding is important for equity, especially in primary education; a higher public expenditure per pupil/student can reduce the student achievement differences between schools which, in turn, reduces the achievement gap between low- and high-achieving pupils/students in primary schools. In many countries, higher funding is provided for schools with more disadvantaged pupils. However, evidence suggests that while additional support for disadvantaged schools is important, it is not sufficient on its own to address educational inequalities. This is especially true in comparison with the impact of major system-level factors such as early tracking, grade repetition and selective admission to schools[83].

At the systemic level, **teacher shortages, insufficient** or **inadequate professional development opportunities** for teaching and non-teaching staff, the overall status of the

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2019), *PISA 2018 and the EU: striving for social fairness through education*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

83 Ibid.

teacher profession and the working conditions of teachers may have impact on the quality of teaching and ultimately on pupils' outcomes[84]. According to data from the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) of 2018, only one in five lower secondary teachers feel that their profession is valued by society. Moreover, according to the same survey, 37.8% of principals report shortage of teachers competent enough to teach pupils with special educational needs, and shortages of teachers capable of teaching in multilingual and multicultural settings (23,5%) or teaching students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes (24.2%). Moreover, due to the demographic structure of the European teaching force, waves of retirements in many countries will require massive recruitments of young teachers in the coming years.

Academic research finds that the '**socio-economic composition of schools**' can influence individual educational performance. Disadvantaged schools – those enrolling high proportions of students from low socio-economic backgrounds – generally have below average educational performance. They also often lack resources and face greater problems with discipline, which makes learning difficult. The concentration of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in disadvantaged schools may occur as a result of residential segregation, or it may also be the unintended result of school policies, such as school choice, admissions and tracking[85].

Finally, PISA 2018 shows that the difference in reading performance between pupils attending schools in cities and those enrolled in schools in **rural and outermost areas** is statistically significant and rather large in many Member States. In Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Portugal it even exceeds 100 PISA score points, corresponding to approximately 3-4 years of schooling. Schools in rural and outermost areas often struggle to provide quality education due to their geographical isolation and small size, which increases the risks of suffering from insufficient infrastructure, a limited educational offer and a lack of experienced teachers[86]. Learners living in rural and outermost areas are also more likely to leave school earlier than their peers living in a city or more urban areas[87]. Within cities, there can also be discrepancies between areas, with ELET rates higher in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods[88].

2.4 Other factors

National contextual factors, such as economic situation and labour market trends can also have an important impact, particularly when it comes to students in VET. The overall economic context may have an influence on students' behaviour, as an economically disadvantaged family situation may mean that they have to abandon their studies and find employment to sustain and support themselves and their families. On the other hand, some studies underline

[84] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Davydovskaia, O., De Coster, I., Vasiliou, N., et al., Birch, P.(ed.), (2021), *Teachers in Europe: careers, development and well-being*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[85] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[86] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2020), *Education and training monitor 2020: teaching and learning in a digital age*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[87] Nikolaou, S. M., Papa, M., & Gogou, L., (2018), "Early School Leaving in Greece and Europe and Educational Inequality: Actions and Policies against Educational and Social Exclusion", in *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*, 5(1):212-220.

[88] Van der Graaf, A., Vroonhof, P., Roullis, G., and Velli, F., (2019), *Research for CULT Committee – How to tackle early school leaving in the EU,* European Parliament, Brussels.

the influence of the 2007 economic crisis on ELET in southern European States such as Spain[89] or Portugal[90], where the labour market situation acted as a pull factor for reducing ELET rates during the crisis.

A 2016 Cedefop study[91] shows that an **insufficient supply of apprenticeship placements** is the most frequent factor among the education and training organisation factors stated among early leavers from VET. If young people are not able to find an apprenticeship, they are more likely to choose another VET pathway which may not be in line with their aspirations. This may later lead them to drop out. In some countries, not finding an apprenticeship placement which is statutory for completing VET pathways may even mean that they will not start training at all, or they will not be able toto complete the training, qualify and get their diploma.

In addition, the **attractiveness of the labour market**, especially for seasonal jobs and in the tourism sector, may lead young people to leaving education and training early, as they are more interested in directly starting a new job without finishing their studies. In contrast, the lack of positive prospects for finding a job after their studies may discourage young people to start VET in the first place, or continuing or finishing their studies ('discouraged student effect'). In opposition to this, the 'encouraged student effect' has a positive impact on students remaining in education and training. This effect is related to **labour market regulations** that require jobs to have specific certifications and wages for qualified workers differ significantly from those not qualified. This means that, to be able to obtain a job, young people need to graduate from VET, so that they have an incentive to successfully end their VET training.

Other factors leading to drop related to the labour market are **working conditions**, of which students become aware while being in their work-based learning. For example, the timing, shifts, physical and emotional requirements of these jobs may deter students from remaining in the training, as they do not correspond to their own desires and needs.

Finally, an additional societal factor identified in the literature is the **value placed on education**. In countries where the national appreciation for education and formal qualifications is higher, the levels of ELET tend to be lower. The reverse also holds true; when society demonstrates distrust or displeasure with the education system in a country, there is a higher likelihood of higher ELET rates[92]. In Greece for example, it has been noted that that the negative attitude to education in some communities or regions contributes to ELET[93].

The analysis above was largely echoed during the consultation activities supporting the preparation of the Commission proposal on Pathways to School Success. The following figure shows the five obstacles to school success considered to be the most pressing by all respondents.

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89 Serrano Martinez, L. and Soler Guillen, A., (2015), *La formación y el empleo de los jóvenes españoles. Trayectoria reciente y escenarios futuros*. Fundación BBVA. Informe 2015. Economía y Sociedad.

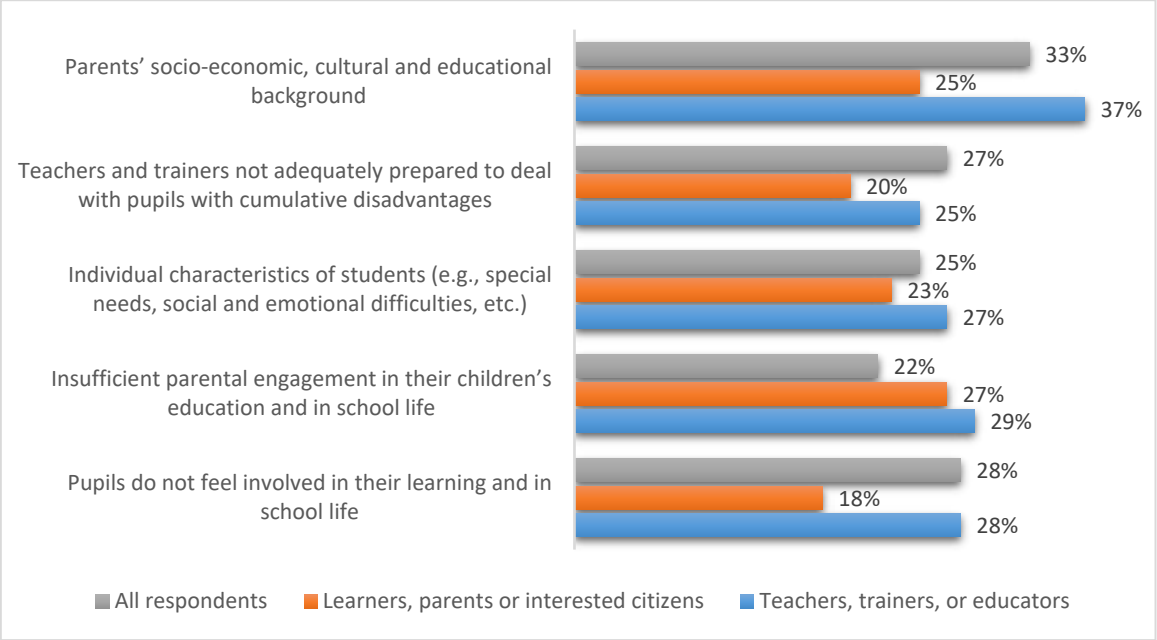
90 Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Oliveira, C., (2016), *Jovens no mercado de trabalho – Módulo ad hoc de 2016 do Inquérito ao Emprego.* INE 2016, p.1-21.

91 Cedefop (2016), *Tackling early leaving: putting VET centre stage. Volume I. Investigating causes and extent*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

92 Van der Graaf, A., Vroonhof, P., Roullis, G., and Velli, F., (2019), *Research for CULT Committee – How to tackle early school leaving in the EU,* European Parliament, Brussels.

93 Nikolaou, S. M., Papa, M., & Gogou, L., (2018), "Early School Leaving in Greece and Europe and Educational Inequality: Actions and Policies against Educational and Social Exclusion", in *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*, 5(1):212-220.

Figure 5. Top 5 obstacles to school success per respondent category



Source: Open Public Consultation synopsis report

2.5 Impact of underachievement and early leaving from education and training in society

Children's and young people's success in learning will significantly affect their future[94]. It is acknowledged that education plays a critical role in individual and societal prosperity and well-being, fosters economic growth and social cohesion, and is essential for personal development and welfare. In short, its benefits have multiple dimensions.

Investment in education provides substantial **long-term gains for individuals, public finances and the economy as a whole, as well as a number of important non-economic benefits**[95]. Looking at all the different policies in the past half-century, investment in education, along with health policy, is associated with the highest rate of return[96]. Conversely, **poor education**

[94] A more in-depth review of the importance of learning and later lifetime outcomes can be found in Granato, S., Havari, E. and Schnepf, S.V. (forthcoming 2022), "Learning and Human Development", in Choi, Álvaro (ed), *Economic foundations of education*, Bloomsbury.

[95] An overview of economic and non-economic benefits can, be found in European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, Algan, Y., Brunello, G., Goreichy, E., et al., (2021), *Boosting social and economic resilience in Europe by investing in education*. ENEE Analytical Report n.42, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, Münich D. and Psacharopoulos G., (2018), *Education externalities – What they are and what we know*. EENEE Analytical Report n. 34, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, Wossmann, L., (2014), *The economic case for education*. EENEE Analytical Report n. 20, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[96] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, Algan, Y., Brunello, G., Goreichy, E., et al.,

outcomes can have serious consequences on the individual, on societies and on economies. Low-achievers are less likely to continue education, i.e. both higher education and lifelong learning, and more likely to leave school prematurely. Given the rapidly evolving skills requirements, the lack of upper secondary qualifications or non-participation in further learning can seriously put people at a disadvantage in terms of employability: it can create barriers to accessing the labour market and contribute to a more limited choice of work. Moreover, research consistently shows that individuals with lower educational attainment[97] will have considerably reduced earnings in the future, meaning that the individual will most likely end up in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, with huge consequences for their overall quality of life as well as that of their families, and higher risk of falling into poverty[98].

Research demonstrates that previous policies prolonging compulsory schooling age have improved children's future earning potential considerably[99]. In addition, even among children with equal educational attainment, i.e. schooling level, it is those with poorer achievements who will face lower incomes in their adult lives[100]. This indicates the importance of reaching higher learning outcomes in school besides simply completing compulsory schooling for progressing more successfully through adulthood.

As a consequence of the above-mentioned relationship between education and labour market access, underachievement and early leaving from education and training may thus hinder upwards social mobility and favour the intergenerational transmission of poverty (in 2019 50.8 % of children whose parents' level of education was low were at risk of poverty compared with 7.5 % of children whose parents' level of education was high[101]) and of educational poverty (among the socio-economic factors which can influence ELET, low parental education has the strongest impact[102]). In addition, people with low levels of education tend to contribute less in terms of tax revenues and rely more often on social assistance as compared to higher qualified people; they also tend to make less efficient consumer and financial choices.

The expected benefits of education go beyond earnings and employment, however, by affecting, for instance, **health and longevity, happiness and pro-environmental behaviour**. Less educated people tend to take less informed decisions affecting marriage, parenthood and retirement. Low levels of education are also linked to higher risks of committing crimes[103], to

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(2021), *Boosting social and economic resilience in Europe by investing in education*. ENEE Analytical Report n. 42, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

97 Oreopoulos, P. (2006), "The compelling effects of compulsory schooling: evidence from Canada", *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 39(1): 22–52.

98 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, Wossmann, L., (2014), *The economic case for education*. EENEE Analytical Report n. 20, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

99 Angrist, Joshua D., Krueger, A., (2001), "Instrumental variables and the search for identification: from supply and demand to natural experiments", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 15: 69–85; Meghir, Costas, Palme M., (2005), "Educational reform, ability, and family background", *American Economic Review*, vol. 95(1), 414–424.

100 Brunello, G., Fort, M., Weber, G., (2009), "Changes in compulsory schooling, education, and the distribution of wages in Europe", *The Economic Journal*, 119: 516–539.

101 Eurostat. Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion

102 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2020), *Education and training monitor 2020: teaching and learning in a digital age*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

103 Heckman, James, Karapakula, (2019), *Intergenerational and intragenerational externalities of the Perry Preschool Project*. NBER Working Paper n. 25889.

lower health, more risky behaviour, less use of preventive services and overall lower well-being[104]. Empirical research also documents that better educational outcomes enhance social cohesion and mutual trust within society, as well as democratic and civic engagement[105].

The **gender dimension** is worth mentioning: boys' lower performance in education translates into lower participation rates in higher education (the gap in 2019 was 10% in favour of girls, and this continues to grow[106]) and lifelong learning (where the gap has been widening in the last three years). A number of more 'indirect' implications were also explored and some evidence was found showing that men with incomplete studies are at higher risk of ill-health and suicide. Men with lower levels of education may also have more difficulties forming stable intimate relationships, leading to demographic implications[107].

In addition, research shows that there may be a link between reading difficulties and antisocial behaviour, and that having a low level of education is one of the risk factors for joining extremist movements and criminal activities.

Research indicates that essential learning gaps can develop as early as during primary or even pre-school aged children[108] and that it is most effective and efficient to combat inequalities in learning outcomes as early as possible, indicating the need to invest more funding into pre and primary schooling[109].

The **cost of early leaving from education and training** has been investigated by several studies[110]. Even though the measurement and size of the losses or gains found in these studies

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104 Brunello, G. Fort, M., Schneeweis, N, Winter-Ebner, R., (2016), "The Causal Effect of Education on Health: What is the Role of Health Behaviors?" vol. 25, issue 3, 314-336; Feinstein, L., Sabates, R., Tashweka, M. A., Sorhaindo, A. and Hammond, C., (2006), *What are the effects of education on health? Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement*. Proceedings of the Copenhagen Symposium.

105 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, Münich D. and Psacharopoulos G., (2018), *Education externalities – What they are and what we know*. EENEE Analytical Report n. 34, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg;

106 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Donlevy, V., Day, L., et al., (2021), *Study on gender behaviour and its impact on education outcomes (with a special focus on the performance of boys and young men in education),* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

107 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Donlevy, V., Day, L., et al., (2021), *Study on gender behaviour and its impact on education outcomes (with a special focus on the performance of boys and young men in education),* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

108 Almond, Douglas, Currie, (2011), *"Human capital development before age five"*, in Ashenfelter, Card (eds), *Handbook of Labor Economics*. Vol. 4B, Elsevier, pp. 1 315–1 486; Garcia E., Weiss, E., (2017), *Education inequalities at the school starting gate, Gaps, trends, and strategies to address them*. Economic Policy Institute.; Duckworth, K. et al., (2009), *Influences and leverage on low levels of attainment: a review of literature and policy initiatives*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report 31, London, DCSF.

109 Heckman, James, (2006), "Skill formation and the economics of investing in disadvantaged children", *Science*, 312(5782): 1 900–1 902. On efficiency and effectiveness, see: European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Agasisti, T., Hippe, R. and G. Munda, (2017), *Efficiency of investment in compulsory education: empirical analyses in Europe*. EUR 28607 EN. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

110 For an overview of the existing empirical literature on the costs of early school leaving see: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, Brunello, G., De Paola, M., (2013), *The costs of early*

vary because of differences in the database and the methodology used, all studies agree that potential costs sum up to several hundred thousand EUR per early leaver:

- The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions study, using the 2005 to 2011 European Survey on Income and Living Conditions estimated that the resource costs of being a dropout to $7,000 per year in EU26[111].
- A study on nine European countries found that an additional year of schooling increases the lifetime earnings by 5% to 20% depending on the modelling specification[112].
- A study covering Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Italy and the Netherlands, found that one additional year of schooling decreases the probability of being in poor health by 7 percentage points on average[113].

A recent report has provided an analysis of the **economic benefits of educational improvement** for each EU country[114]. The analysis focuses on the relationship between educational achievement, as measured by scores in PISA, and the long-run growth of nations. Building on prior research that shows the strong historical relationship of growth and educational achievement, it projects the aggregate economic results of improvements in achievement. Four scenarios are identified:

- The first scenario considers **an increase in student achievement of 25 PISA points**. This reform, shown possible by several EU countries (Portugal, Poland, and Germany), would add €71 trillion to EU GDP over the status quo. This amounts to an aggregate EU gain of almost 3½ times current levels of GDP and an average GDP that is seven percent higher for the remainder of the century.
- The second scenario brings **all low-performing students up to basic skill requirements** (PISA level 2). Achieving this goal would boost average GDP over the 21st Century by nearly four percent. The more limited goal to reduce low achievement to 15 percent by country would have only about one-seventh the impact.
- The third scenario matches the goal of ET 2020 calling for **reductions in early leaving from education and training**. Enhancing the skills of all potential early leavers from education and training is projected to raise average GDP by 0.7 percent. Just reaching the specific ET 2020 goal of no more than 10 percent early leavers in each EU country has significantly less impact (0.1 percent).

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school leaving in Europe. EENEE Analytical Report n. 17, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.; European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, Psacharopoulos, G. (2019), "Developments in the rates of early leavers from education and training (ELET)", EENEE Ad-hoc question.

111 EFILWC, (2012), *NEETs young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe*, Dublin, Ireland: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

112 Brunello G, Weber G, Weiss C, (2012a), *Books are Forever: Early Life Conditions, Education and Lifetime Income*. IZA Discussion Papers 6386.

113 Brunello G, Fort M, Weber G, Weiss C, (2013), *Testing the Internal Validity of Compulsory School Reforms as Instrument for Years of Schooling.* IZA Discussion Papers 7533.

114 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Expert Network on Economics of Education, Hanushek, E. A., Woessmann, L., (2019), *The Economic Benefits of Improving Educational Achievement in the European Union: An Update and Extension*. EENEE Analytical Report n. 39, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

- The fourth scenario focuses on **top performers**, ensuring that at least 15 percent of students in each country achieve PISA level 5. While having minimal effect on currently high-achieving countries, average GDP across EU countries would be 0.5 percent higher over the remainder of the century.

The analysis above points towards the need to intervene as early as possible, and to combat inequalities at the beginning or even before children's school career[115], especially considering the impact of educational achievement on social and economic progress. Children's underachievement has long lasting and serious consequences on their adult lives and on society at large. Consequently, it is vital to improve learning outcomes, not leaving any student behind.

[115] Heckman, J. (2006), *Skill formation and the economics of investing in disadvantaged children*, Science, 312(5782): 1 900–1 902.

Part 3

Main achievements and lessons learned from the past



3. Main achievements and lessons learned from the past

3.1 Main achievements

Reducing early leaving from education and training has been a key target of the European cooperation in education and training and extensive work has taken place at the European level and in Member States. This section briefly summarises the actions conducted so far, main achievements and lessons learnt from twenty years of policy cooperation at European level.

At a European level, the need to reduce early leaving from education and training was first highlighted in the Europe 2020 strategy[116]. One of its five headline targets was to reduce the early school leaving rate (later renamed early leaving from education and training) to less than 10% by 2020. As a follow up, the Commission adopted, on 31 January 2011, a set of policy documents on early school leaving[117], leading to the approval by the Council of a **Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving**. The Recommendation aims to provide policy impetus and instruments to encourage efforts at a national level across the EU in moving towards the 10% headline target. It invites Member States to implement evidence-based and comprehensive strategies, involving all relevant policy sectors and addressing all levels of education and training (including VET)[118]. The Annex to the Recommendation sets out a framework for comprehensive policies, based on strong monitoring and data collection, which includes a set of measures under three key pillars which should all be addressed in national strategies: prevention, intervention and compensation. To support the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation, the Commission also put in place a number of policy tools, including:

- *Support for peer learning and policy cooperation between Member States*. After a first Thematic Working Group on early school leaving (2011-2013)[119], the focus on early leaving from education and training was integrated into the mandate of the ET 2020 Working Group on Schools (2014-2015)[120], which worked on 'whole school approaches to reduce early school leaving', publishing key messages[121]. Subsequent mandates of the Working Group on Schools (2016-2018, 2018-2020) have not placed an explicit focus on early leaving from education and training while continuing to look at it from different angles[122].

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116 COM/2010/2020 final

117 These comprised: a Commission Communication, Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda (COM (2011)18), a Staff Working Paper Reducing early school leaving, and the proposal for the Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving.

118 The Council Recommendations includes recommendations to the Member States on implementing a policy framework, and invites the Commission to support national policy efforts through a variety of actions at EU level including monitoring, facilitating the exchange of good practice, launching comparative studies and research, and integrating measures aimed at tackling ELET in all relevant EU policies addressing children and young people.

119 European Commission (2013), Final report of the Thematic Working Group on ELET, November 2013, https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/early-school-leaving-group2013-report_en.pdf

120 https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-working-groups_en

121 European Commission (2015), *A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving – policy messages*, final report of the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Schools

122 On the other hand, the focus of the 2016-2018 Working Group on common values and inclusion was on fostering equity and inclusiveness in education and training by addressing the needs of all

- A *strong emphasis on early leaving from education and training within EU programmes*, in particular Erasmus+ and the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF, whose Regulation included the introduction of *ex ante* conditionalities requiring countries to demonstrate the existence of comprehensive strategy and tracking mechanisms as a precondition for the use of ESF for activities to tackle ELET)[123];

- *Regular monitoring and reporting* by the Commission on progress towards achieving the target, in particular through the European Semester and the ET2020 reporting mechanisms[124];

- *Investment in research and development*[125];

- *Development of dedicated online tools*: the 'European Toolkit for Schools: promoting inclusive education and tackling early school leaving'[126] and Cedefop's 'VET toolkit for tackling early leaving'[127]; both platforms provide a wealth of resources and instruments to support policy makers and practitioners.

Other important initiatives from the EU include the 2015 Council conclusions on early school leaving[128]; the 2018 Council Recommendation on common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching[129], which aims at strengthening inclusive education, to promote quality education for all pupils and the European dimension of teaching, so children also learn about Europe's common heritage and diversity and get an understanding of the functioning of the EU; the 2019 Council Recommendations on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems[130] to lay the foundations for later success in life; and the Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience[131], which emphases that VET has a key role in preventing and counteracting early leaving from education and training and promoting equality of opportunities by providing programmes that are inclusive and accessible for vulnerable

learners, promoting understanding and ownership of shared values, and enhancing the acquisition of social and civic competences.

123 European Commission (2016), The implementation of the provisions in relation to the *ex-ante* conditionalities during the programming phase of the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/how/studies_integration/impl_exante_esif_report_en.pdf

124 Since 2011 the Commission has been publishing the Education and Training Monitor. The Monitor gathers yearly a wide range of evidence on the evolution of national education and training systems across the European Union. It measures countries' progress towards EU-level targets of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) (until 2020, the ET2020 objectives). The Monitor analyses key education challenges and recent policy developments at the EU and national levels. It highlights policy measures that can make European education systems more responsive to societal and labour market needs.

125 Within the EU Framework Programme 7, the RESL.eu project provided new evidence for what constitutes effective prevention, intervention and compensation measures in an EU context (https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/rELET-eu/).

126 http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools.htm

127 www.cedefop.europa.eu/TEL-toolkit

128 OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 36–40

129 OJ C 195, 7.6.2018, p. 1–5

130 OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4–14

131 OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1–16

groups[132]. Other relevant ongoing initiatives and their synergies with Pathways to School Success are described in chapter 5.

In July 2019, the Commission published an **independent assessment of the implementation of the Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving**[133]. The study covered 37 EU and non EU countries. It addressed:

- situation and trends at European and national level and the national arrangements for monitoring and evaluating early leaving from education and training;
- overview and examples of the measures implemented at national level to reduce early leaving from education and training, in terms of prevention, intervention and compensation measures, as well as presenting evidence of effectiveness;
- an analysis of the role and influence of the 2011 Council Recommendation and associated EU policy tools in terms of their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability;
- need for future EU level support, and the nature of the support envisaged.

The assessment draws an overall positive picture regarding the impact and influence of the 2011 Council Recommendation and associated EU policy. It provides a strong indication that the 2011 Recommendation is regarded as relevant and effective across Europe, especially within the EU27, but also to a varying degree among Candidate and EFTA countries.

The Recommendation has interacted in complex ways with national and EU policies and programmes, including those in the fields of youth, labour markets, and lifelong learning; nonetheless, its 'footprint' can be traced in educational strategies and policies initiated across Europe during the period from 2011-2018. The Recommendation and associated tools clearly shone a light on the need to tackle early leaving from education and training across Europe, keeping this issue high in the policy agenda at EU and national level and providing a policy

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[132] Other initiatives include: supporting peer reviews of ELET policies in several EU countries including Germany, Bulgaria, Portugal and Malta; developing indicators (European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Noorani S. (2017), *Structural Indicators on Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg of the European Union, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/788496); disseminating information; supporting studies (e.g. European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Nevala, A-M., Hawley, J., et.al. (2011), *Reducing early school leaving in the EU*, IP/B/CULT/IC/2010-079, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2011/460048/IPOL-CULT_ET%282011%29460048%28SUM01%29_EN.pdf), on second chance education (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Redgrave, K., Day, L., Mozuraityte, N., McCoshan, A. (2014), *Preventing early school leaving in Europe – Lessons learnt from second chance education*, doi: 10.2766/61898, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg) and on early school leaving (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Dumcius, R. et.al. (2014), *Study on the effective use of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in preventing early school leaving (ESL): final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/81384); supporting EPALE's (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe) focus on early school leavers and second chance education (e.g. https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/themes/second-chance-schools)

[133] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Donlevy, V., Day, L., Andriescu, M., Downes, P., (2019), *Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving: final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

framework for doing so, which countries and key stakeholders have globally responded to, albeit to different degrees and in differing manners. Although disentangling the formal and informal patterns of influence into national policy remains a complex endeavour, the assessment has identified a range of national strategies and policies, as well as EU-funded projects and research, which either directly or broadly mirror the policy framework in the Recommendation.

The most direct evidence of influence of the 2011 Council Recommendation was for the **eight Member States, which adopted a comprehensive strategy**[134] **for tackling early school leaving after 2011**, reflecting the three pillars from the EU policy framework: Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Bulgaria, France, Greece, Hungary, Malta, and Romania. The Netherlands also has a strategy but this pre-dates the 2011 watershed. A further set of countries (CY, ES, FI, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, PT, SE, SK, as well as NO, RS and TR) took the decision not to adopt a separate ESL strategy, but have nonetheless **transposed elements of the EU policy framework within a wider set of policy measures**. This approach has typically evolved over a number of years, with the 2011 Recommendation providing one of a number of reference points for policy formulation, alongside national statistical reviews and research, and other EU or international sources such as OECD reports and study visits. A more limited influence of the Council Recommendation was found in the remaining countries, principally due either to having historically relatively low ESL rates (such as in Czech Republic and Slovenia), or long-standing early school leaving frameworks or policy measures in place before 2011 (such as in Denmark, Finland, Poland, and the UK). Nonetheless, the diffusion of the EU policy framework, and changing circumstances at a country level have seen elements of the 2011 Recommendation adopted more widely in recent years even in these countries.

The accompanying set of EU policy tools have procured complementary effects and supported the sustainability of policy attention and efforts, through the provision of peer learning opportunities and structured dialogue, funding actions and research, disseminating research and good practice examples. In particular:

- The *EU monitoring and reporting mechanisms* were widely considered to be an effective tool, in particular for raising the profile and visibility of early leaving from education and training at national level. The monitoring of the headline target and the European Semester reports and country-specific recommendations have also often carried weight with national policymakers and provided challenge where efforts had stalled, as well as validating progress.

- *Targeted funding mechanisms* also appear to have played a valuable role in supporting national level implementation. There was considerable evidence that the ESIF ex-ante conditionalities played an important part in levering action at a national level, although challenges were raised in some cases around sustained engagement. EU-funded programmes have also been widely utilised to address national priorities around ELET. However, the separation of EU programmes from national policy-making and budgets was highlighted as a challenge in some countries, as well as the

[134] The assessment defines a national strategy "as a guiding document with clear objectives that explicitly aims to reduce the early school leaving rate and has a comprehensive approach to doing so, with a combination of prevention, intervention and compensation measures and organisations responsible for tackling them, as well as a clear division of responsibilities". The extent to which such a strategy might be considered 'comprehensive' is also discussed in the assessment.

risk of substitution effects, and limitations posed by having too many disparate projects.

- As to the effectiveness of the *policy cooperation at EU level,* the ET 2020 Working Groups were recognised to be a valuable forum for dialogue between national stakeholders and the European Commission, though their value was principally thought to reside in providing access to good practice examples. The greatest benefits were often reported from smaller scale and more direct exchanges between country representatives, e.g. peer learning activities. The written outputs and European Toolkit for Schools were generally well regarded and used.

The evidence for the *efficiency* of the 2011 Recommendation and policy tools is complex to ascertain with any strong degree of certainty. As budgets for early leaving from education and training were usually neither ring-fenced nor extensively monitored, the causal chains between financial inputs, activities, outputs nor results are difficult to define.

As regards the concrete policies and measures developed at national level, the assessment portrays a picture and assess the coverage of prevention, intervention and compensation measures. The following heat maps provides a visual representation of measures covered at a country level across Europe.

In terms of **prevention policies**, although country coverage was overall quite comprehensive, most countries have some gaps, and around a quarter have more marked gaps. In particular, the implementation of systemic or infrastructural policies such as anti-segregation policies appears to be less prevalent than measures implemented within schools or other institutions. There is evidence of relatively good coverage of 'targeted prevention' measures, oriented towards specific groups at risk, such as Roma, migrant children or children with migrant background, families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

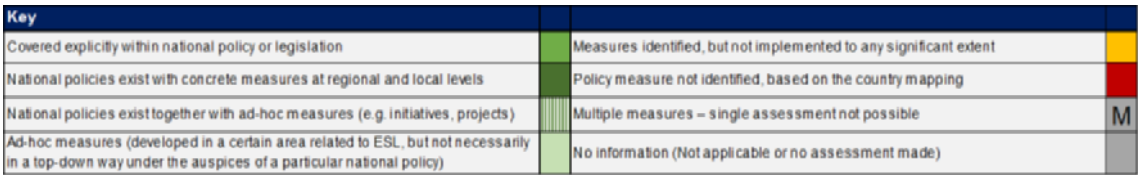
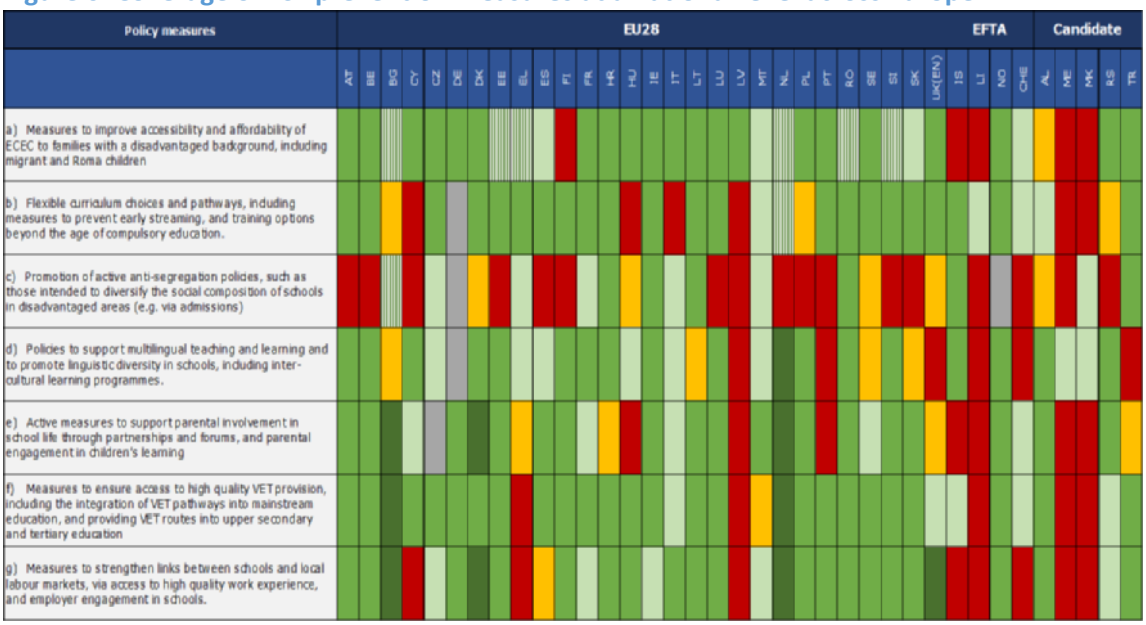


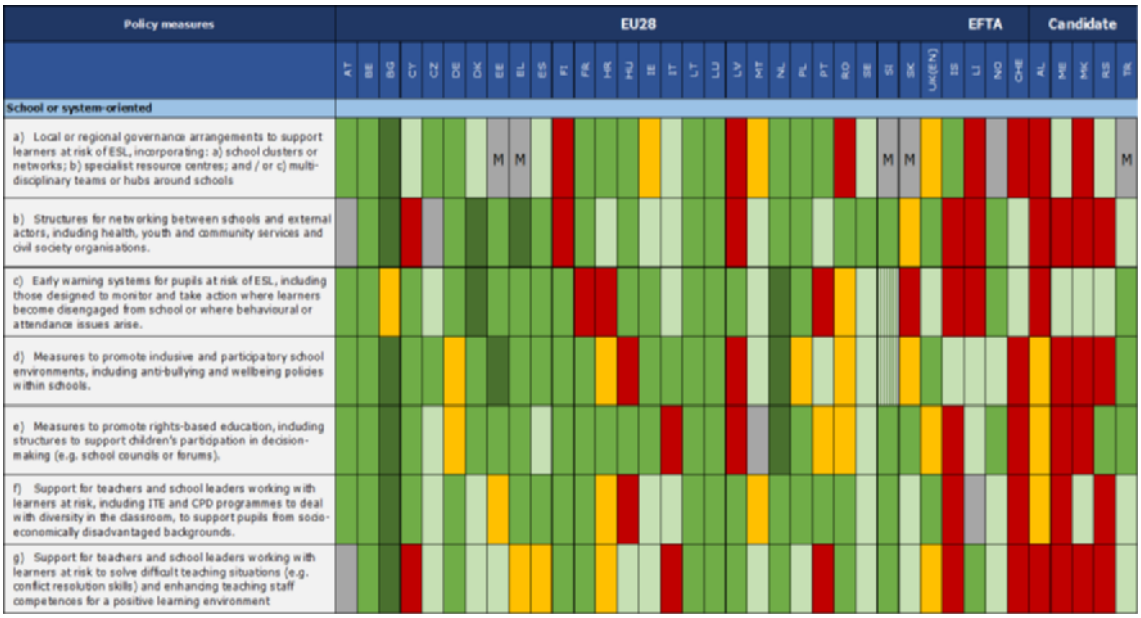
Figure 6. Coverage of ESL prevention measures at a national level across Europe



Source: Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation

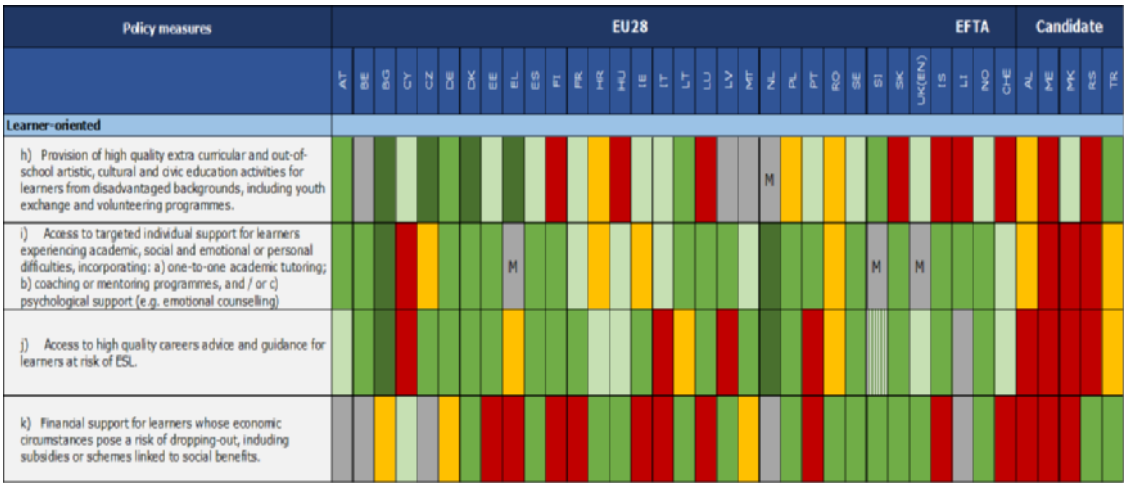
There is relatively good national coverage of **intervention policies**, although with more variation than for prevention policies. Coverage is highest for intervention measures focused on in-school support, including targeted support for learners experiencing personal, social or academic difficulties, as well as CPD for teachers and school leaders to help them to manage diversity and to support learners. Over half of the countries also implement measures to promote inclusive school environments, anti-bullying and wellbeing, as well as policies to engage child participation in decision-making. However, there are some clear gaps in certain countries for these two groups of measures. Implementation of infrastructural measures shows the weakest overall coverage.

Figure 7. Intervention measures 1: school and system oriented



Source: Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation

Figure 8. Intervention measures 2: learner-oriented

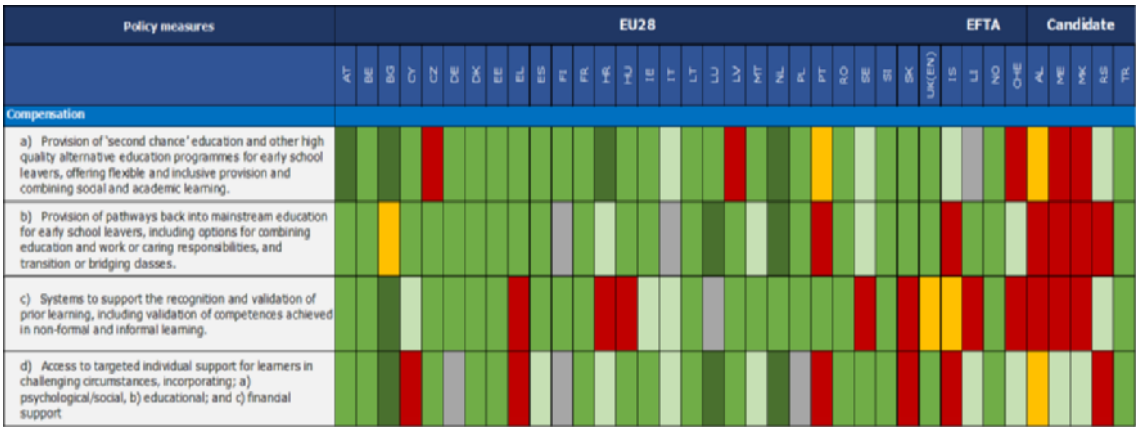


Source: Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation

Compensation measures are comparatively well-established across Europe. Most countries offer 'second chance' education schemes of some type, often combined with careers

guidance, financial, childcare and/or psychological support. The weakest overall focus in this area is on systems to support the recognition and validation of prior learning.

Figure 9: Compensation measures



Source: Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation

The assessment concludes that **the implementation of the Council Recommendation has contributed to a decrease of the rate of early leavers from education and training at EU level** and encouraged transformation within educational institutions and policies, while highlighting **a number of gaps and areas in which further work is needed**.

3.2 Gaps and needs in policy development and implementation

Policy cooperation at EU level has mainly focused on combating ELET. However, despite the successful experience of the 2011 Council Recommendation, statistics confirm that ELET remains a policy challenge in a number of countries and regions. In the meantime, the overall performance in basic skills has further deteriorated, while policy work at EU level to address this challenge has been much less effective and systematic. For both challenges, significant differences exist across and within countries and certain groups seem more affected than others (e.g. young men, migrants, learners living in rural areas and outermost regions).

The independent assessment of the 2011 Council Recommendation has clearly indicated that more needs to be done to tackle the multi-faceted and evolving range of challenges contributing to early leaving from education and training, with underperformance in basic skills being closely related to it. It has identified a number of gaps and weaknesses, calling for a renewed action at EU level and hinting at the importance of **addressing all aspects that can have an impact on the educational experience of children and young people in a systematic way**. In particular, the following areas for further work, at EU and national level, have been identified:

- **Further strengthen an integrated approach**: despite the 2011 Recommendation calling for comprehensive policies, many countries still adopt fragmented, project-based and short-term policies, addressing only one issue, or not taking into account all school dimensions, thus resulting in a limited impact. More systemic and comprehensive policies are often missing, and consistency between actions is often challenging.
- **Ensure that strategies or measures include a stronger focus on prevention and intervention**, as well as compensation: Tackling problems proactively before – or as soon as - warning signs appear prevents them from escalating and can avoid complete

disengagement from the education system, a stage after which it is much harder to incentivise learners to return to school. Not only are prevention policies more effective, but all learners can also benefit from them (not only those more at risk of disengagement or educational failure). In addition, many countries need to put greater focus on implementing **anti-segregation policies** in schools and educational districts, as well as developing more flexible and individualised pathways and measures for well-being.

- **Enhance data collection and monitoring systems**: Many countries have statistics on ELET, but lack systems to identify those who should be reached out to with additional information and offers for a solution to their situation. In addition, monitoring and evaluation of policies and interventions are not sufficiently developed and there is limited evidence about their effectiveness and efficiency, which reduces the learning process both within the country and across countries;
- In addition to more universal measures, which all learners can benefit from, **develop policies to address the specific needs of particular groups**, such as learners with disabilities, those with special educational needs, High Learning Potential or Gifted children, people from ethnic minorities, with a migrant background and newly arrived migrants, including refugees those living in rural or deprived areas and outermost regions, among others. There also needs to be a stronger focus on those with complex needs (e.g. children with mental health issues, children in care, children with a parent in prison or children who are victims or witnesses of domestic abuse).
- In order to tackle the multi-faceted dimensions of the problem, **facilitate and promote more strategic and cross-sectoral cooperation between policymakers across different policy fields** (e.g. education, health, employment, housing, justice, inclusion of migrants, non-discrimination) and levels of government (European, national, regional and local), as well systematic dialogue with **stakeholders**.
- **Address the well-being dimension in schools**. National, regional and local strategies and measures aimed at tackling educational failure should be further integrated with those on well-being, in particular **those targeting bullying as well as mental health, including trauma and adverse childhood experiences**.
- To be effective, policy-making must **include the voices of other key stakeholders** such as marginalised parents, learners, migrant communities and non-governmental organisations.
- Further develop a systemic approach to promoting educational success at school level ('**whole school approach**'), based on cross-sectoral partnership in and around schools and multi-disciplinarity. A whole community, area-based approach merits further consideration at policy, practitioner and research level, including promising examples of community lifelong learning centres combined with multidisciplinary teams as one stop shops.
- More – and more effective – systems need to be established to facilitate the successful integration of **newly-arrived migrants,** including refugees. There is an insufficient policy focus on the validation/recognition of prior learning, which has a particular impact for migrants.
- There is considerable scope to **better strategically exploit the potential of the arts and culture,** as well as other extra-curricular activities, such as sports and access to nature.
- Understanding and addressing underachievement and early leaving from education and training – and social inclusion more widely – should be **at the heart of the preparation of**

school leaders, teachers, trainers and other educational staff, including through increased recognition of the importance of practical placements of student teachers in areas of high poverty, as well as teachers' and trainers' relational and cultural skills (e.g. conflict resolution skills, integrating diverse, culturally meaningful materials in teachers, etc.). More focus should also be placed on the dimensions of teaching which can influence ELET in continuing professional development, including raising awareness of the phenomenon and spotting warning signs.

- More research on early leaving from education and training is needed, with research networks on the topics building on university connections.

The assessment also provides recommendations for EU level tools:

- To keep the policy spotlight on tackling early leaving from education and training, there is a need to renew and relaunch the 2011 Recommendation and associated policy tools, taking into account the policy learning from implementation and the contextual changes (e.g. migration related developments).
- The headline target provides a valuable and visible cross-country comparative point, and should be retained post-ET 2020. As well as reviewing the level at which to set the future target, further consideration should be given to the use that can be made of disaggregated data (e.g. on migration background or gender)[135].
- Translational tools (e.g. a grid of structural indicators) have the potential to synthesise key policy recommendations and minimise policy amnesia, ensuring that Member States are required to report on why different types of measures are not being implemented.
- Continue the inclusion of specific country specific recommendations on the remaining challenges in the European Semester; further scaffolding should however be provided not only to say *what* should be done, but *how* to achieve it, with clear signposting to different mechanisms such as EU funding sources, peer counselling or targeted peer learning.
- Consider tougher standards to ensure that project activities funded by the European Social Fund, or other EU funds (e.g. Erasmus+) are strategic and effectively targeted to address national priorities and needs, to avoid the piecemeal approach that was found in many countries.
- Ensure that the longstanding focus on educational inclusion is retained within the mandate of the ET 2020 Working Group on Schools, including an explicit focus on early leaving from education and training.
- Expand opportunities for peer counselling and peer review, to enable more focused country exchanges and visits, perhaps linked to country-specific recommendations.
- Undertake further communications activities to raise the profile of the European Toolkit for Schools, capitalising on the potential of the Toolkit to disseminate case studies and research in a format that is accessible to educationalists across Europe.
- Develop a new EU-level ESL Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, including standardised and evidence-based research instruments for evaluating policies and

[135] As mentioned previously, this target has remained post-ET2020 as an EU-level target for the new strategic framework of European cooperation in Education and Training until 2030.

programmes in the field of early leaving from education and training, disseminated via the European Toolkit for Schools.

- Consider setting-up an EU Monitoring and Evaluation Observatory for early leaving from education and training, bringing together higher education institutions from across Europe to take the lead in high quality multi-disciplinary academic research in this field.

This picture can be complemented by the Cedefop study conducted in 2016 on the role of VET in tackling early leaving [136], whose findings raise the need for countries to:

- **Develop more extensive national systems to be able to monitor early leaving from VET**. The study identified only a few countries that have monitoring systems on ELET that are systematically deployed across the whole country and used to offer support to young people. These monitoring systems should allow identifying (nearly) every young person who exits prematurely from any type of education and training and follow-up to offer them an alternative programme or support. Comprehensive data collection and monitoring systems on early leaving may improve understanding of the phenomenon in each country to target measures better to prevent and address it.
- **Strengthen VET policy commitment to combat early leaving from education and training**. Cedefop's research shows that rates of early leaving in VET vary from country to country, but also among different VET systems within the same country. On the one hand, in cases where vocational education and training is particularly exposed to early leaving, it requires important prevention efforts to increase the quality, accessibility and attractiveness of VET. On the other hand, in other cases, VET can also bring some answers: VET programmes (particularly those more practical and oriented to work-based learning) can be effective in motivating discouraged and disengaged young people. Evidence shows (Cedefop, 2016) that the majority of those who drop out from school, when decide to go back, opt for a VET programme and qualify in upper secondary education. School education can therefore benefit from incorporating more vocational pedagogies to make learning more meaningful for some.
- **Target activities and combine measures for success**. Effective strategies should address the specific cause of the problem and be adapted to the profile of the young person. It is crucial to collect information on their characteristics and needs to be able to offer tailored support[137].
- **Evaluate progress and impact to inform policy-making and funding**. Most Member States have a multitude of activities, financed from local, regional, national or European sources that aim to combat ELET. However, evidence about which ones are making the difference and to whom, is often lacking. Understanding which measures are successful and for which target group is a precondition for improving effectiveness and efficiency of national strategies to combat early leaving.

While these assessments clearly indicate that more work is needed on these already well-known challenges, newer challenges are explained bellow.

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136 European Commission, Cedefop (2016), Cedefop research paper No 57, *Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training centre stage. Volume I: investigating causes and extent*. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/893397

137 The study identified six profiles of young people by level of disengagement and the type of challenges in education and training as well as in other spheres of life. The profiles are available here: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-toolkit-tackling-early-leaving/identify

Part 4

The current context: remaining and new challenges



4. The current context: remaining and new challenges

4.1 Main trends and their possible impact on education

Since the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving was adopted, European countries have been confronted with new situations, challenges and opportunities, and with a set of conditions affecting policy innovation in the field of education which are not always favourable. While the rate of early leavers from education and training at EU level has decreased significantly, considerable differences still exist across and within countries and inequalities persist among specific population groups (see 4.2.1). Faced with the deteriorating trend in the basic skills performance as identified by the results of PISA 2018, concerns have emerged prominently in policy and academic discourses at national and European level (see 4.2.2). Educational research has provided new insights and policy cooperation between European countries, although it has allowed Member States to share promising practices, it has also highlighted gaps and areas in which further work is needed (see 4.2.3 and 4.3). In addition, important developments and shifts in European and world societies and economies have also exerted a deep influence on education systems over the past ten years

Europe's **digital transformation** is accelerating rapidly and digital technologies have become part of our everyday life and of students' learning experience. However, not all children and young people benefit equally from the digital transformation: a fifth of young people in the EU do not possess basic digital skills and the impact of socio-economic status on digital literacy is significant. The results of the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS)[27] 2018 show that **a fifth of young people in the EU do not possess basic digital skills** and also reveal the impact of socio-economic status on digital literacy: on average, students from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds have significantly higher computer information literacy scores and students with a parent who had completed a Bachelor's degree or higher also score higher than those whose parents do not hold a degree. Additionally, increased time online has caused concern over the impact of digital media on children's well-being.

The **increased mobility** between EU countries and the rising number of third country migrants coming to the EU in recent years have contributed to **greater linguistic and cultural diversity** in European classrooms. According to data from PISA 2015, an average of around one in ten (9%) of 15-year-old learners speak a different language at home than the language of schooling across EU Member States[138]. The massive influx of displaced Ukrainian children in spring 2022 due to the war in Ukraine is contributing to an even further extent to enhancing the linguistic and cultural diversity in the European classrooms. Addressing the diversity of educational needs is at the core of making education systems more equitable and inclusive, and will be instrumental for the successful integration of newcomers.

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138 European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice (2017) *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe: 2017 edition*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/04255

Most recently, Europe faced significant challenges due to the **COVID-19 pandemic**, which aggravated inequalities in education, and revealed gaps and challenges in current education provision and education systems. Learning loss estimated as a consequence of the pandemic may enhance the share of underachieving children, may cause an increase in early leaving of school and training, and negatively affected children's well-being (the impact of the pandemic will be presented more in-depth in 4.3.2).

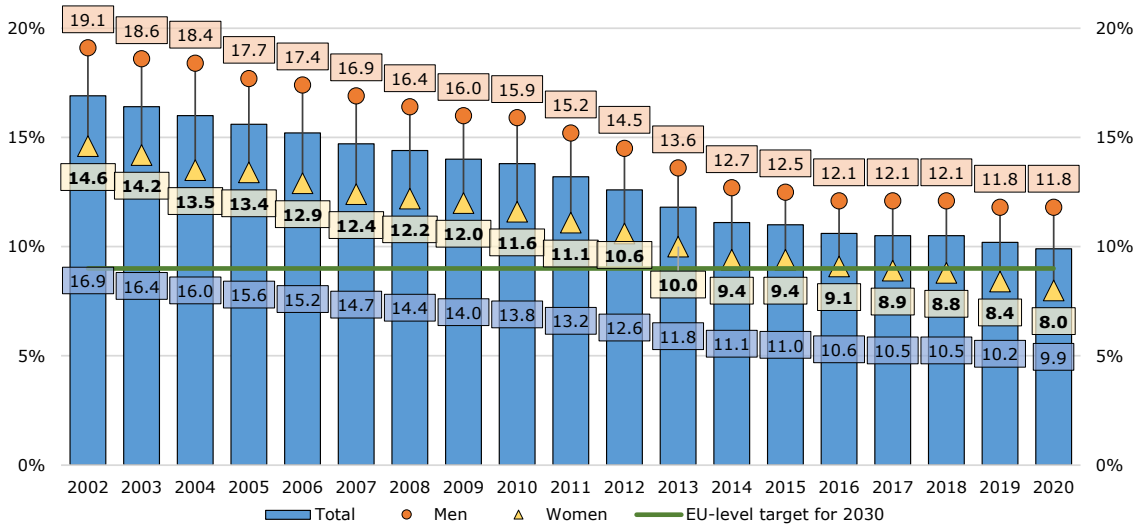
These trends have exacerbated or altered existing challenges or added new ones, contributing to making the concerns around ELET and underachievement in basic skills even more pressing. The following sections present more in detail main challenges which justify a new 'Pathways to School Success.'

4.2 Remaining challenges

4.2.1 Early leaving from education and training[139]

Across the EU on average, the **share of early leavers from education and training was 9.9% in 2020**. The share has steadily decreased since 2002, when it was 16.9%. A decrease of 3.9 percentage points has been observed since 2010: a decrease of 2.7 percentage points over the period 2010 to 2014 was followed by a smaller reduction of 1.1 percentage point since 2015,

Figure 10: Early leavers from education and training in the EU. 2002-2020 [%]



Source: Eurostat. Online data code [edat_lfse_14]

The EU average masks important **differences between and within countries.** In some countries, more than 15% of the young population are early leavers from education and

[139] The source for the current and following section is the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2021) *Education and training monitor 2021: education and well-being*, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/00614. Data on 2021 ELET rates has been released on 28/04/2022, and could not be incorporated in this document. 2021 ELET data are available a: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/SDG_04_10/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=a7aaf0db-7026-45f8-889c-e555a3a87f12

training[140]; in 18 Member States, the share of early leavers from education and training is currently less than 9% and Denmark is close to reaching the 9% target. Croatia has the smallest proportion of early leavers (2.2%). Several countries with a high share of early leavers from education and training have seen very marked reductions over time (Portugal and Greece as well as Latvia, Spain and Ireland), while opposite trends have been recorded in other countries.

Young men (11.8%) are more likely to be early leavers from education and training compared to young women (8%). National data also shows that boys are more likely to be absent from school compared to girls. These findings confirm trends identified by the OECD in 2015. According to 2008 and 2012 PISA data, compared to girls, boys across OECD countries were more likely to leave school or training early, were more likely to arrive late or miss school, and were more likely to repeat a grade[141].

On average in Europe, native-born people have lower ELET rates than **foreign-born people**. In 2020, among the 17 Member States for which data are available, the highest shares of foreign-born early leavers from education and training were in Italy (32.1%), Spain (29.0%), Malta (28.5%), Greece (27.0%), Cyprus (26.8%) and Germany (25.5%). The proportion of early leavers from education and training among the foreign-born young people was below 9% in two countries: Luxembourg (8.7%) and Slovenia (7.4%). In all countries for which data for foreign-born pupils disaggregated by sex is available, young men who are foreign-born are more likely to be early leavers than young women, and gender gaps are often wider than among the young population born in the reporting country.

As regards the **urban/rural divide**, the pattern is more nuanced. At EU level, the ELET rate is lower in cities (8.7%) than in rural areas (10.5%) or towns and suburbs (11.2%)[142]. The picture is, however, quite uneven across Member States. Regardless of the degree of urbanisation, the EU average share of early leavers from education and training among young men is higher than among young women. In 2020, the EU average gender gap was widest in towns and suburbs (4.8 percentage points), followed by cities (3.7) and rural areas (2.5).

Wide **disparities also exist across regions** at the NUTS[143] 2 level. Some of the lowest 2020 shares of early leavers from education and training were concentrated in Eastern Europe and in capital regions, while the highest shares were often concentrated in island and/or outermost regions of the EU, highlighting a particularly difficult situation. The share of early leavers from education and training was also relatively high in most regions of southern Europe and across most regions of Bulgaria and Romania. Some regions in Belgium or France also record relatively high shares.

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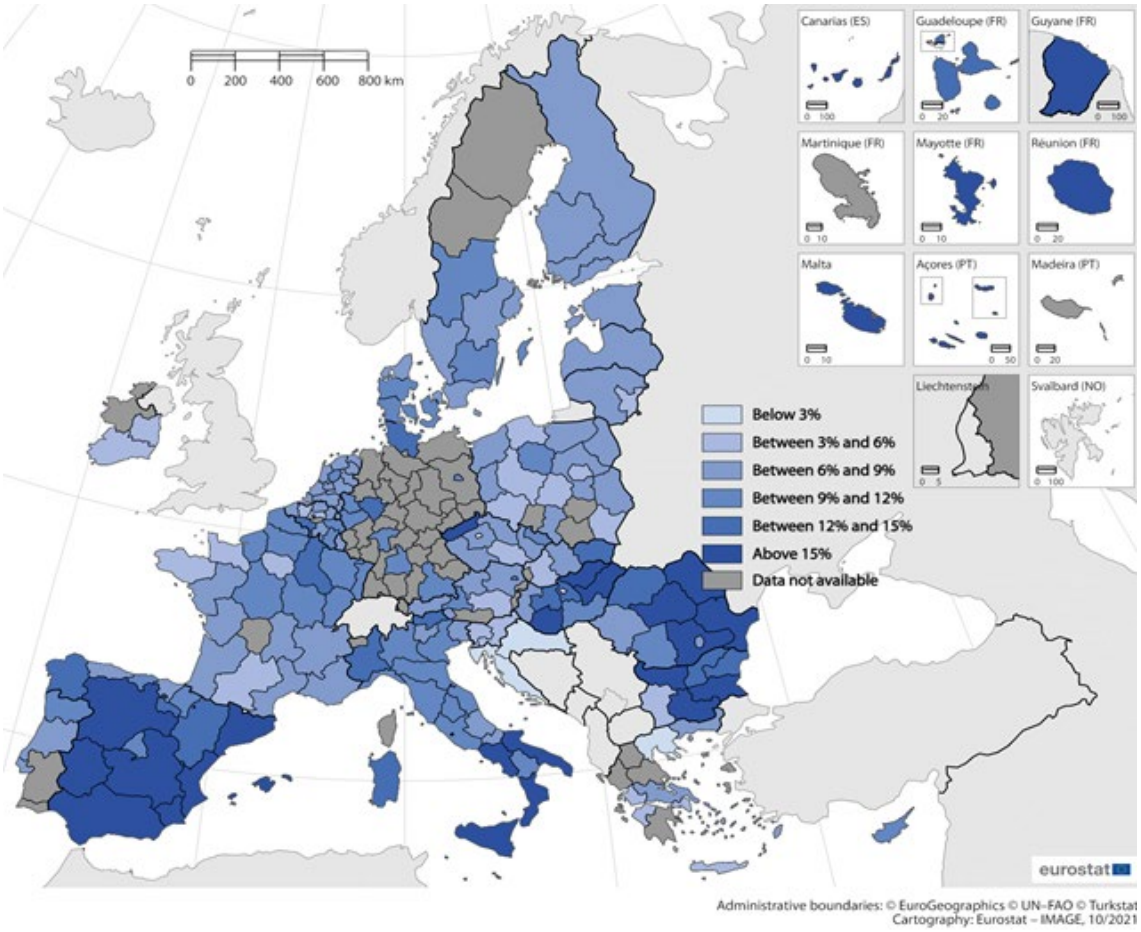
140 This is the case in Spain (16.0%) and Romania (15.6%). The share of early leavers is also well above the 9% target in Italy (13.1%), Bulgaria (12.8%), Malta (12.6%), Hungary (12.1%) and Cyprus (11.5%).

141 OECD (2015). *The ABC of Gender Equality in Education. Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence*. PISA, OECD publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264229945-en.pdf?expires=1610634769&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=66B1763A84CB2A7C21B3829FBC7B8E3B

142 The rural disadvantage is very strong in Romania and Bulgaria, where the difference between the ELET rate in rural areas and in cities is 18.8 pps and 19.9 pps, respectively. It is important to also consider that where the young population is more concentrated in cities, the number of early leavers may be largest in absolute terms. While comparable data on the distribution of the youth population by level of urbanisation are not available, data from 2019 Eurobarometer poll suggest that the proportion of the young population reporting they live in rural area or village is 26%, while 74% report living in a town (40% in small or middle-sized towns and 34% in a large town).

143 NUTS - Nomenclature des Unités territoriales statistiques

Figure 11: Early leavers from education and training by NUTS 2 regions. 2020 [%]

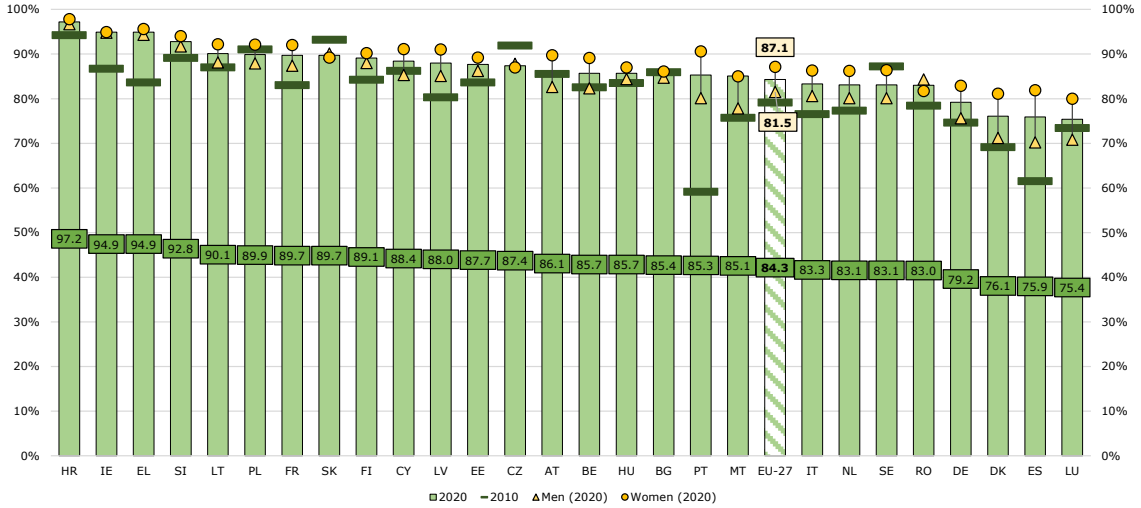


Source: Eurostat. Online data code [edat_lfse_16]

The EU-level target is complemented by an indicator measuring the share of people aged between 20 and 24 years with at least an upper secondary qualification (ISCED 3 level)[144]. Across the EU on average, 84.3% of 20- to 24-year-olds had at least an upper secondary qualification in 2020. Young women (87.1%) have a clear advantage over young men (81.5%). The young population is increasingly likely to have completed upper secondary education, with only few countries seeing a decrease or limited change in the proportion.

[144] The aim of the complementary indicator is to measure the proportion of the young population that is likely to have the minimum necessary qualifications for their active participation in society.

Figure 12: Population aged 20 to 24 who have attained at least upper secondary education. 2010-2020 [%]



Source: Eurostat. Online data code [edat_lfse_03]

4.2.2 Underachievement in basic skills

While basic skills have gained increased attention in the policy debate at the EU level, the performance in basic skills shows a deteriorating trend over the 2009-2018 period. The EU-level target for 2030 is to ensure that the total average underachievement in these three domains across the EU is below 15%. On average across the EU, this target has not been reached in any of the three areas tested by PISA 2018 and the majority of EU Member States perform below it. Despite progress in some countries, since 2009 the EU share of underachievement has increased in both science and reading, while remaining stable in mathematics. More than one in five pupils in the EU has insufficient proficiency in reading, mathematics or science: in 2018 the underachievement rate stands stood at 22.5% in reading, 22.9% in mathematics and 22.3% in science[145]. However, some countries have been able to improve their performance over time.

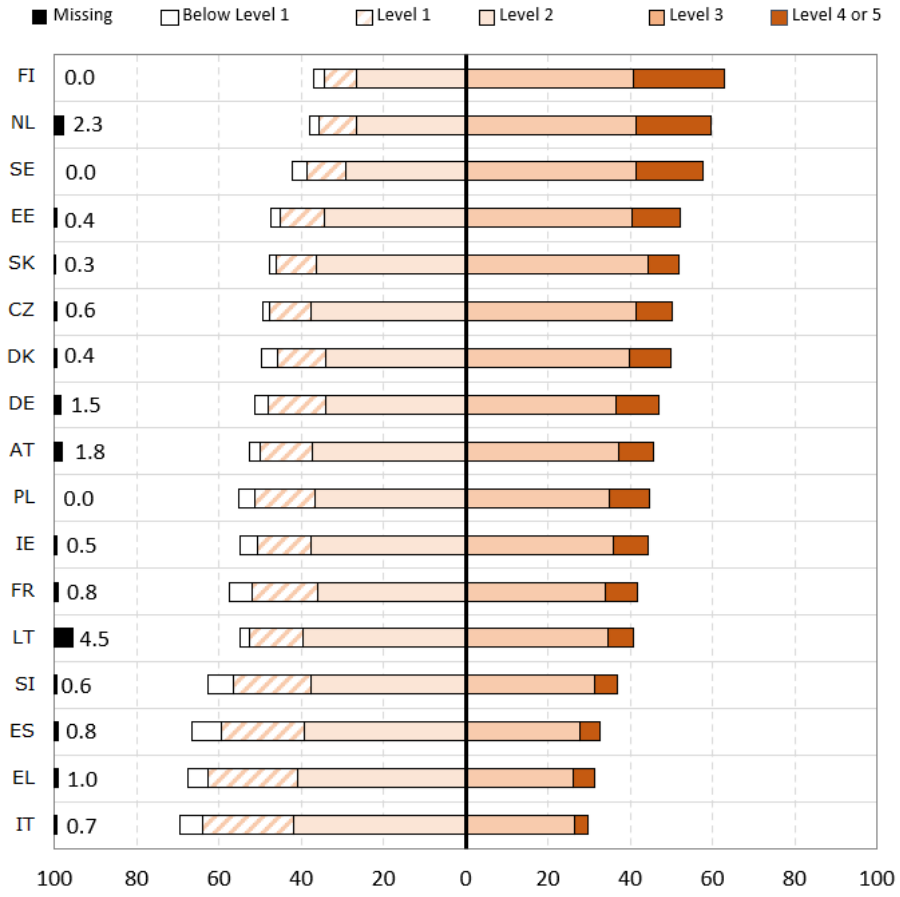
Major differences in performance exist between the Member States. The underachievement rate in the three domains simultaneously ranges from 4.2% in Estonia to 31.9% in Bulgaria. It is below 10% in eight countries (Estonia, Poland, Finland, Ireland, Slovenia, Denmark, United Kingdom and Latvia) while it exceeds 20% in four countries (Malta, Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria).

The PISA 2018 results, like previous PISA cycles, clearly indicate that performance is highly correlated across all three tested domains (reading, mathematics and science). Member States that show certain levels of basic skills in one area tend to perform similarly in the other areas. Countries such as Estonia, Finland, Ireland and Poland have low underachievement rates in all three domains. By contrast, in Bulgaria, Romania Cyprus and Malta, more than one in five pupils underachieve at the same time in all three domains.

145 EU27 (without the UK).

Failing to meet the minimum standards required in all three subjects will likely translate into serious problems in further education, on the labour market and later in life[146].

Figure 13: Population age 16 to 65 at each proficiency level in literacy. PIAAC first cycle [%]



Source: OECD. PIAAC first cycle.
Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of the combined percentages of adults scoring at Level 3 and at Level 4 or 5. The first cycle took place in 2011-2012 (first round) except in EL, LT and SI (second round: 2014-2015).

Reading

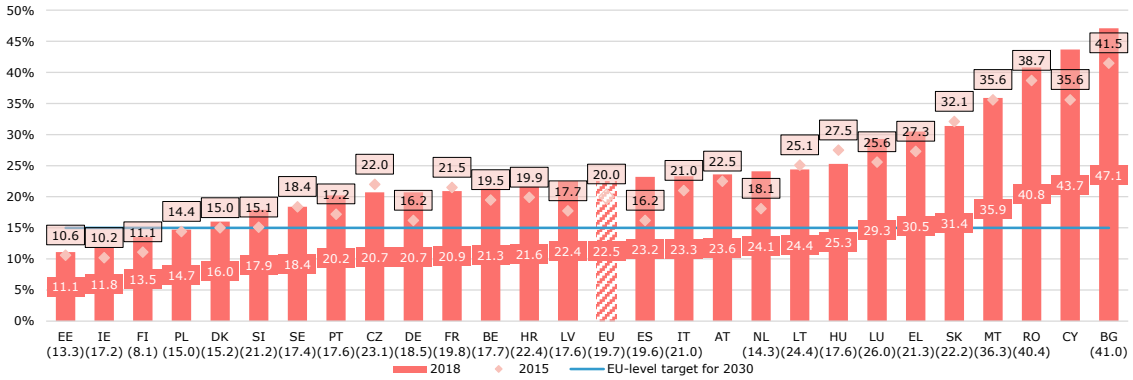
In 2018 reading performance showed a large variation across EU Member States. Four countries met the 15% ET2020 benchmark for underachievement: Estonia (11.1%), Ireland (11.8%), Finland (13.5%) and Poland (14.7%). Denmark was just above the benchmark (16.0%). By contrast, the underachievement rate exceeded 30% in Malta (35.9%), Slovakia (31.4%) and Greece (30.5%), and even 40% in Bulgaria (47.1%), Cyprus (43.7%) and Romania (40.8%). Performance worsened in most countries compared to the previous 2015 PISA round, although the change was statistically significant only in Cyprus (+8.1 percentage points), the

[146] Educational attainment plays a major role in shaping adult-learning choices: the 2016 Adult Education Survey found that 1 in 5 low-qualified people and 2 in 3 people with a tertiary qualification had participated in learning. Three times as many people in the highly qualified group looked for information on learning opportunities than people in the low-qualified group. See Eurostat, Adult Education Survey, Eurostat online data code: [TRNG_AES_195]. Low-qualified adults are also less likely to be aware of and find information on skills development opportunities and may have a negative attitude towards organised learning owing to negative experiences of initial schooling.

Netherlands (+6.0 percentage points), Latvia (+4.8 percentage points), Germany (+4.5 percentage points), Luxembourg (+3.6 percentage points), Slovenia (+2.7 percentage points) and Finland (+2.5 percentage points). No country achieved a statistically significant reduction in underachievement.

Looking at reading performance over a longer time span, performance did not significantly change in most countries between 2009 and 2018. In eight countries (the Netherlands, Slovakia, Greece, Hungary, Finland, Latvia, Belgium and Luxembourg) the underachievement rate increased in a statistically significant way. Only Ireland and Slovenia experienced a statistically significant decline. Overall, EU reading performance deteriorated: the EU-average underachievement rate was 19.7% in 2009.

Figure 14: Underachievement rate in reading. 2009, 2015 and 2018 [%]



Source: OECD. Online data code [educ_outc_pisa]
Note: Underachievement in 2009 is shown in brackets (data not available for AT and CY)

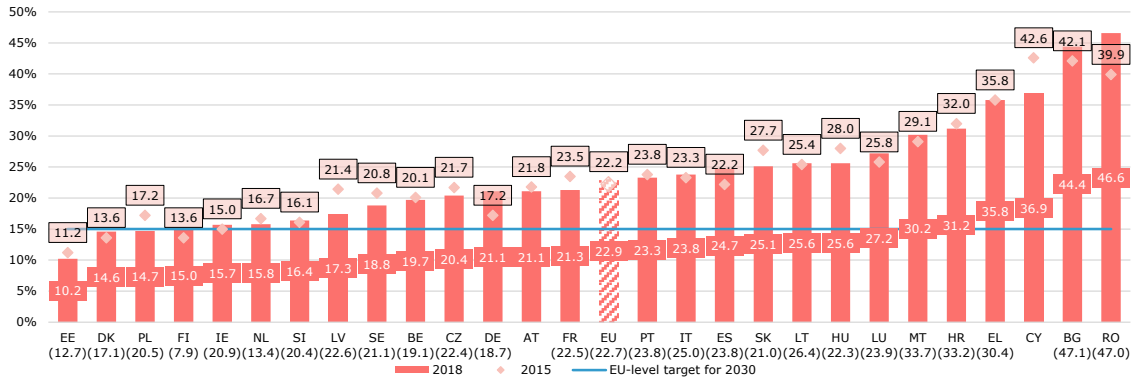
Mathematics

The 2018 pattern of underachievement in mathematics is similar to that of reading. Four countries met the 15% ET2020 benchmark: Estonia (10.2%), Denmark (14.6%), Poland (14.7%) and Finland (15.0%). Ireland (15.7%), the Netherlands (15.8%) and Slovenia (16.4%) were just above the benchmark. The underachievement rate exceeded 30% in Romania (46.6%), Bulgaria (44.4%), Cyprus (36.9%), Greece (35.8%), Croatia (31.2%) and Malta (30.2%).

Performance remained rather stable in many Member States between 2015 and 2018. A slight majority of countries experienced a decline in the underachievement rate, but it was statistically significant only in Cyprus (–5.7 percentage points) and Latvia (–4.1 percentage points). The only statistically significant increases took place in Romania (+6.6 percentage points) and Germany (+3.9 percentage points). Consequently, the EU average, at 22.9%, remained stable compared to 2015, when it stood at 22.2%. The EU average performance in mathematics remained stable also over 2009-2018, although trends differ across Member States[147].

Figure 15: Underachievement rate in mathematics. 2009, 2015 and 2018 [%]

[147] Three countries experienced a statistically significant increase of their share, namely Finland (+7.1 percentage points), Slovakia (+4.1 percentage points) and Luxembourg (+3.3 percentage points). At the same time, four Member States registered a statistically significant decrease: Poland (–5.8 percentage points), Latvia (-5.3 percentage points), Ireland (-5.2 percentage points) and Slovenia (-4.0percentage points).



Source: OECD. Online data code [educ_outc_pisa]
Note: Underachievement in 2009 is shown in brackets (data not available for AT and CY)

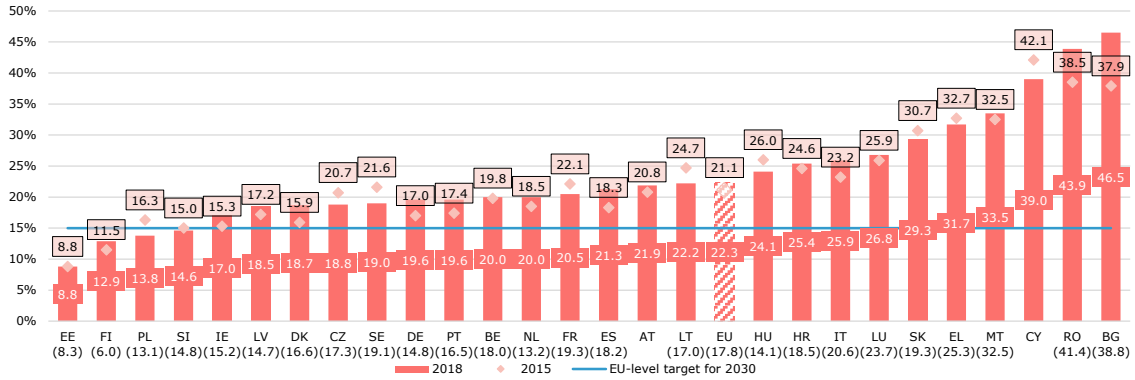
Science

Underachievement in science also shows a mixed picture across EU countries. Four countries met the 15% ET2020 benchmark in 2018: Estonia (8.8%), Finland (12.9%), Poland (13.8%) and Slovenia (14.6%). By contrast, the underachievement rate was higher than 30% in Bulgaria (46.5%), Romania (43.9%), Cyprus (39.0%) and Greece (31.7%). In a few Member States the underachievement rate increased in a statistically significant way between 2015 and 2018 (+8.6 percentage points in Bulgaria, +3.0 percentage points in Spain, +2.8 percentage points in Denmark), while Cyprus and Poland experienced a statistically significant decline (-3.2 percentage points and -2.4 percentage points, respectively). The EU average slightly increased, from 21.1% to 22.3%.

Long-term trends (2009-2018) for science are more negative than for reading or mathematics. The EU-average underachievement rate increased by 4.5 percentage points over the past decade. No EU country was able to reduce significantly its proportion of underachievers over the decade, whereas the rate increased significantly in several countries[148]. In many cases, the largest increase took place between 2012 and 2015.

148 Hungary (+10.0 percentage points), Slovakia (+10.0 percentage points), Bulgaria (+7.7 percentage points), Croatia (+6.9 percentage points), Finland (+6.9 percentage points), Greece (+6.4 percentage points), Italy (+5.3 percentage points), Lithuania (+5.2 percentage points), Germany (+4.8 percentage points) and Latvia (+3.8 percentage points).

Figure 16: Underachievement rate in science. 2009, 2015 and 2018 [%]



Source: OECD. Online data code [educ_outc_pisa]
Note: Underachievement in 2009 is shown in brackets (data not available for AT and CY)

In every Member State, without exception, various data sources (PISA, PIRLS and national data) demonstrate a large and persistent **gender gap** in favour of girls in reading. According to PISA 2018, girls significantly outperform boys in reading in all EU countries[149]. The gap in underachievement between boys and girls ranges from 6.6 percentage points (pps) in the Ireland to 21.5 pps in Cyprus. The EU average is 27.3% for boys and 1F7.4% for girls. Specifically, the gender gap increased by 1.7 pps at EU level between 2015 and 2018[150]. The picture for maths and science is less contrasted. The differences between boys and girls are much smaller than in reading and vary from country to country. PISA 2018 data shows that boys perform marginally better than girls in maths across the EU27 but boys' performance in maths declines as they progress through compulsory education. As regards science, girls generally outperformed boys in PISA 2018[151].

The 2018 PISA assessment[152] also pointed out that the proportion of underachievers in reading among pupils with a migrant background is much higher than for pupils with a non-migrant background in many EU Member States. Language barriers can play a negative role in the reading performance of pupils with a migrant background, to a greater extent than for the other two tested subjects. The situation is usually worse for pupils born abroad (their underachievement rate exceeds 50% in Greece, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden) than for native-born pupils with parents born abroad[153]. Greece has the highest underachievement rate in the EU among foreign-born pupils (58%), while Germany has the widest gap in underachievement rates in reading between pupils born abroad and pupils without a migrant background (40 pps).

Figure 17: Underachievement in reading by migrant background. 2018 [%]

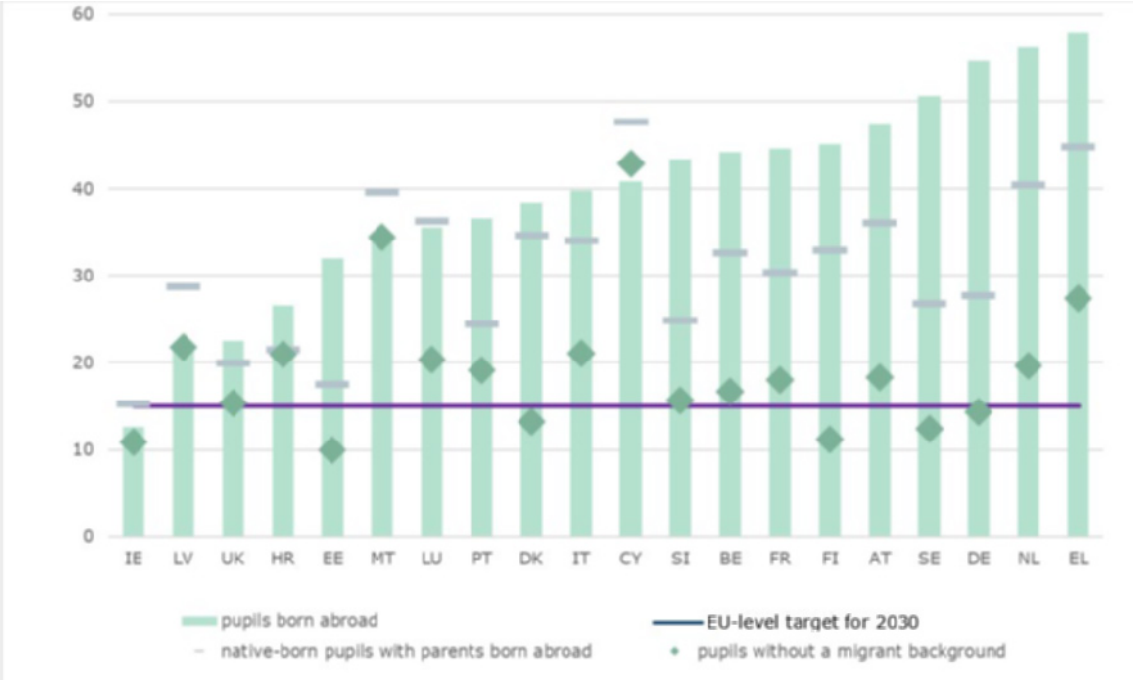
149 OECD (2019) *PISA 2018 results (volume II) – Where all students can succeed.* PISA, OECD publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2018-results-volume-ii_b5fd1b8f-en

150 European Commission, (2019). *PISA 2018 and the EU: Striving for social fairness through education*.

151 While these trends need further exploration, boys from low socio-economic backgrounds, rural communities and migrant families are generally at a 'double disadvantage' due to their gender and marginalised group status. For example, PISA 2018 data shows that first-generation immigrant boys performed 27.5 points worse than their female counterparts.

152 European Commission, (2019). *PISA 2018 and the EU: Striving for social fairness through education*.

153 The definition of pupils 'born abroad' and pupils 'native-born with parents born abroad' employed in this report corresponds to what the OECD defines respectively as 'first-generation immigrant students' and 'second-generation immigrant student.



Source: OECD. PISA 2018.
Note: The countries are sorted in the ascending order of the underachievement rate among the pupils born abroad. Data not available for ES. Countries where less than 5% of the pupils have a migrant background are not included in the chart.

Socio-economic background remains the strongest predictor of educational performance[154]. According to PISA 2018 results, the proportion of underachievers in reading in most countries is much larger in the bottom quarter of the ESCS index compared with pupils in the top quarter of ESCS, rising to more than 40 pps in Romania and Bulgaria. Moreover, countries with a large share of underachievers in reading also tend to have large performance gaps between pupils from advantaged and disadvantaged socio-economic background.

[154] In PISA, pupils' socio-economic background is estimated by the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS), which is based on a range of survey information about pupils' home and background, namely: parents' education, parents' occupation, home possessions, number of books and educational resources available at home.

Figure 18: Underachievement in reading (%) by socio-economic status (ESCS), 2018



Source: PISA 2018, OECD.
Note: Countries are sorted in ascending order according to the underachievement gap between the bottom and top quarter of the socio-economic index. Data not available for ES.

The significant variations in basic skills results and the inequalities within and between Member States, which are likely to increase further to the pandemic, call for a well thought out approach to improving school success universally, which could be suitable for all learners in all countries.

4.3 New challenges

4.3.1 Well-being and mental health at school

***Learners' well-being*[155]**

Research has long indicated that learners' well-being at school, as well as good mental and physical health are fundamental factors to improve academic performance, as they are directly linked to learners' motivation at school, their focus, their capacity to learn, retain and apply knowledge, and other behavioural and cognitive aspects. The latest 2017/2018 World Health Organisation (WHO) study 'Health Behaviour on school-aged Children' (HBSC) shows that the positive gains in the various aspects of adolescent health and well-being over the last five years were overshadowed by overall **declines in mental and social well-being**[156]. It reported that since the previous HBSC study in 2013/2014, fewer adolescents like school and

[155] This section refers to well-being at school in general. Data refers to pre-Covid crisis. Specific aspects related to Covid impact on well-being are addressed in 4.3.2

[156] Inchley J, Currie D, Budisavljevic S, Torsheim T, Jåstad A, Cosma A et al., editors. *Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being. Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in Europe and Canada. International report*. Volumes 1 & 2. Key findings. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2020. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

more experience intense pressure to do well academically. Many school-aged children reported that they lacked supportive environments, especially as they get older. Such students are missing the academic, social and emotional benefits that attachment to school can bring, which calls on schools to foster more positive learning environment and trusting and caring relationships for young adolescents.

Around twenty percent of school children in Europe experience **mental health** problems during their school years, wherein half of those mental health problems are developed before the age of fourteen[157]. Thirty-five percent of 13-year-old and 40% of 15-year-old European children reported feeling low, nervous and experienced psychosomatic symptoms more than once a week[158]. Moreover, reports from a study with 28 160 adolescents revealed that the scale of mental health problems is higher than previous estimates, with two in five young people scoring above thresholds for emotional problems or conduct problems[159].

Depression and anxiety disorders are among the top five causes of the overall disease burden, whilst suicide is the leading cause of death among adolescents (10–19 years old) in low- and middle-income countries and the second leading cause of death in high-income countries[160]. Marginalised young people are particularly affected. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these difficulties, with an increase in mental health difficulties[161], particularly amongst those already at risk for mental health[162].

Children themselves have raised their concerns around mental health and well-being in education. According to the 'Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future'[163] consultation with more than 10,000 children aged 11-17, one in five children report growing up unhappy and anxious for the future. Children reveal these alarming rates of mental ill-health as caused by anxiety about the future, bullying, challenges in coping with schoolwork and loneliness, and much of these experiences have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, data collected by the OECD unfortunately concludes that schools and teachers are not sufficiently prepared to deal with these issues[164].

PISA 2018 data revealed that nearly one in two students in the EU reported **feeling sad** sometimes or always. Some 32.2% of students in the EU reported being scared sometimes or always, while 37.3% reported feeling miserable. Girls are disproportionately affected by

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157 WHO Regional Office for Europe (2018). *Adolescent mental health in the European Region*. WHO, Denmark. Available at: https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/383891/adolescent-mh-fs-eng.pdf

158 Inchley J, Currie D, Budisavljevic S, Torsheim T, Jåstad A, Cosma A et al., editors. *Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being. Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in Europe and Canada*. *International report*.

159 Deighton, S., Lereya, T., Casey, P., Patalay, P. Humphrey, N. and Wolpert, M. (2019). Prevalence of mental health problems in schools: poverty and other risk factors among 28 000 adolescents. *British Journal of Psychiatry,* 215(3), 565-567. doi:10.1192/bjp.2019.19

160 WHO Regional Office for Europe (2018). *Adolescent mental health in the European Region*.

161 Cowie, H. and Myers, C. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of children and young people. *Children and Society*, 2021, 35:62–74.

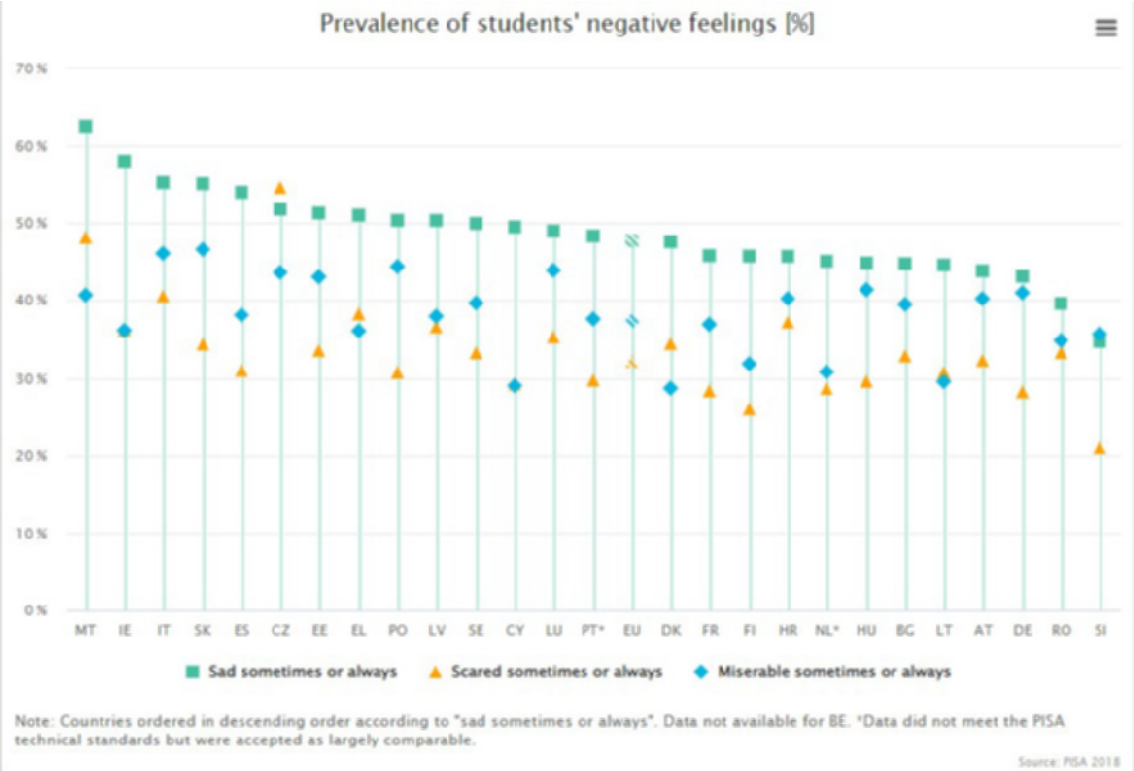
162 OECD (2020). *PISA 2018 Results*. Volumes 1-III. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/pisa-2018-results.htm

163 ChildFund Alliance, Eurochild, Save The Children, UNICEF, World Vision (2021). Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future. Retrieved from www.unicef.org/eu/reports/report-our-europe-our-rights-our-future

164 www.oecd-forum.org/posts/can-children-believe-in-us-to-invest-in-mental-health

feelings of sadness. On average, girls reported feeling sad "sometimes" or "always" 28 percentage points more than boys in the EU.

Figure 19. PISA data on negative feelings among students



Source: PISA 2018

Various factors seem to contribute to these negative feelings, including the phenomenon of bullying. A school's socio-economic status also plays a role in students' negative feelings. In 15 Member States, student sadness in socio-economically disadvantaged schools[165] was more than five percent bigger than that of socio-economically advantaged ones, with an EU average of 5.1%[166]. An important moment in this sense is the transition from primary to secondary schools: the transition of less advantaged students into schools with higher socio-economic status tends to have a detrimental effect on their well-being.

Closely connected to these negative feelings and mental health issues are children and students' **sense of belonging**[167] and social contacts. Although the majority of students across the OECD countries reported they felt socially connected at their school, about one in four had problems in making friends easily at school; about one in five felt like an outsider at school; and about one in six felt lonely at school. On average, there was also a general decrease in

[165] The socio-economic profile is measured by the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). A socio-economically disadvantaged (advantaged) school is a school in the bottom (top) quarter of the index of ESCS in the relevant country/economy.

[166] OECD (2019) *PISA 2018 results (volume II) – Where all students can succeed.*

[167] In PISA 2018, responses to the following questions were used to build a composite index of the sense of school belonging:

1. I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school
2. I make friends easily at school
3. I feel like I belong at school
4. I feel awkward and out of place in my school
5. Other students seem to like me
6. I feel lonely at school

sense of belonging in the last 15 years[168]. The latest WHO HBSC study also reported a decrease in students' liking for school and an increase in the intense pressure to do well academically, compared with the previous study. The share of 15-year olds feeling lonely in schools varies between 7 and 26% across 23 European countries, and the school environment alone can explain 22 percent of the total variation in loneliness indicating the importance of the school context for such negative feelings[169].

The risk of children experiencing lower well-being at school can be related to various personal and contextual factors, including their gender, deprivation, poverty and ethnicity. The language children speak at home also plays a role. Findings form a Eurydice report[170], show that children who do not speak the language of instruction at home report a lower sense of belonging and more experiences of bullying at school than those who speak the language of instruction at home. According to the 2018 PISA results, students from social-economically disadvantaged schools reported a weaker sense of belonging than their more affluent peers. This difference was found in the majority of European countries (27), including 21 Member States, with the largest differences recorded in Bulgaria, Hungary and Luxembourg[171]. This is a particularly interesting finding, because sense of belonging normally moderates the negative impact of socio-economic status on academic achievement and well-being. The WHO HBSC study similarly reported that adolescents from low socio-economic status received lower levels of support from school peers and friends[172].

Evidence from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)[173] 2019 and PISA 2018 shows that higher levels of well-being (measured as pupils' sense of belonging at school) are generally associated with higher educational aspiration[174], lower absenteeism and better learning outcomes in mathematics. The following figure shows differences in the average sense of belonging at school of boys and girls by performance at (PISA) mathematics test level 2 or above on the one hand and below level 2 on the other hand[175].

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168 In almost all countries, students were more likely to report positive feelings when they had a stronger sense of belonging at school and greater student cooperation; they were more likely to express sadness when they were bullied more frequently. OECD (2019) *PISA 2018 results (volume II) – Where all students can succeed.*

169 Schnepf, S., Boldrini, M. and Blasko, Z., Can schools mitigate young people from feeling lonely?_An analysis across Europe, European Commission, 2022, JRC128731. Forthcoming.

170 European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice (2019) *Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe: National Policies and Measures*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/222073

171 The study found a similar relationship between life satisfaction and socio-economic status, with students from low socio-economic background being less satisfied than their more advantaged peers. On average across OECD countries, 67 % of students reported being satisfied with their lives, with higher values being observed amongst many East European countries, whilst northern and western European countries were close to the OECD average.

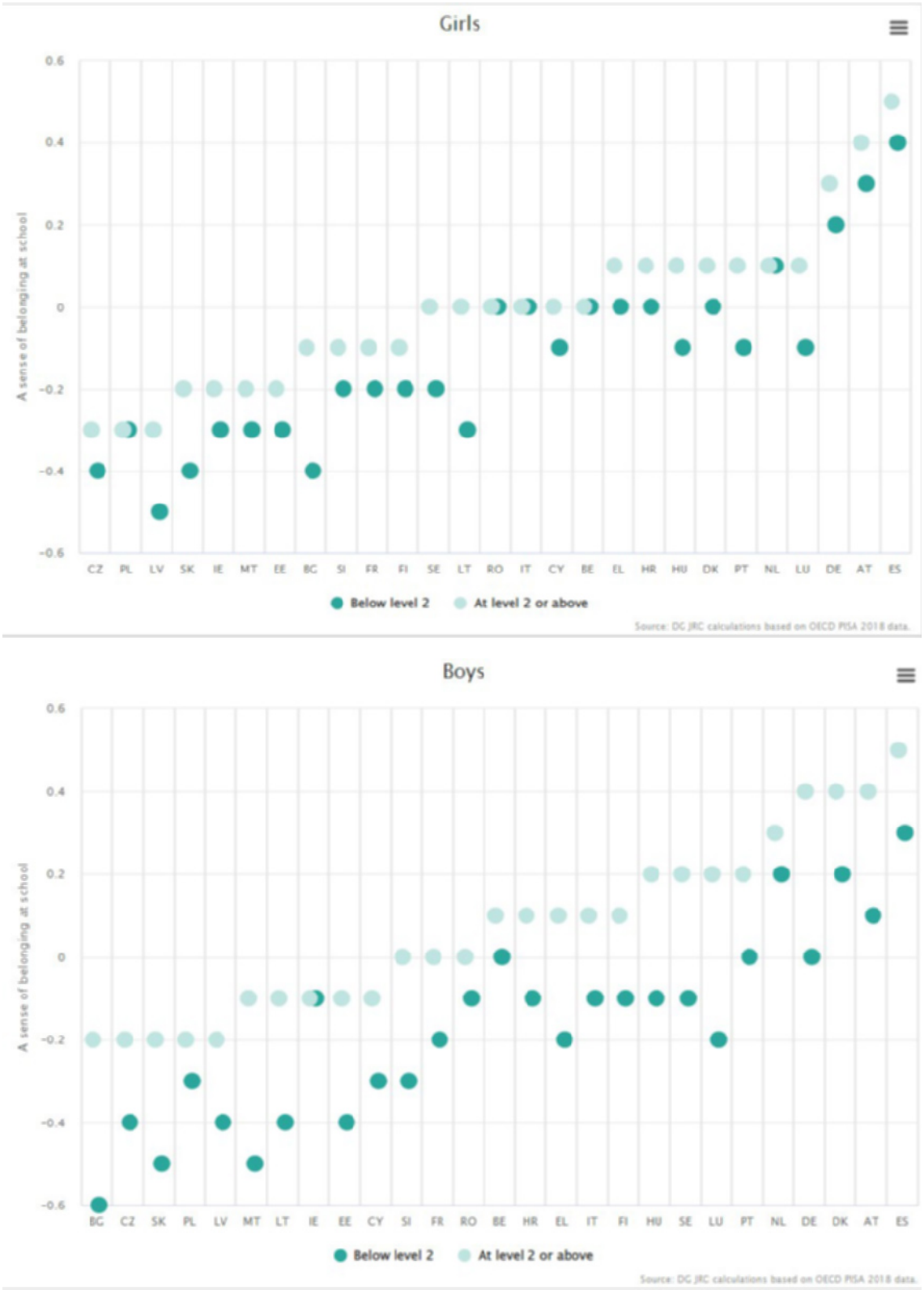
172 Inchley J, Currie D, Budisavljevic S, Torsheim T, Jåstad A, Cosma A et al., editors. *Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being. Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in Europe and Canada.*

173 TIMSS is carried out every four years by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). It is an international assessment of student achievement in mathematics and science at fourth and eighth grades.

174 Measured by the highest level of education they expect to complete.

175 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2021) *Education and training monitor 2021: education and well-being*

Figure 20. Average sense of belonging at school for girls and for boys



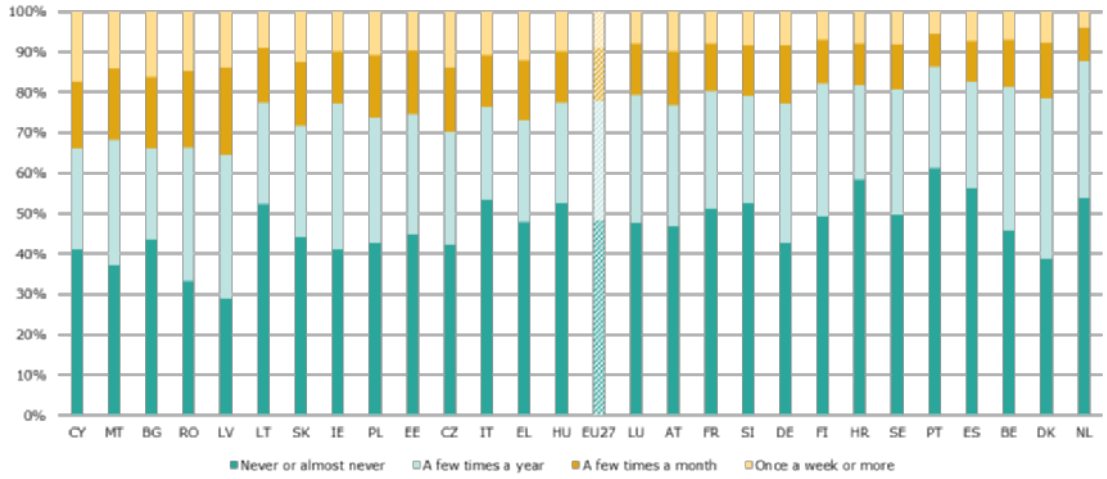
Source: PISA 2018 data, calculated by JRC.

The sense of belonging at school is lower, on average, among low performing students than among students at level 2 or higher. This applies to both boys and girls, although the magnitude of the difference among girls appears to be slightly smaller than among boys and the magnitude of the differences varies significantly across countries.

An important and common phenomenon affecting well-being in school is **bullying.** Bullying appears to be widespread in the EU, with more than 50% of students having suffered from it. In 19 EU Member States, more than half of all students experience bullying at least a few times a year. Being "frequently bullied" is reported at 6.9% in the EU[176], as demonstrated by the following figure.

[176] OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives.*

Figure 21. Frequency of reported bullying across the EU



Source: Education and Training Monitor 2021

In addition to the socio-economic gap, a gender gap is clearly discernible in the PISA data on bullying. The EU average for bullied boys (at least a few times a month) was nearly 5 percentage points higher than that of girls, at 24.4% to 19.7%. A recent report analysing the 2018 PISA data confirms the increased propensity of boys to being bullied, and points to further characteristics such as class repeaters and students prone to truancy in middle school[177]. Finally, there is a clear trend that low-achievers in reading are twice as likely to get bullied then high-achievers category[178].

Bullying has a direct impact on mental health and well-being, as well as on academic achievement. In a meta-analysis of 66 systematic reviews and meta-analyses it was found that bullying victimization is associated with: (high effect size) psychosomatic symptoms, sleeping problems, psychotic symptoms currently and later in life, suicidal ideation, depression, internalising and externalising symptoms, carrying weapon, lower academic achievement; (middle effect size) loneliness, general and social anxiety, suicidal behaviour, and lower general and social self-esteem[179]. In the same meta-analysis, bullying perpetration emerged to be associated with: (high effect size) violence later in life, carrying weapon, drug use, suicidal ideation; (middle effect size) offending later in life, suicidal behaviour.

Being a passive bystander in bullying situations is also connected with potential negative outcomes for youth's mental health. Witnessing bullying or cyberbullying increases the levels of stress[180]and passive bystanders develop more negative pro-victim attitudes and attitudes of self-justification of bullying, which can favour active perpetration of bullying. In conclusion, the

177 Yu, S., & Zhao, X. (2021). The negative impact of bullying victimization on academic literacy and social integration: Evidence from 51 countries in PISA. In: S*ocial Sciences & Humanities Open*, 4(1): 11.

178 OECD (2019) *PISA 2018 results (volume II) – Where all students can succeed.*

179 Zych, I., Ortega-Ruiz, R. and Del Rey, R. (2015). Systematic review of theoretical studies on bullying and cyberbullying: Facts, knowledge, prevention, and intervention. *Aggression and violent Behavior, vol 23*. DOI:10.1016/j.avb.2015.10.001

180 Caravita, S. C. S., Donghi, E., Banfi, A., & Meneghini, F. (2016). Essere immigrati come fattore di rischio per la vittimizzazione nel bullismo: Uno studio italiano su caratteristiche individuali e processi di gruppo. *Maltrattamento e Abuso All'Infanzia: Rivista Interdisciplinare,* 18(1), 59–87. https://doi.org/10.3280/MAL2016-001004

occurrence of bullying has negative impact on the well-being of all those directly and indirectly involved.

Besides bullying, there is growing concern on the **use of digital tools and devices** in relation to mental health. The amount of time children spend online is increasing rapidly. In 11 European countries, the amount of time children spend online almost doubled in less than a decade: from an hour and a half to almost three hours daily[181].

Despite public concern about this issue, the link between mental health and use of digital devices appears to be weak[182]. Robust studies suggest that moderate use is key[183]. In these studies, the highest mental well-being was observed not among those children who reported no screen use, but among those who used screens for less than 2 hours per day. Moderate use (between 30 minutes and 3 hours per day, depending on device and timing) was associated with the highest mental well-being. Children who did not use technology, as well as those who were very intensive users, had lower well-being.

A growing body of research confirms the key role of social and emotional skills[184]**.** The OECD's Survey of Social and Emotional Skills (SSES)[185] results show that students' social and emotional skills are closely related to students' psychological well-being. This is particularly the case for stress resistance, optimism and emotional control. Stress resistance and being optimistic are strongly related to a lower level of test anxiety. Students who assessed themselves as being more stress-resistant, optimistic and in control of their emotions reported higher levels of psychological well-being. Another important finding is that students' social and emotional skills differ by social background. Students from advantaged backgrounds reported higher social and emotional skills than their disadvantaged peers. Potentially, parents from more advantaged backgrounds make greater investments in their children's social and emotional skills. However, it also seems likely that students with less advantaged backgrounds have more challenges to overcome and fewer opportunities and less support to develop these skills. **Investing in the mental health and well-being of children and young people has social and economic returns.** Cost benefit ratios vary from 1 to 11 in the case of social and emotional

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181 Gromada, A., Rees, G., Chzhen, Y. (2020) *Worlds of Influence: Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries.* Innocenti Report Card 16, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence.

182 Orben, A., and Przybylski, A. (2019) 'The Association between Adolescent Well-being and Digital Technology Use', *Nature Human Behaviour,* vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 173–182

183 Przybylski, A., and Weinstein, N. (2017) 'A Large-scale Test of the Goldilocks Hypothesis: Quantifying the relations between digital-screen use and the mental well-being of adolescents', *Psychological Science, vol. 28, no. 2.* pp. 204–215

184 "Social and emotional learning refers to the educational process through which an individual develops social and emotional competences for personal, social and academic growth and development through curricular, embedded, relational and contextual approaches". The definition implies developing and applying the attitudes, knowledge and skills required to understand oneself and others, express and regulate emotions, feel and show empathy for others, develop healthy and caring relationships, set and achieve positive goals, make good, make responsible and ethical decisions, and make use of one's own strengths and overcome difficulties in social and academic tasks. See European Commission, Cefai, C.; Bartolo P. A.; Cavioni. V; Downes, P. (2018), *Strengthening Social and Emotional Education as a core curricular area across the EU. A review of the international evidence*, NESET Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, doi: 10.2766/664439, p. 38.

185 OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en.

education programmes[186] to 1:5 in the prevention of depression and anxiety in school children[187].

Various studies show that social and emotional education offers strong and considerable economic and financial returns on investment[188]: One piece of research estimated a return of 37 US dollars to participants and society for every dollar invested in programmes to prevent substance use and criminality[189]; In another cost-benefit analysis of six social and emotional education curricular interventions, including one in Europe, it was reported that in all programmes, measurable benefits exceeded the costs, often by considerable amounts (estimated average cost-benefit ratio of about 11 to 1). This same study calculated key savings of prevention of conduct problems and bullying, with the intervention cost being recouped in five years[190]; in a more recent study in Sweden [191] it was found that school students decreased their use of drugs over a five-year long Social and emotional education (SEE) intervention, the value of which easily outweighed the intervention costs; Finally, additional research also reported that the cost-benefit ratio of various studies show positive returns on investment for school-based social emotional education programme in UK schools[192].

Teachers' well-being

There is a symbiotic relationship between the mental health of the teachers and that of the students: teachers need to enjoy positive mental health themselves in order to promote the well-being and mental health of their students. In fact, classroom and school climate are strongly mediated by the relationships between staff and students and between staff themselves. In turn, teachers' well-being, self-efficacy and job satisfaction have been identified as key factors mediating the teacher-students relationship. Socially and emotionally competent teachers report lower levels of stress and higher job satisfaction and confidence in their work, which reflects positively in student performance. This is **consistent with research which found that teacher well-being may account for about 8% of the variance in student school performance.** On the contrary, teachers' ill mental health (such as depressive symptoms or burnout) has been associated with poorer student well-being and psychological

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186 Belfield, C., Bowden, B., Klapp, A., et al. (2015) *The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning.* Centre for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education. Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

187 Chisholm, D., Sweeny, K., Sheehan, P., et al. (2016), 'Scaling-up treatment of depression and anxiety: A global return on investment analysis', *Lancet Psychiatry, 3*, 415–424.

188 Belfield, C., Bowden, B., Klapp, A., et al. (2015) *The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning*. Centre for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education.

189 Lee, S., Aos, S., Drake, E., Pennucci, A., Miller, M., Anderson, L. (2012), *Return on investment: Evidence-based options to improve statewide outcomes*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy

190 Belfield, C., Bowden, B., Klapp, A., et al. (2015), *The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning*. Centre for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education.

191 Klapp, A., Belfield, C., Bowden, B., Levin, H., Shand, R., Zande, S. (2017), 'A benefit-cost analysis of a longterm intervention on social and emotional learning in compulsory school', *International Journal of Emotional Education*, 9 (1)

192 Clarke, A.M., Morreale, S., Field, C.A., Hussein, Y., Barry, M. M. (2015), *What works in enhancing social and emotional skills development during childhood and adolescence? A review of the evidence on the effectiveness of school-based and out-of-school programmes in the UK,* A report produced by the WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion Research, National University of Ireland Galway.

distress. It is then clear that supporting teachers in addressing their well-being consequently improves that of their students[193].

According to the recent 2021 Eurydice report on Teachers in Europe[194], well-being of teachers is generally linked to their working conditions. Building on the TALIS 2018 survey[195], the report indicates that, in the EU, almost 50% of teachers in lower secondary experience stress in their work. The variation between countries is significant, ranging from almost 90% to 20% in some other countries. Overall, in Europe, 24% of teachers report that their job has a negative impact on their mental health, and 22% of them consider the same in relation to their physical health. Generally, the main reasons for stress are not directly related to teaching itself: administrative work, excessive marking and being held responsible for students' achievement are the most frequently mentioned factors for increased stress. Moreover, maintaining class discipline, lesson preparation, addressing parents or guardians' concerns and the overall workload (number of lessons) are also linked to stress levels. Systemic elements matter, too: appraisal as a requirement for career progression tends to raise stress levels, whilst teachers in countries where CPD (Continuing Professional Development) is a requirement report lower stress levels. Eurydice's analysis also shows that teachers working in disruptive classes and/or in schools where collaboration between teachers is low report higher stress levels.

Conversely, a collaborative school culture and teachers' sense of autonomy tend to lower levels of stress. This is also the case when teachers feel confident in managing students' behaviour and are able to motivate students. All in all, the report concludes that creating conditions for collaborative work, increasing teacher autonomy and providing meaningful CPD can reduce stress levels and increase the well-being of teachers.

Outside of research, the well-being of teachers has also been highlighted by the 2020 Council Conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future[196], which reflects on the key role of teachers for learners' achievements, as well as on the importance of teachers' well-being, showing that there is a political understanding of the need to better support this area of teachers' mental health and well-being.

4.3.2 The impact of school disruptions due to the COVID-19 crisis on educational outcomes and well-being of learners

The Covid-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented disruption of education. Between March 2020 and May 2021, European countries implemented periods of physical school closures and

193 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Simões, C., Caravita, S., Cefai, C., (2021), *A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU : analytical report*. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/50546

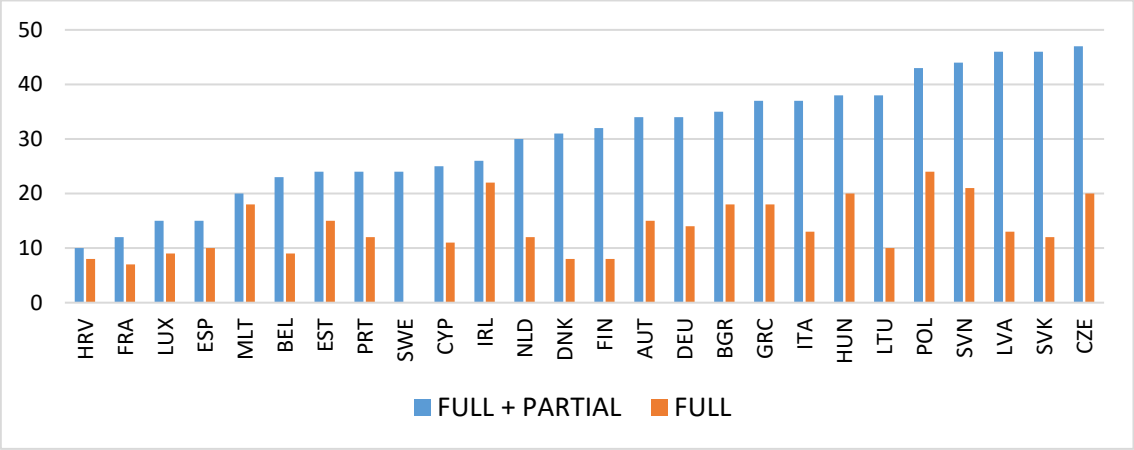
194 European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice (2021), *Teachers in Europe. Careers, Development and Well-being.* Publication Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

195 Every five years, the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) collects the views of teachers and school principals on working conditions and learning environments. TALIS 2018 results are available at: https://www.oecd.org/education/talis/

196 OJ C 193, 9.6.2020, p. 11-19

replaced face to face education with varying forms of distance teaching or extended academic breaks.[197].

Figure 22. Full and partial school closures in Europe between March 2020 and May 2021 due to COVID-19. Number of weeks.



Source: UNESCO

Note: Full school closures refer to situations where all schools were closed at the nation-wide level due to COVID-19. Partial school closures refer to school closures in some regions or for some grades, or with reduced in-person instruction.

Schools' responses to the situation varied by education level and by school, based on the availability of technologies, teachers' ICT skills, and choices made by educational authorities and schools. Online platforms were used both at the primary and the secondary schools in all participating EU countries, often supplemented by take-home packages, use of television programmes and sometimes by mobile phone and radio programmes.[198] However, the uptake of distance education varied not only within countries, but also between countries. For example, a comparative online survey found that online classes were provided to 65% of primary school children in Italy, but only to 20% in France.[199]

Distance teaching typically involves substantially less hours spent on formal lessons than during in-person education, and students' independent learning time did also not make up for the lost formal teaching hours[200].

Firstly, efficient distance learning requires obvious technical pre-conditions from the student's side, such as access to internet and to ICT devices, as well as also the ability to use ICT. According to PISA data, the share of 15-year-olds that had no internet access at home varied

197 OECD (2021) *The State of School Education: One Year into the COVID Pandemic*. OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/201dde84-en

198 OECD (2021) *The State of School Education: One Year into the COVID Pandemic*.

199 Champeaux, H., Mangiavacchi, L., Marchetta, F., & Piccoli, L. (2020), 'Learning at Home: Distance Learning Solutions and Child Development during the COVID-19 Lockdown', in *Distance Learning*, 31

200 For an estimation of learning time lost in Italy, France and Germany, see European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Di Pietro, G., Biagi, F., Dinis Mota Da Costa, P., Karpinski, Z. and Mazza, J. (2020), *The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets*, EUR 30275 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

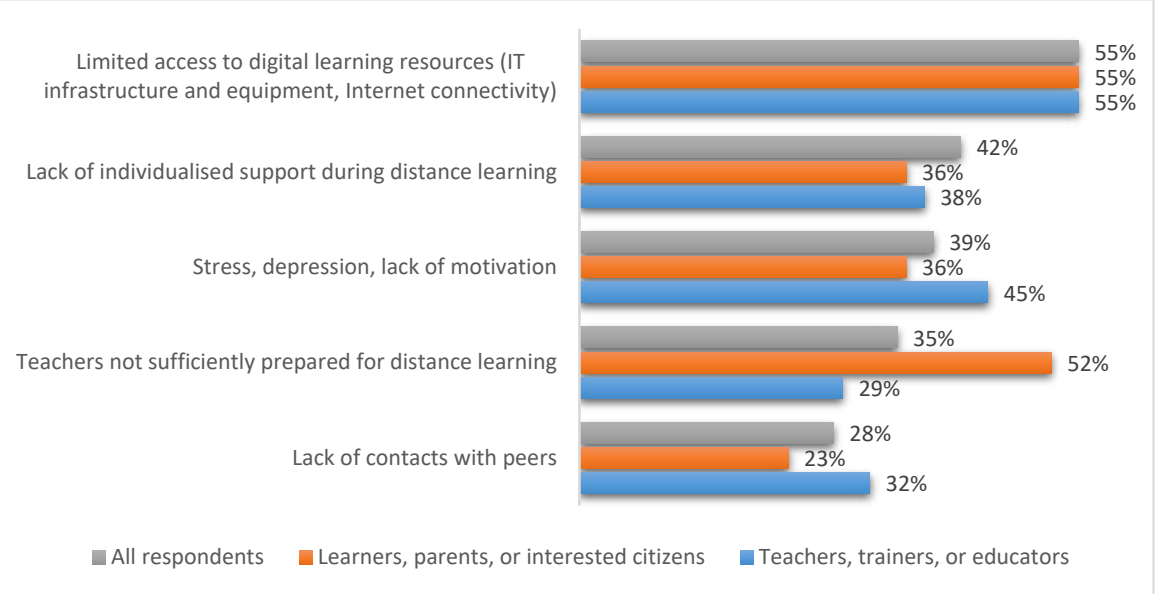
between 1 and 5% in various EU countries[201]. For children with special needs, accessible IT tools is a pre-requisite.

Secondly, in the absence of teachers' physical presence and easy availability, parental help and a supportive home-environment are other key elements of learning success – especially for younger children. According to TIMSS 2019 data, at home, between 1 and 11 % of 4th graders do not have access to more than 25 books and reading devices at home. Many more can rely on limited parental involvement, at least based on the parents' earlier habits to read for their child[202].

Thirdly, the quality of students' distance learning is also affected by teachers' digital competences and their level of comfort with distance teaching and use of online tools. Finally, students' learning could be further hindered by the lack of motivation, caused by isolation from their peers, mental distress related to the pandemic situation, as well as by the lack of assessment in several countries[203].

These findings are reflected in the consultation activities supporting the preparation of the Commission proposal on Pathways to School Success. The figure below illustrates the five factors that were identified as particularly problematic in the context of the Covid-19 crisis by all survey respondents.

Figure 23. Top 5 problems in the context of the Covid-19 crisis



Source: Open Public Consultation synopsis report

201 OECD (2020), *Learning remotely when schools close: How well are students and schools prepared? Insights from PISA, available at* https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=127_127063-iiwm328658&title=Learning-remotely-when-schools-close

202 Blaskó, Z., Schnepf, S., V., & Costa, P. (2021). *Learning Loss and Educational Inequalities in Europe: Mapping the Potential Consequences of the COVID-19 Crisis*, IZA Discussion Paper 14298, available at https://ftp.iza.org/dp14298.pdf

203 European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Di Pietro, G., Biagi, F., Dinis Mota Da Costa, P., Karpinski, Z. and Mazza, J. (2020), *The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets*, EUR 30275 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Recent studies further suggest that **students from disadvantaged backgrounds** were disproportionately affected by school closures[204]. Children at risk spent less time on learning during the pandemic[205] and received less support from their parents[206], who in turn also felt less capable to help their children in their homework[207]. Students from lower income families were also less confident about their own ICT skills in several European countries, as shown by a cross-country study of the JRC[208]. Lastly, the closure of education institutions also caused disruptions in support services, such as language and learning support for migrant children[209]. All these differences in the online learning experience **contribute to enhanced gaps in educational outcomes, which affects equal opportunities and equal participation in society later in life[210].**

Besides learning loss due to school closures, **children's wellbeing[211]** has been negatively impacted by the pandemic in the past months, due to increasing stress and anxiety resulting from school closure, social distancing from friends and relatives, increased exposure to domestic violence, decreased access to essential services, increased poverty and more exposure to online sexual exploitation and cyberbullying[212].

Most of the studies indicate that there has been an increase in anxiety and mental health problems as a result of COVID-19 amongst children and young people in various parts of the

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204 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Koehler, C., Psacharopoulos, G., Van der Graaf, L. (2022), *The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. doi: 10.2766/929570

205 Andrew, A., Phimister, A., Krutikova, S., Kraftman, L., Farquharson, C., Costa Dias, M., Cattan, S., & Sevilla, A. (2020), *Learning during the lockdown: Real-time data on children's experiences during home learning*. https://doi.org/10.1920/BN.IFS.2020.BN0288; Cullinane, C., & Montacute, R. (2020). *COVID-19 and Social Mobility. Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown*. Research Brief. The Sutton Trust. Available at: https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/

206 Boca, D. D., Oggero, N., Profeta, P., & Rossi, M. C. (2020), *Women's Work, Housework and Childcare, before and during COVID-19 (IZA Discussion Papers No. 13409; Discussion Paper Series, p. 26*). Accessible at: https://covid-19.iza.org/publications/dp13409/; Fodor, É., Gregor, A., Koltai, J., & Kováts, E. (2020), 'The impact of COVID-19 on the gender division of childcare work in Hungary', *European Societies*, 17. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1817522

207 Bol, T. (2020). *Inequality in homeschooling during the Corona crisis in the Netherlands. First results from the LISS Panel.* [Preprint]. SocArXiv. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/hf32q; Cullinane, C., & Montacute, R. (2020). COVID-19 and Social Mobility. Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown.

208 European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Vuorikari, R., Velicu, A., Chaudron, S., Cachia, R. and Di Gioia, R., (2020), *How families handled emergency remote schooling during the time of Covid lockdown in spring 2020: Summary of key findings from families with children in 11 European countries,* EUR 30425 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/31977.

209 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Koehler, C., Psacharopoulos, G., Van der Graaf, L. (2022), *The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof*

210 Ibid.

211 OECD (2021) *The State of School Education: One Year into the COVID Pandemic*.

212 Jiao, W. Y., Wang, L. N., Liu, J., Fang, S. F., Jiao, F. Y., Pettoello-Mantovani, M., et al. (2020), "Behavioral and emotional disorders in children during the COVID-19 epidemic", *J. Pediatr. 221, 264–266*.e1. doi: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2020.03.013; Lee, J. (2020), "Mental Health Effects of School Closures during COVID-19", *Lancet Child. Adolesc. Health* 4 (6), 421. doi:10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30109-7

world[213]. Children with special (educational) needs, in particular, suffered from the lack of routine and stability provided by regular face-to-face education[214].

Research also indicates that the longer the lockdown, the poorer the outcome for children's mental health, including heightened anxiety[215]. A study among girls in the UK found that 33% reported feeling sad and lonely most of the time, and 42% to 45 % felt worried and stressed most of the time[216]. Young people aged between 15-18 years felt most stressed with concerns about their future, schooling, and relationships. A study of Italian children, found that they seemed more likely to manifest symptoms of depression and anxiety and to experience regression, fear, and mood change[217].

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the related move to online teaching, the time spent online has inevitable increased: according to the "Kids' Digital lives in COVID-19 Times" (KiDiCoTi) survey[218], students spent close to 3.5 hours per day on digital technologies for school activities only. Many hours per day, close to 40% of their available time, were spent on the internet or using digital technologies (including digital games). This is somewhat expected, given the limitations to social activities during the lockdown, but it also signals a potential risk for the physical and mental well-being of students. Indeed, many students felt that they spent too much time on the internet or using digital devices, compared to pre-lockdown, with potentially disruptive consequences on sleep and eating. Moreover, an average of 44% (across the 11 countries covered by the survey) reports a higher exposure to cyberbullying during the lockdown whereas only 22% report a reduction during the same period; in five countries (Germany, Italy, Spain, France and Ireland) around 50% of students have been more exposed to at least one form of cyberbullying during the lockdown than before[219].

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213 Shum, A.; Skripkauskaite, S.; Pearcey, S.; Walte, P.; Creswell, C. (2021) *Report 09: Update on children's & parents/carers' mental health; Changes in parents/carers' ability to balance childcare and work: March 2020 to February 2021*. Co-SPACE study. https://cospaceoxford.org/findings/changes-in-parents-carersability-to-balance-childcare-and-work-march-2020-to-february-2021/; OECD (2021) Tackling the mental health impact of the COVID-19 crisis: An integrated, whole-of-society response. *Available at: https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/tackling-the-mental-health-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-an-integrated-whole-of-society-response-0ccafa0b/;* Xie X, Xue Q, Zhou Y, et al. 'Mental Health Status Among Children in Home Confinement During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak in Hubei Province, China', *JAMA Pediatr.* 2020;174(9):898–900. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1619

214 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Koehler, C., Psacharopoulos, G., Van der Graaf, L. (2022), *The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof.*

215 Imran, N., Zeshan, M., & Pervaiz, Z. (2020), 'Mental health considerations for children & adolescents in COVID-19 Pandemic', *Pakistan journal of medical sciences*, 36(COVID19-S4), S67–S72. https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.36.COVID19-S4.2759; European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Simões, C., Caravita, S., Cefai, C., (2021), *A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU : analytical report*. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/50546

216 Girlguiding (2020) Girlguiding research briefing: Early findings on the impact of Covid-19 on girls and young women. *Girlguiding. Available at https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girlguiding-covid19-research-briefing.pdf*

217 Ibid.

218 Coordinated by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre; see https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/science-update/kidicoti-kids-digital-lives-covid-19-times

219 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2021) *Education and training monitor 2021: education and well-being.*

Key take-away

- **The ELET rate** has steadily improved in the EU over past years reaching an average of 9.9% in 2020, but considerable differences still exist across countries and inequalities persist among specific population groups (e.g. vulnerable and socially disadvantaged children).
- **Performance in basic skills showed a deteriorating trend** over the 2009-2018 period. More than one in five pupils in the EU has insufficient proficiency in reading, mathematics or science: the underachievement rate stood at 22.4% in mathematics and 21.6% in science.
- **A stronger focus on well-being and mental health while addressing underachievement and early leaving from education and training is key**. Higher levels of well-being (to be understood in a broad way, as linked to sense of belonging at school, sense of connectedness, healthy relationships and other social and emotional competences, etc.) are generally associated with higher educational aspirations, lower absenteeism and better learning outcomes.
- Current challenges in our societies have also led to **increasing levels of mental health issues**, which thus also needs to be addressed at and through school (e.g. anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide, violence and anti-social behaviour, delinquency and substance use)
- **The COVID-19 crisis has further exacerbated inequalities in education**. If the learning progression of all learners and their well-being has been negatively affected, than the impact was stronger for vulnerable and socio-economically marginalised children and young people that already had lower average achievements before the pandemic. As a result, the share of underperforming students in Europe is likely to have risen considerably due to the pandemic.

Part 5

Opportunities for implementation



5. Defining a new framework of action to school success

What does **school success** mean? Several different definitions present themselves for consideration. The most obvious one equates school success with high learner achievement. Others may emphasize element such as high graduation rates, a prosperous economy or fulfilling careers, citizenship and democratic values, a socially cohesive society, or a combination of these elements. Definitions of success are inevitably related to beliefs about the purposes of education, and more broadly to the values, ideals and representations of each society.

During the consultation activities supporting the preparation of the Commission proposal, several stakeholders called for a more holistic understanding of school success. According to several organisations representing both parents, students and education employers, the concept should not only be linked with minimum standards for achievement of basic skills or the skills needed to enter the labour market. More focus should be placed on other aspects essentials for the development of critical thinking or civic engagement, such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills.

In its position paper, the European Parents' Association (EPA) criticised that educational success continues to be strongly linked to obtaining 'good grades'. EPA suggested using the concept of 'maturity' instead, stating that all young people at the end of their school time should be mature, meaning:

> "[*able] to confront life and the future challenges in a responsible and autonomous way, to make independent and well-informed decisions and to continue developing their unique full potential over the lifespan – consequences that can hardly be expressed in grades*."

Source: OPC position paper

School is indeed more than an academic context. It is a dynamic learning, social and emotional environment in which students live and develop cognitively and affectively. In the view of Pathways to School Success, 'school success' occurs when a system provides fair and inclusive education services that lead to successful learning, engagement, wider participation in the community and transition to a stable adulthood. **School success is not just about achievements and academic results, but it also encompasses elements such as personal, social and emotional development, students' well-being and mental health**. These elements are not just a precondition for the educational success of individuals but can be seen as educational, societal and policy objectives in themselves. In line with the results of the consultations (see annex I), a successful education should be understood as encouraging lifelong learning and accompanying learners on their journey to become active and mature citizens capable of confronting life and future challenges in a responsible and autonomous way, and for whom lifelong learning can be an enriching and crucial part of their personal as well as professional development.

Such a definition acknowledges that educational failure is not simply a problem of the individual but rather as a complex phenomenon, resulting from multiple interconnected factors, and requiring actions at different levels. It conceptualises 'success' in a perspective of equity and inclusion and proposes a wider view of learner outcomes. The plural 'pathways' suggests that school success is a relative concept, which needs to be defined with due attention to the personal development dimension and the situation of each individual learner. There is not one single route or recipe for educational success; rather many different

approaches and actions are needed and should be combined to help all learners reach their full potential.

In this context, and based on lessons learnt from the past, as well as the extensive consultations and the research gathered to prepare the Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation, a **new framework for action is proposed to Member States**, which should inspire them when developing their strategies towards school success. The framework outlines some overarching conditions for effective action (5.1) and proposes a set of policy measures, to be implemented at school and education system level to promote a whole school, whole system approach (5.2). The framework is underpinned by the principles and values that are the backbone of the EU rights and values and builds strong synergies with other Commission initiatives and policies (see chapter 6).

5.1 Key enablers

5.1.1 An integrated approach at all levels to reducing underachievement and ELET

An integrated and comprehensive strategy

Addressing school success requires educational policies to be articulated with a broader set of policies (such as health, employment, housing, justice, migration), including measures addressing the structural roots of inequalities and social exclusion. Improving the quality and inclusiveness of education, both at the level of each individual school as well as at system level, are expected to have a strong impact and improve overall educational performance. Effective cooperation between policy areas as well as between relevant public and private actors is essential, at all levels (national, regional, local, school). Reducing underachievement and ELET and promoting supportive learning environments require **whole-system, whole-school and whole community approaches** and strong coordination mechanisms across the different layers, linking local, regional and national authorities.

The 2011 Council Recommendation called for **comprehensive strategies** against early leaving from education and training. Its assessment confirms the pertinence of holistic approaches, while revealing that implementation is still challenging in many countries.

Therefore, the Commission proposal invite **Member States to develop and further strengthen by 2025 an integrated and comprehensive strategy towards school success, to be adopted at the appropriate level according to the structure of the education and training system.** Such a strategy should include a balanced and coordinated set of policy measures, combining monitoring, prevention, intervention and compensation. It can ensure coherence, continuity and effectiveness of actions, help formalise commitments and draw clear lines of accountability for implementation. To be successful, such strategies require:

- **Sustained political support** and agreement on the essential objectives and measures.
- **Stronger focus on prevention and intervention**. The assessment of the 2011 Council Recommendation has confirmed that integrated strategies against underachievement and ELET should focus mainly on prevention and intervention, which are much less established in comparison with compensation measures. During the consultation several stakeholders stressed that prevention measures should be prioritised in the strategies developed by Member States. Tackling problems proactively before – or as

soon as - warning signs appear avoids problems escalating and can avoid complete disengagement with the education system, which is much harder to return from.

- **Strong stakeholder involvement** from the design phase and all the way through the implementation process. Developing effective policies requires **dialogue** and engagement, input and active involvement from a range of stakeholders, such as school leaders, teachers and trainers, learners, parents and families (including from marginalised groups) and companies, as well as in order to generate useful feedback and ideas for policy reform, create ownership and develop solutions which reflect stakeholders' needs.
- **Establishing clear lines of responsibilities**, including horizontal cooperation between different ministries or sectors and vertical coordination between the different levels of government (national, regional, local). Effective cooperation between policy sectors, as well as stronger collaborations between ministries and other national/regional/local agencies are essential.
- **A clear implementation plan**, with measurable targets and milestones. For more complex and ambitious measures and reforms, a **piloting phase** in a limited number of schools provides the opportunity to gather early feedback on what is working well and what may need to be adjusted and allow adaptation at the design stage.
- **Systematic and adequate monitoring, evaluation and feed-back** mechanisms, at national, regional and local level as appropriate, to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of adopted measures. Evaluation plans need to be built in the early stages of policy design and implementation process and to be sure that these are coherent with the policy logic and capture essential aims. Both qualitative and quantitative monitoring data need to be gathered regularly at national, regional and local level (see 4.3.2).
- **Including only evidence-based measures.** Strategies should include actions and measures that have demonstrated to have a positive impact to achieve educational success and well-being, based on latest quantitative and qualitative research[220]. Policy needs to build not only on problem identification, but on scientific evidence of concrete social impact, showing which practices improve learners' results and which do not[221]. Evidence needs to include academic studies and policy reviews, as well as the contextualised insights of school leaders, teachers, parents and carers, and

[220] Many countries continue implementing measures which, according to abundant research, not only do not have any positive impact but could also be detrimental for school success, such as segregation, grade repetition, ability grouping, etc. On the contrary, many European schools situated in the poorest socio-economic areas within their country, with children of very different origins or from disadvantaged background, manage to obtain the same results in mathematics, literacy and other subjects as the average of their country and even better than school located in more affluent neighborhoods, also achieving notable improvements in the living together and well-being. These schools are not miracles, exceptions or by chance, but the result of implementing successful educational actions with a proven evidence of social impact. See: Flecha, R., & Soler, M., (2013), 'Turning difficulties into possibilities: engaging Roma families and students in school through dialogic learning', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 43(4), 451–465. doi: 10.1080/305764X.2013.819068.

[221] Scientific evidence also allows the identification of limitations of measures, and tell us which ones work well in a certain type of context and which ones obtain improvements in any context in which they are rigorously implemented.

students. University-school partnerships may support development of the evidence base. EU-funded research[222] and policy cooperation at EU level has allowed to identify numerous good practices and examples, currently available through the **European Toolkit for Schools** and **Cedefop VET toolkit for tackling early leaving**, which include selected resources that can inspire policy-makers and practitioners at national, regional, local and school level.

- **Proportionate resources** allocated to its implementation, including by making optimal use of EU and national funds to achieve economies of scale.
- Effective and timely **communication with all relevant stakeholders.** Clear and consistent communication on the purposes and processes of the strategy will be important not only in the early stages of policy design and stakeholder engagement, but throughout the processes of implementation, adaptation and evaluation. This includes vertical communication between central policy levels, and horizontal communication between local governments and schools, within schools and across school networks.

Strategic commitment requires a corresponding structure at national/regional level (depending on the structure of the education system) as a driving force to ensure that policies and practices for school success are kept as a priority for schools and at policy level. Establishing a **coordination mechanism or structure**, at the appropriate level, would ease implementation of an integrated strategy, allow better monitoring and evaluation, as well as identifying areas for further work.

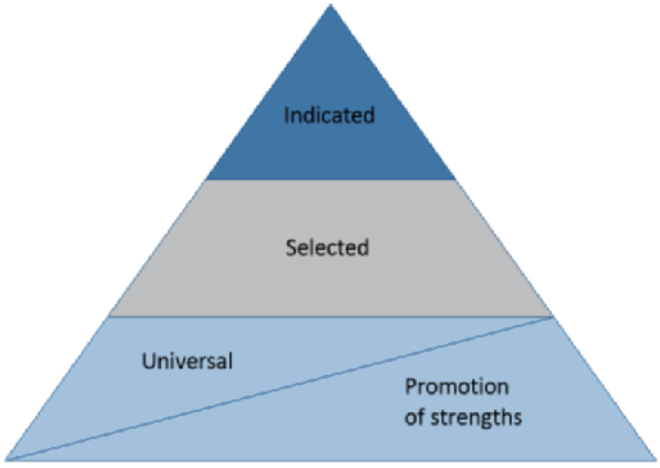
Differentiation: targeting policies and measures according to the level of need

Given the plurality of factors contributing to underachievement and ELET, including socio-economic status and specific individual characteristics, and the strongest propensity of certain

[222] For example, the INCLUD-ED project has analysed educational strategies that contribute to overcome inequalities and promote social cohesion, and educational strategies that generate social exclusion. The project has identified the elements that can influence school failure or success and their relationship with other areas of society, namely, housing, health, employment, and social and political participation. A specific focus has been placed on social groups that are vulnerable to social exclusion: youths, migrants, cultural minorities, e.g., Roma minorities, women, and persons with disabilities. The project has identified Successful Educational Actions with universal components, which are effective regardless of the context and therefore are transferrable to other schools and communities to improve school success and social cohesion. The implementation of these actions is leading to the improvement not only of the educational results but also of the inclusion and well-being of all members of the community in the more of 9000 schools that are implementing them in 14 countries of Europe and Latin America
See: https://comunidades-aprendizagem.dge.mec.pt/; comunidaddeaprendizaje.com.es); Soler-Gallart, M., & Rodrigues de Mello, R. (2020). *Schools as Learning Communities*. Dio Press Inc.
The EU-funded ISOTIS project aims at contributing to the development of effective practices and policies for increasing educational equality and social inclusion for those who face persistent disadvantages and risk of marginalization. To combat inequalities and increase inclusiveness, researchers set their sight on early childhood and primary education, along with family support and health services, and community programmes. The project developed effective interventions for tackling the mechanisms of inequality. One such intervention is the online Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The VLE includes over 100 multimedia learning activities on such topics as identity, language awareness, bridges between home and school, cultural differences and social justice.

groups to be affected, an integrated policy approach should acknowledge that **different levels of need require different measures and should include differentiated approaches.** Building on the public health models[223], differentiation implies distinguishing different levels of action: universal (school wide for all learners), selected (for some learners, some groups, or for those at moderate risk) and more indicated (for few, for individuals, for those in chronic need and at higher risk). A principle of differentiated need, recognising that there are different layers of complexity, is gaining fuller recognition in domains such as mental health[224], school violence and bullying[225], early leaving from education and training[226] and social work[227].

Figure 24. Differentiated Levels of Need for Prevention



Legend:
Universal – All
Selected – Some, Groups, Moderate Risk
Indicated – Individual, Intensive, Chronic Need
Source: Downes, P., Nairz-Wirth, E., Rusinaitė, V.[228]

BOX 1. Finland - Right to Learn programme

In 2020, the government launched the 'Right to Learn' programme (2020–2022)[229], which has a budget of EUR 180 million to fund projects aimed at improving the quality of education and

223 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Downes, P., Nairz-Wirth, E., Rusinaitė, V., (2017), *Structural indicators for inclusive systems in and around school: analytical report*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

224 Suldo, S. M., Friedrich, A. & Michalowski, J., (2010), 'Personal and systems-level factors that limit and facilitate school psychologists' involvement in school-based mental health services', *Psychology in the Schools* 47 (4), 354-373.

225 Downes, P. & Cefai, C., (2019), 'Strategic Clarity on Different Prevention Levels of School Bullying and Violence: Rethinking Peer Defenders and Selected Prevention', *Journal of School Violence*, 18 (4) 510-521

226 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Downes, P., Nairz-Wirth, E., Rusinaitė, V., (2017), *Structural indicators for inclusive systems in and around school: analytical report*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

227 Hood, R., (2018), *Complexity in social work*. SAGE Publications Ltd: Sage, London.

228 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Downes, P., Nairz-Wirth, E., Rusinaitė, V., (2017), *Structural indicators for inclusive systems in and around school: analytical report*.

229 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Donlevy, V., Day, L., et al., (2021), *Study on gender behaviour and its impact on education outcomes*

reduce educational performance differences between children based on their socio-economic background, migrant background, gender, or special needs.

An important characteristic of the Finnish education system is its effective special needs policy. As part of this policy, teachers are encouraged not to treat their classes as 'one entity', but to adjust their pedagogical approach to the individual needs of each student. Since boys are over-represented in special needs classes, this policy is likely to be particularly beneficial for boys. This is possible thanks to the high level of decentralization in the Finnish education system.

Source: European Commission, 2021
Study on gender behaviour and its impact on education outcomes[230]

BOX 2. Cyprus - Commission supported Cyprus to address students' disengagement and school dropout through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI)

The aim of the project was to support Cyprus in improving the engagement of students at risk of dropout and to offer new opportunities for those who already dropped out, but wish to re-engage in schools and gain necessary qualifications and skills to improve job prospects. The support provided consisted of:

i. An analysis of the root causes for students disengaging and dropping out from secondary education, and of the policies in place to address these causes in Cyprus;
ii. Policy recommendations to improve the engagement of students encountering difficulties in the secondary education in Cyprus and to reengage those who left education and training prematurely; and
iii. An Action Plan for effective implementation of these policy recommendations.

The set of recommendations and the Action Plan for implementation of these recommendations should inform the Cypriot authorities on providing tailored and equitable educational opportunities to the students struggling at schools, and to those who already dropped out. Over the longer-term, it would contribute to reducing the numbers of early school leavers in Cyprus.

Source: European Commission

In addition to more general measures, an integrated strategy should therefore incorporate **actions that address the needs of particular groups**, such as people with disabilities, those with special educational needs, High Learning Potential or Gifted children, migrants or people with a migrant background, belonging to a minority, and victims of bullying within and outside the school context. A stronger focus would also be necessary on those with complex needs (e.g. children and young people in care, with a parent in prison, with caring responsibilities, victims of domestic abuse or violence, people with a history of substance misuse, as well as children with serious mental health issues). Policies should also be adjusted for children and young people of different age-groups.

(with a special focus on the performance of boys and young men in education). Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

230 Ibid.

BOX 3. Estonia - Establishment of support centres for students with special needs

In 2013, several new amendments to Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools act were adopted. One of the goals was to improve availability of support services in schools, such as social pedagogy, psychology, speech therapy and special education guidance. In 2014, the state established a nationwide specialist network called "Pathfinder" (Rajaleidja) where students with learning, psychological or behavioural difficulties can get support. This was funded through the European Social Fund and co-funded by the Ministry of Education and Research. The goal of this national intervention was to support students in need, to reduce and prevent ELET and reduce dropout in lower-secondary education. The Pathfinder centres support local municipalities and specialists working in schools and kindergartens. They also provide additional psychological and medical research and appoint a counselling committee to propose a learning curriculum for students where state-provided service has not yielded the expected results. All schools can get additional support from these regional services for their students who need them.

However, Estonia currently experiences an acute shortage of support specialists. Rajaleidja also contributes to rationalise the support given to pupils and teachers in a context of an ageing and shrinking special support workforce.

Source: Foundation Innove, Pathfinder centres[231]

Better use of funding

Long-term interventions linked to comprehensive strategies need time to produce results, but generate more effective and lasting effects than short-term, fragmented initiatives. This may be challenging for some countries especially under the current circumstances, with the COVID-19 pandemic putting pressure on national budgets. Yet, the financial mechanisms created to support Member States recover from the impact of the pandemic offer many opportunities. Addressing educational inequalities and improving school success for all should remain a strategic priority within national implementation plans.

The assessment of the 2011 Council recommendation indicates that **targeted funding mechanisms** (e.g. the European Structural and Investment Funds - ESIF, Erasmus+) appear to have played a valuable role in supporting national level implementation of comprehensive strategies. There was considerable evidence that the ESIF "ex-ante conditionalities" played an important part in levering action at a national level, although challenges were raised in some cases around sustained engagement[232]. EU-funded programmes have also been widely utilised to address national ELET priorities; in the most impactful examples, ESF has been utilised to

[231] *https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/toolkits/vet-toolkit-tackling-early-leaving/resources/foundation-innove-pathfinder-centres-estonian*

[232] Ex-ante conditionalities were introduced in the regulatory framework for the ESI Funds for the 2014-2020 period to ensure that the effectiveness of EU investment is not undermined by unsound policies or regulatory, administrative or institutional bottlenecks (see Article 19 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 establishing Common Provisions for the European Structural and Investment). An ex-ante conditionality is "a concrete and precisely pre-defined critical factor, which is a prerequisite for and has a direct and genuine link to, and direct impact on, the effective and efficient achievement of a specific objective for an investment priority or a Union priority". One of these was related to early school leaving: Member States had to demonstrate the existence of a comprehensive strategy and monitoring systems as a precondition for the use of ESIF financing for activities to tackle early leaving from education and training.

support strategic projects with a close alignment to the 2011 Recommendation. However, the separation of EU programmes from national policy-making and budgets was highlighted as a challenge in some countries, as well as the risk of substitution effects, and limitations posed by having too many disparate projects.

BOX 4. Latvia, Slovakia, Sweden – ESF funded projects to support national implementation

In **Latvia**, the large-scale project '**PuMPuRS'**, was able to reach over 300 schools and to engage municipalities with substantial ESF funding support. Latvia has also benefited from synergies between a range of smaller ESF supported initiatives (including a focus on VET and school environment)[233].

In **Slovakia**, an ESF supported project on pre-primary education provided a test bed for the subsequent 2018 educational reforms, which include obligatory pre-primary education one year before entering primary school, among other measures.

In **Sweden**, ESF funding enabled the **Plug In** project to develop at scale, covering 8 regions and 59 local sub-projects between 2015-18 with the aim of improving mentoring, outreach and other ESL prevention measures in secondary schools[234].

Source: Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation[235]

The Technical Support Instrument (TSI) offers Member States the possibility to receive support, upon demand, for tailor made reforms in a variety of areas. This includes, for example, reforms to improve educational outcomes for all learners, to raise quality in early childhood education and care, to develop national strategies on digital education, to create tools to support teacher recruitment and professional development, or to prepare the piloting and roll-out of curriculum reforms.

BOX 5. Addressing school failure and school drop-out in Portugal through the TSI

The aim of the project was to support **Portugal** in addressing school failure and school drop out in Educational Areas of Priority Intervention (TEIP schools). This approach was tested in a limited pilot experience in 2017-2018, and was later on expanded to a wider group of TEIP schools. The project led to issuing a set of recommendations which inform a review and upgrade of the national strategy to address education gaps linked to socio-economic causes. The ultimate goal is to contribute to reducing educational attainment disparities over the long-term.

BOX 6. Improving cooperation and monitoring of early leavers from education and training (ELET) in Spain through the TSI

233 http://www.pumpurs.lv/

234 https://skr.se/skr/tjanster/englishpages.411.html

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

Spain has the highest rate of early leavers from education and training (ELET) in the EU. Despite having fallen steadily over the past decade, progress has slowed down significantly. The reason for this stagnation lies on the difficulty to address the different social and economic contexts of the critical populations, but also on the poor coordination mechanisms and the lack of a consistent monitoring system to assess the relevant policies and measures.
The project aimed at steering a consultative process to design a proposal for a Cooperation Framework and an Action Plan to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of the ELET dedicated policy included in the new law on Education across the territory.

BOX 7: Increasing the effectiveness of public spending for professional development of teachers and school leaders through the Structural Reform Support Programme in Estonia

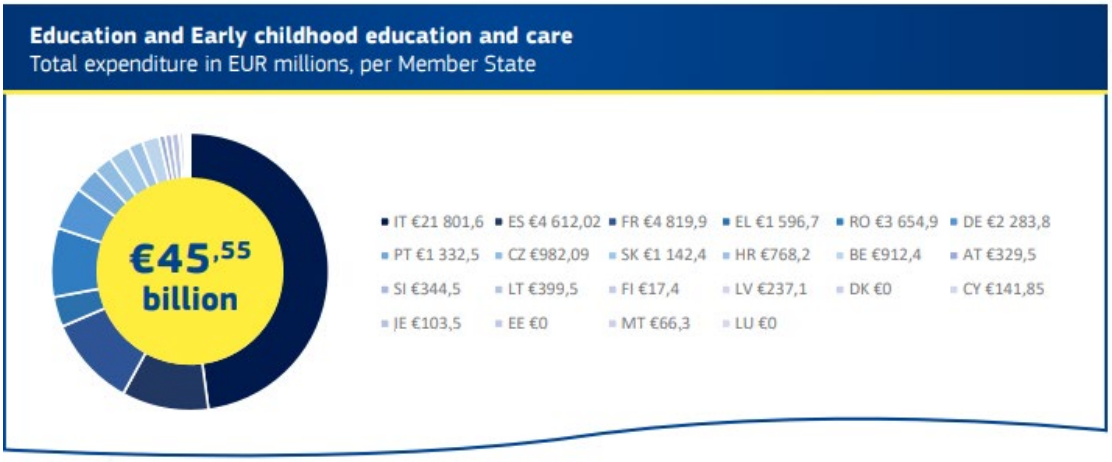
The project, supported by the European Commission through the Structural Reform Support Programme (the predecessor of the TSI), developed tools and recommendations that would help policymakers, school leaders and teachers increase learners' chances to have a teacher that is both confident and effective. As an alternative to large-scale external training programmes, the project piloted instructional coaching methods, as a school-based, collaborative way for teachers to improve their practice, both for their own professional development and well-being, and, importantly, for the benefit of learners.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is offering an unprecedented opportunity for Member States for structured action to facilitate the recovery, reverse the negative trends and improve the labour market relevance of education and training. In this context, Member States included in their recovery and resilience plans a range of reforms and investments to support quality, inclusion and effectiveness of education. Member States have chosen to use the Facility primarily to improve the resilience of their education systems with a strong focus on digital education. Some Member States will also use the Facility for targeted measures to compensate for the learning loss resulting from the pandemic. The investments and reforms address all levels of education and training (i.e. pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary education and training) with country-specific variations linked to national priorities and challenges[236].

F

[236] European Commission (2021), *Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard – Thematic Analysis: Education*.

igure 25. Total expenditure on education and ECEC per EU MS



Source: European Commission (2021), Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard – Thematic analysis: Education

Of the 22 recovery and resilience plans currently covered by the Scoreboard, investments relevant for education add up to EUR 45.55 billion and represent approximately 10% of the total budget foreseen for these plans. Investments and reforms cover early childhood education and care, general primary and secondary school education, initial vocational and training, and higher education. Among these, investments and reforms in general school education will support improvements in quality and inclusiveness. To support this ambition, in May 2021, the Commission launched an expert group on quality investment in education and training to identify policies that have the potential to boost educational outcomes and equity, while improving efficiency of spending. Policies related to teachers and trainers are one of the focus areas for this expert group.

Member States will offer individualised support to disadvantaged schools and to students, including mentoring, working to overcome learning gaps and prevent potential school dropouts caused by the partial school closure. Other measures include investments to increase the number of instruction hours and enable whole-day schooling. Several measures address topics such as implementing curricular reforms, reforming teachers' recruitment mechanisms, fighting ELET, improving special needs education, supporting low performing students, improving external evaluation of schools or supporting desegregation. Adequate funding for the school infrastructure should also be available (eg: schools and classrooms should be adapted to learners with disabilities, equipped with appropriate material and facilities, canteen, etc).

BOX 8. Romania - A national programme will be rolled out to reduce the high rate of early school leaving.

In 2020, the proportion of early leavers from education and training among 18-24 year-olds was 15.6%. Although the rate has decreased in recent years, it remains significantly higher than the EU average of 9.9% and represents a structural challenge for the school system. Early school leaving is higher in rural areas (23%) and among disadvantaged groups, including Roma. These are also the groups that were disproportionately affected by the impact of COVID-19 in education and the school closures. To avoid a worsening of the situation and to reduce early school leaving, a grant programme for schools will be implemented between 2022 and 2026 with funding from the Recovery and Resilience Facility. With a budget of EUR 400 million, the scheme will enable the development of various educational support measures and social

programmes to prevent and reduce drop-out. More than 2 500 schools will be eligible for funding. In addition, an early warning tool developed in cooperation with the European Commission through the Structural Reform Support Programme (the predecessor of the Technical Support Instrument) and currently being piloted will be scaled up and rolled out across the country.

Source: European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2021[237]

BOX 9. Slovakia – Recovery and Resilience plan

The Slovak recovery and resilience plan includes a component dedicated to curricular reform in primary and lower secondary education. The aim is to create new learning content, including textbooks, to develop pupils' key competences, cognitive and soft skills, and to improve teachers' skills. The implementation of the reform will be supported by the creation of 40 regional centres for mentoring and counselling for schools, as well as by setting up a favourable digital ecosystem. This will include a network of digital methodological coordinators in schools, to improve digitalisation in education and to enable the upper secondary school leaving exam ('baccalaureate') to move online. To complete the curricular reform, changes in initial teacher education and CPD are planned. By the end of 2023, at least 60% of teachers in primary and lower secondary education are expected to receive training. At the same time, complementary investments are planned to increase the percentage of schools with highly equipped and connected classrooms from 30% to at least 90% and to improve school infrastructure, including establishing or renovating school libraries. Slovakia also plans to improve the inclusiveness of education, including via relevant legislative changes, a catalogue of mainstream and targeted inclusive measures in education, training of teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as making school buildings barrier-free.

Source: European Commission, Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard[238]

5.1.2 Enhanced data collection and monitoring systems

The 2011 Council Recommendation strongly supports the development of evidence-informed and cost-effective policies which are **based on gathering and maintaining data** on why early leaving from education and training occurs and how it manifests at local, regional and national levels. Subsequent work at EU level has confirmed that an accurate understanding of the scope and reasons behind underachievement and early leaving from education and training is necessary to design and implement targeted policies. Data collection and monitoring systems should:

- cover all levels and types of education and training, including private schools;
- allow analyses at local, regional and national levels;
- facilitate the availability of data and information at different policy levels and their use in steering, monitoring and evaluating policy development (data to be available in time and in formats that support policy design, setting targets, prioritising and allocating funds and monitoring developments);

[237] https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/en/romania.html
[238] European Commission (2021), *Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard – Thematic Analysis: Education*.

- enable the regular monitoring of pupils' educational progress with a view to the early detection and identification of learners at risk and allow for timely provision of appropriate support, as well as help assess the effectiveness of measures;
- help understand the reasons for underachievement and early leaving, especially by collecting the views of learners;
- allow for disaggregated analysis, for example by gender, racial or ethnic origin, disability, religion or belief, in order to identify key factors impacting the learners' performance;
- provide the basis for developing effective guidance and support to schools as well as follow-up measures for young people who have left education and training prematurely.

Data collection on young people who have never enrolled in school may also be relevant for some countries and regions.

BOX 10. Spain – Data collection on school enrolment

In 2015, **Catalonia** created a unique identifier to develop a register of students. The aim of the identifier is to allow schools and public administrations to track students once they have left compulsory education to help them re-enter education or enter employment. This measure is intended to provide longitudinal data following students from their entrance at the education system (at age 3) until they join the labour market[239]. Through this system, the Department for Education will be able to follow students participating in upper secondary education and several pathways within VET, as well as knowing when students drop out. Although the follow-up system does not include all educational pathways, it aims to broaden its scope over time.

Source: Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation[240]

BOX 11. Estonia – Collecting data on student absenteeism

In Estonia, schools register all absences in the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS). If a pupil is absent two days in a row, and the parents did not inform the school, the school has to notify the local government, which has the responsibility to enforce compulsory school attendance.

Source: Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation[241]

The assessment of the 2011 Council Recommendation confirms the continued importance of **systematic and robust data collection**, research into the ELET phenomenon, as well as the evaluation of the policies and initiatives that have been implemented. The study reveals that data collection and monitoring is implemented in different ways and to variable degrees of

239 http://ensenyament.gencat.cat/ca/departament/estadistiques/itineraris-educatius/

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

241 Ibid.

effectiveness across the different countries covered. Some countries delegate monitoring and/or evaluation to an independent public authority. In Greece, for example, monitoring of factors influencing ELET is operated by the Observatory for Monitoring and Tackling Early School Leaving under the Institute for Educational Policy, now part of the Institute's Office for Research and Evaluation[242]. Others delegate to national statistical agencies, which then manage the main collection tools.

Different countries also use a wide array of monitoring tools. In Finland, the Ministry of Education monitors the constitution of multi-stakeholder committees, working groups and steering groups of external experts. In Ireland, the Department for Education and Skills (DES) produces annual statistics on ELET, including background information on early leavers from education and training; the School Completion Programme, external evaluators and school self-evaluation (SSE) allow for an additional collection of data[243].

BOX 12. France – Identifying early leavers from education and training

In **France**, the Inter-ministerial Exchange of Information System (Système interministériel d'échange d'informations, SIEI) was created in 2011. It aimes at identifying early leavers from education and training by combining datasets from the Ministry of Education and its partners (Ministry of Agriculture, Apprenticeship Training Centres, employment data) twice a year. The availability of this data led to the establishment of the Monitoring and Support Platforms for Early School Leavers (plates-formes de suivi et d'appui aux décrocheurs, PSAD). These platforms are in charge of contacting young people who were identified by the SIEI and those who approach the PSAD proactively. The scope of the SIEI was widened in 2014 to improve the relevance, comprehensiveness and reliability of the data, in particular by taking into account apprentices who have dropped out of the vocational education and training system, and promoting closer cooperation with all potential partners.

Source: Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation[244]

The study also highlights that most countries do not systematically evaluate the effectiveness of ELET-related policies at national level, due to the national (lack of) tradition of monitoring and evaluation of education policy, an absence of specific ELET policies or the existence of decentralised models.

Stakeholders have emphasised the need for **higher standards of data disaggregation** to understand educational disadvantage and underperformance and addressing the barriers to school success. For instance, the needs of migrant students and students with a migrant background differ depending on whether they are first generation, or second generation migrants, or newly-arrived and this information may be relevant in terms of targeting policies. Some stakeholders have also proposed to reflect on an EU-wide mechanism for exchange of data between Member States on the movement of pupils within the EU. The cooperation of

[242] This organisation has published numerous studies on ELET in Greece and, in parallel, the Ministry of Education has conducted some studies at local level. Countries often use a wide array of monitoring tools.

[243] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Donlevy, V., Day, L., Andriescu, M., Downes, P., (2019), *Assessment of the implementation of the 2011 Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving: final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[244] Ibid.

different stakeholders is also considered advisable to establish a common understanding of the type of data and information required, the possible indicators and data collection methods.

5.2 A Whole-school approach to school success: core dimensions

The consultation activities (64 % of all survey respondents) and research gathered to prepare the Commission proposal clearly identified the need for promoting a 'whole school approach' to school success. The importance of dialogue and collaboration between schools, parents, civil organisations and other relevant stakeholders at the local, regional and national level was considered essential to create supportive learning environments for students. The concept of 'whole school approach' allows for the entire system of actors and their inter-relationships in and around schools to be considered, acknowledging that each stakeholder has a part to play in supporting the learners' educational journey and nurturing their learning experience. The next sections presents its main dimensions.

5.2.1 Learners

"We focus on knowledge, forgetting that a pupil is above all a child, a young person with his story, his life, his feelings and that this too can be worked on"

Source: Open Public Consultation position papers

Learners' needs should be at the centre of education. All learners are entitled to high-quality education, a relevant curriculum, appropriate assessment, equitable and valued learning opportunities. Schools should provide an environment that accommodates learners' diversity, including varied learning and linguistic needs, to maximise each young person's potential. Quality education should be designed to fit the diversity of learners rather than requiring them to fit into an existing system. This should ensure that they engage with the learning process, and see a clear purpose for their education.

Early detection

Early identification of development problems, language competences and special education needs, as well as early detection of learners at risk of underachievement and drop out is essential, in order to define and organise the appropriate support. It is important, however, that screening avoid labelling and stigmatisation; this could be achieved, for example, through more formative forms of screening based on formative evaluation of children' strengths and needs. New technologies can be very helpful in this respect.

BOX 13. Sweden - Using Artificial Intelligence to detect reading difficulties

The digital tool Lexplore uses eye tracking AI to determine students' reading levels. This unique evidence-based technology is based on an extensive 30-year research project carried out at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. Lexplore's machine learning algorithms recognise correlations and patterns in eye movement data. More specifically, tools like Lexplore make their analysis by tracing how a reader's eyes follow words in sequential (or non-sequential) order to identify patterns. Readers at low risk for dyslexia tend to make more progressive movements—from left to right—as they scan words. Dyslexic readers on the other hand make

more regressive movements—right to left movements—and do not make regular pauses (or fixations) during reading in the same way non-dyslexic readers do. This unique high-tech process provides teachers with real-time data for intervention that directly correlates to a student's reading level (as well as detecting dyslexia). The methodology for this comprehensive research project entitled "the Dyslexia project", has since been evaluated and refined. Over two years, more than 3,000 students in grades 1-3 in Järfälla and Trosa municipalities were screened. The evaluation reported high overall accuracy with a good balance between sensitivity and specificity.

Source: https://www.lexplore.com/

Curriculum

Making learning relevant to learners' lives is crucial. In recent years, education systems have shifted from a traditional content-based paradigm towards a more comprehensive competence-based approach of education and training, based on a vision of learner development, in which each learner develops his or her own abilities and is able to mobilise and critically reflect on his and her knowledge[245]. At EU level, the Council Recommendation on the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning describes the eight competences (defined in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes) that individuals need to develop to deal with problems and complex demands of contemporary societies. Many European countries have made significant progress towards incorporating these into national curricula, introducing reforms to strengthen key competences, including basic skills and establishing standards for learning outcomes.

BOX 14. Norway: values and principles for primary and secondary education

Norway put into effect a new core curriculum and new subject curricula in the autumn of 2020. One of the main aims of the reform is to stress key elements of the core curriculum in each subject, thus improving the links between them.

The most noteworthy changes include:

- The introduction of three interdisciplinary topics to flag up important social challenges: health and life skills, democracy and citizenship, and sustainable development
- More hands-on practice and exploration in several subjects
- Renewed emphasis on critical thinking and a critical approach to sources
- Play-based learning for the youngest children
- Expansion of digital skills, programming and technology
- Reduction of the number of subject competences, allowing for more in-depth learning

Source: National Reforms in School Education | Eurydice (europa.eu)

Relevant and stimulating curricula are key to assist teachers to create motivating lessons. Curricula should allow **flexible approaches and more personalised forms of teaching and learning**, to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and development of competences and skills to the best ability of each child. They should allow more participatory methods in learning and

[245] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Siarova, H.; Sternadel, D.; Mašidlauskaitė, R., (2017), *Assessment practices for 21st century learning: review of evidence*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

make children and young people actively involved in the learning process. Curricula at each stage should be aligned with subsequent levels of education or alternative training pathways.

Curricula should allow a **variety of teaching methods**, including collaborative teaching and learning, on-the-job learning and coaching, which have proven to be beneficial in (re-) engaging and motivating learners to continue in education and training. These teaching methods should maintain high quality standards for all learners.

BOX 15. Portugal - curricular flexibility and autonomy

Portugal began the process of education reform by analysing which values and competences this generation of pupils should have in order to thrive in a global society. These were then codified in the 2017 document Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling.

After establishing this educational vision, the government launched the new Essential Core curriculum to address curriculum overload and support deeper learning. It also invited professional societies such as the Maths Teachers Association and the Portuguese Association of English Teachers to determine a common foundation of competences that all students should develop.

A particular feature of the Portuguese approach is the Project for Autonomy and Curriculum Flexibility (PACF). This project tackled the implementation and evaluation of the curriculum and sought to give stakeholders a sense of ownership. For example, PACF granted schools voluntary autonomy over certain curricular and pedagogical areas, so they could design learning experiences in line with the aims of the student profile. This might mean, for instance, tailoring lessons and practices to non-native Portuguese speakers or students at risk of dropping out. It remains to be seen how this approach can coexist with the existing centralised governance of the education system, but the outlook is positive, according to OECD.

Source: OECD[246]

Some **adaptation** to the local social and cultural context may be necessary to ensure that curriculum implementation is responsive to local needs; some regions or schools may need to focus more attention on particular competences and issues than others. In this case, a careful balance is needed between curriculum integrity, to ensure effectiveness, and evaluation and adaptation to the context's particular circumstances. The **active involvement of staff, students (particularly the older ones) and parents**, through participatory and democratic processes, in the design and development of new programmes and content is key especially as regards social and emotional education materials and resources, in order to ensure cultural responsiveness.

BOX 16. Estonia, Finland, Malta – Active involvement of students through participatory and democratic processes

In **Estonia**, 'health councils' in schools — established to develop competences such as problem

[246] OECD (2018) Curriculum Flexibility and Autonomy in Portugal – an OECD Review. Paris, OECD. https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/Curriculum-Flexibility-and-Autonomy-in-Portugal-an-OECD-Review.pdf

solving, decision making, peer and media pressure, self-regulation, self-esteem, and coping with stress — also include student representatives. In **Finland**, following suggestions by children and young people themselves, student associations were set up in all schools to contribute to decisions affecting them, including opportunities to participate in preparing curriculum and school rules. In **Malta**, each school has a student council made up of students elected by their peers themselves and some members of staff; it provides students with the opportunity to voice their opinions and take a more active role in the life of their schools.

Source: Cefai, C., et.al. (2018)[247]

Embedding socio-emotional education in curricula

Social and emotional learning is part of one of the eight key competencies for lifelong learning (personal, social and learning to learn competence) as in the 2018 Council Recommendation. Well-implemented socio-emotional education enhances social and emotional competences, improves pro-social behaviour and positive attitudes towards oneself and others and reduces behavioural and emotional problems, including bullying and violence, substance use, mental health problems, anxiety and depression. Social and emotional education programmes can help learners develop a positive attitude towards school and increase academic achievement substantially.

BOX 17. LifeComp

The Joint Research Center developed in 2020 an European framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key competence (LifeComp). LifeComp is made up of three intertwined competence areas: 'Personal', 'Social', and 'Learning to Learn'. Each area includes three competences: Self-regulation, Flexibility, Well-being (Personal Area), Empathy, Communication, Collaboration (Social Area), Growth mindset, Critical thinking, and Managing learning (Learning to learn Area). Each competence has, in turn, three descriptors which generally correspond to the 'awareness, understanding, action' model. LifeComp can be used as a basis for the development of curricula and learning activities fostering personal, and social development, and learning to learn.

Source: Sala, A., et.al. (2020)[248]

Curricula are at the heart of any process to promote social and emotional education in schools. Social and emotional education needs to be structured and fully integrated into the curriculum, from the early years to secondary school. Fragmented one-off initiatives are not likely to work in the long run. Moreover, curriculum should also include mental health literacy

[247] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Cefai, C., Bartolo, P., Cavioni, V., et al., (2018), *Strengthening social and emotional education as a core curricular area across the EU : a review of the international evidence : analytical report*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/664439

[248] European commission, Joint Research Centre , Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., (2020), *LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. doi:10.2760/922681, JRC120911

(including addressing stigma and prejudice) adapted to the schools' context and needs. The following conditions have been identified for effective social and emotional education[249]:

- A balanced curriculum, focusing on both interpersonal and intrapersonal domains (self-awareness and self-management, and social awareness and social management) and including resilience skills and success-oriented learners engagement skills;
- A curriculum which employs a SAFE strategy: Sequence (a structure, sequential approach); Active (implemented as experiential, skills-based form of learning) ; Focused; and Explicit (with specific learning goals and outcomes);
- Adequate training for teachers and other school personnel. In this context, programmes delivered by teachers are as effective or more effective then when delivered by external practitioners;
- Embedding social and emotional education in other existing related curricular areas, utilising existing practices, expertise, resources and content and fully integrating SEE in the daily life of the class.

BOX 18. Malta, Ireland – Embedding social and emotional education in curricula

The National Curriculum Framework in **Malta** emphasises the crucial importance of developing children's well-being and self-esteem as part of the mainstream educational process from the early years onwards. Personal, social and careers education forms part of Health and Physical Education, one of the eight learning areas in both primary and secondary education, and is a mandatory subject area in secondary school and more recently in late primary school. Personal, Social and Careers Education (PSCD) was introduced about thirty years ago as a compulsory subject in the secondary school curriculum of Maltese state schools. Through a skills-based, experiential approach, students (aged 12-16 years old) have the opportunity to develop intra- and interpersonal competencies such as self-awareness, self-expression, healthy living, responsible behaviour and decision making, critical thinking skills, problem solving, conflict resolution, dealing with peer pressure, respect for others, healthy relationships, and celebration of diversity. More recently, PSCD has also been introduced in the last three years of primary school, addressing such topics as developing a sense of well-being, use of social and communication skills, and good decision-making skills. Since 2014, the subject has been restructured as personal, social and career education (PSCD), adding career education as part of the curriculum. The 2017 Learning Outcomes Framework includes competences in well-being and resilience, which were identified as mainly coming under the curriculum for the subject 'personal, social and career development' and are assessed through a formative approach.

The teaching of social and emotional aspects of education is considered a core aspect of the school curriculum for primary and secondary students in **Ireland**. The promotion of social and emotional competence is embedded within the comprehensive programme of Social, Personal and Health education (SPHE) in both primary and secondary schools. One of the 8 key principles of the junior cycle well-being programme is that the student experience contributes directly to their physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being and resilience. In 2012, a new curriculum for lower secondary school students was introduced, placing greater emphasis on students' social and emotional development across all subjects, with classroom teachers

[249] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Cefai, C., Bartolo, P., Cavioni, V., et al., (2018), *Strengthening social and emotional education as a core curricular area across the EU: a review of the international evidence: analytical report*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

encouraged to embed social and emotional competences into their planning, pedagogy and assessment. The curriculum consisted of six 'key skills', namely, self-management, staying well, effective communication, creativity, working with others, and managing information and thinking. The upper secondary SPHE programme aims to support learners in making choices for health and well-being. The relationships and sexuality programme (RSP) is a key component of the SPHE programme (Government, 1999), and a single, integrated curriculum for RSP and SPHE spanning both primary and secondary is planned.

Source: Cefai, C., et.al. (2018)[250]

Pedagogical approaches

The literature on dropout and retention widely recognises that poor quality of teaching and learning is one among a number of other institutional and individual factors that explain retention and dropout[251]. Teachers should be prepared to adapt and personalise teaching to meet learners' diverse needs. **Learner-centred approaches**, including more active and interactive techniques, such as enquiry, project-based and cooperative teaching and learning have proven to be beneficial. School and class organisation, including the use of space and time, should support the variety of student needs and teaching methods.

Findings from a Cedefop's survey of learners in initial VET[252] show that learner-centred approaches and certain pedagogic dimensions are associated with: higher motivation and engagement of students; higher satisfaction; prevention of dropout; achievement; and progression within the education and training system[253]. The quality and character of the learning environment (including classrooms, workshops in schools, polyvalent workshops, hybrid environments, workplace learning environments, and virtual learning environments) is reported as critical in terms of supporting learner-centred pedagogies and successfully delivering the written curriculum[254].

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250 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Cefai, C., Bartolo, P., Cavioni, V., et al., (2018), *Strengthening social and emotional education as a core curricular area across the EU : a review of the international evidence : analytical report*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/664439

251 European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2015), *Tackling early leaving from education and training in Europe: strategies, policies and measures.* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; Cedefop, (2015), *Vocational pedagogies and benefits for learners: practices and challenges in Europe,* Research paper No 47, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

252 Cedefop, (2015), *Vocational pedagogies and benefits for learners: practices and challenges in Europe*, Research paper No 47. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

253 The research has found promising associations between particular teaching and learning approaches with these five indicators examined, but these do not demonstrate causality. It shows that learner attentiveness, engagement, striving for success, aspirations and assertiveness are associated with key outcomes such as achievement, satisfaction and lower risk of dropout.

254 Cedefop (2010). *Learning outcomes approaches in VET curricula: a comparative analysis of nine European countries,* Research paper No 6, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; Cedefop (2012), *Curriculum reform in Europe: the impact of learning outcomes,* Research paper No 29, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; Cedefop (2015), *Vocational pedagogies and benefits for learners: practices and challenges in Europe.*

BOX 19. Finland - Flexible Basic Education with JOPO

In its quest to reduce school dropout, the Finnish Ministry of Education introduced Flexible Basic Education (JOPO). As its name suggests, JOPO develops flexible, varied teaching methods to cater for students' individual needs. A model of action-based learning has proven very effective with some pupils; others find more use in non-traditional activities like on-the-job learning and school camps; still others might benefit from small group teaching.

JOPO has been shown to improve the situation of nearly 90% of participating pupils, so that most of them received their final certificate, improved their attendance and/or gained motivation.

The project was introduced in 2006 and has since been written into the Basic Education Act and Government Decree. Under the Basic education act, a local authority may provide activities within flexible basic education (JOPO) to the extent it chooses in conjunction with grades 7-9. The aim of flexible basic education is to reduce dropping out of basic education, prevent marginalisation and strengthen students' study motivation and life management.

In flexible basic education, the education is provided at school and as guided learning at workplaces and other learning environments. Studying outside the school is an important part of the studies.

Source: School Education Gateway[255]

Blending learning environments and tools support broad competence development and help cater for the different needs and abilities of all students by creating more engaging learning experiences. According to the Council Recommendation on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education[256], blended learning in formal education happens when a school, educator or learner takes more than one approach to the learning process: blending school sites and other physical environments (companies, training centres, distance learning, outdoor, cultural sites, etc.), and blending different learning tools that can be digital (including online) and non-digital.

BOX 20. Germany - Dannewerkschule Schleswig

Dannewerkschule is a comprehensive lower secondary school offering grades 5-10 (students aged 10-17), located in a socio-economically disadvantaged area in Schleswig. Learners with special education needs are integrated in mainstream classes, with extra support provided by specialist teachers from a local services for special needs children (Förderzentrum Schleswig-Kropp) who work fully integrated into the school. Aspecial "Campus-class" has been developed for mentally and physically disabled students, in cooperation project with the local support center. The school also offers "Flex-Classes" from grade 8 onwards (allowing one more year of schooling combined with work-based learning), as well as temporary "DaZ-classes" for students with a migrant background, including a majority of refugee children, learning German as a second language. Gifted students are also supported and one of them attends the university two days a week.

Teachers systematically combines different learning environments:

[255] https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools/detail.cfm?n=417
[256] COM/2021/455 final

- School garden as a student research center, as an open stage, as an outdoor learning space, or as a place to rest
- School kitchen for "consumer education"
- Technical room for handicraft activities
- MINT-point (mathematics, engineering, science, technology) for peer-to-peer learning services, or MINT-career orientation
- Music room for special music training for DaZ-students, or the "music break"
- Coaching space for an individual learning training
- Space for school social work

All rooms and places are equipped with presentation media and have Wi-Fi. Teachers also combine a whole range of different teaching tools and opportunities to support students individually (tablets, laptops, bring-your-own devices, also non-digital such as the classical books, analog work equipment, work materials for art lessons…). In order to achieve equal educational opportunities, all materials and work equipment are provided free of charge by the school.

Source: https://www.dannewerkschule-schleswig.de/

Within a blended learning approach, digital solutions can prove very effective to reach students who are not able to integrate ordinary schooling.

BOX 21. Belgium - Bednet: Distance Learning for Sick Children

With the help of Bednet, chronically sick pupils can continue to receive education during their illness and treatment. Bednet connects the sick student to their class group via computer: it creates a live connection between them and their classmates, whereby the absent child is visible on a flat screen at the back of the classroom. Not only does the student keep up with the curriculum, they also keep in touch with the class. Bednet is available for pre-school children from the age of 5, as well as primary and secondary school pupils in all certified state-subsidised schools in Flanders and Brussels. Equipment and counselling are free for schools and families for as long as they are needed. Since 2005 when Bednet was launched, 6,209 children with a long-term or chronic illness have used it in 2,600 Flemish schools.

Source: https://www.bednet.be/

Assessment

The key role of **assessment** for providing information about learners' progress towards expected learning outcomes has been highlighted in Commission's Staff Working Document "Assessment of Key Competences"[257]. Assessment helps to adapt teaching and learning more effectively to learners' needs. Research has shown that timely and specific feedback helps close learning gaps and has a significant impact on learning, including for marginalised learners. Moreover, the feedback given through assessment has an important impact on the learner's motivation, self-esteem and awareness of their own learning process – thus impacting also their well-being. Different visions of assessment exist, corresponding to different functions/purposes and practices (assessment *of* learning/summative assessment; assessment *for* learning/formative assessment; assessment *as* learning). However, there is no single method that can fully assess key competences nor serve as a best practices for student

[257] COM/2012/669 final

assessment. The different functions of assessment must be seen in an integrated way and several methods, tools and types of assessment need to be combined to assess various skills in a comprehensive way[258].

Regardless of the methods, active involvement of learners is crucial. When they are fully involved in the assessment process, learners are able to track their progress over time and to build their confidence in their ability to succeed.

Standardised assessments have proved to be effective in assessing a number of key competences. However, if narrowly focused solely on the content of the subject being assessed, they are not always suitable for evaluating non-traditional competences and transversal skills. New technology has the potential to enhance the functionality of standardised assessments and their effectiveness in assessing cross-curricular competences.

Performance-based assessment can serve both summative and formative purposes. It is seen as more effective in capturing more complex performances and processes. By employing a variety of techniques, such as holistic scoring rubrics, project-based assessment and portfolios, this approach can help assess a larger variety of competences and skills and better respond to individual learners' needs evaluating a learner's progress from his or her starting position.

Finally, **peer and self-assessment** is considered to be a powerful tool to engage students in active learning, reflection and raise their motivation and academic standards. However, for these methods to be effective, there is a need for careful planning and for teachers to deliver accurate feedback to enhance students' self-regulated skills for them to meaningfully engage into assessment practices[259].

From the various ways of assessing student progress, **formative assessment** is recognised as very effective to improve educational achievements, alongside the continuing feedback ("feed forward") to increase awareness of the learning process, both for the student and the teacher. It ensures effective learning and awareness of the learning process and it creates trust in the relationship between the teacher and the learner. Formative assessment is particularly suited for social and emotional education, because it actively involves students in the learning process thus promoting the development of competences such as collaboration, self-regulation, and responsible decision-making. These competences are crucial components of a social and emotional curriculum[260]. The social and emotional competences, in turn, help learners to get involved and take the best out of the formative (and other forms) of assessment.

BOX 22. "Rethinking assessments: Prioritising learners' well-being" Position Paper LifeLong Learning Platform December 2021

Some of the recommendations of the LLL Platform include:

Assessments as a catalyst for well-being - not for stress!

Recognising and monitoring well-being in education and training as wholeness of mental,

258 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Siarova, H.; Sternadel, D.; Mašidlauskaitė, R., (2017), *Assessment practices for 21st century learning: review of evidence*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

259 Ibid.

260 Cefai, C.; Bartolo P. A.; Cavioni. V; Downes, P.; *Strengthening Social and Emotional Education as a core curricular area across the EU. A review of the international evidence.*

emotional and physical aspects takes into account the interdependence, complexity and integrity of living systems on well-being. The stress related to assessments can create a fragmentation between learners' physical, emotional, mental health aspects. What's more, mental health problems created by the pressure of assessment have spillover effects such as costs in children's and adults' healthcare.

Enjoy learning to keep learning!

Addressing early leaving from education and training through better assessment practices. Learners who suffer from the impacts of assessment methods that hamper well-being are likely to leave education and training early, particularly disadvantaged learners. Adjusting assessment practices in education could help to significantly reduce the number of early leavers.

Making the shoe fit - aligning the curriculum!

Shifting to competences-oriented and outcomes-based approaches to assessment to consider the impact on the well-being of both learners and educators alike. Curriculum design, pedagogies and andragogies used should seek to positively impact learners' well-being, and educators should understand and know how to support learners in this context.

Source: LLL Platform (2021)[261]

Mastering the language of schooling and valuing linguistic diversity

The Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages underlines the importance of **fully mastering the language of schooling** as a basis for learning and educational achievement, especially for learners from migrant, minority or disadvantaged backgrounds. It also recommends that teachers of all subjects should be supported to be able to support the acquisition of the language of schooling.

BOX 23. Germany – Supporting students in mastering the language of schooling

In 2018, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in **Germany** (KMK) adopted a 10-point Recommendation on the Language of Schooling. This includes a specific focus on supporting pupils whose first language is not German. In the state of Hesse, one of the most diverse states in Germany, more than 50% of children in the first year of primary school have a migration background, and this rises to more than 70% among new-borns. To support these pupils in mastering German as the language of schooling and to help them to succeed at school, Hesse's support system is based on the principle that 'every lesson is a German lesson' ('jede Stunde ist eine Deutschstunde'). In addition to this, pupils receive intensive German classes, either as preparatory courses before compulsory school age, over the summer holidays, or as part the school curriculum.

Source: Education begins with language - Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu)

If **extra language support** in the language of instruction is necessary for certain pupils, it is essential that their competences in their native language(s) are also adequately recognised

[261] LLL Platform (2021), *Rethinking assessments: Prioritising learners' wellbeing. LLLP – Position Paper 2021*. Available at: https://lllplatform.eu/lll/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/PP21.pdf

and valued. Research findings suggest that a **positive attitude towards diversity and valuing the unique linguistic background** of each child promotes academic success and boosts self-confidence[262]. In addition, failing to value or even devaluing pupils' culture and language can have a negative impact on their overall learning achievement, motivation and well-being[263].

As mentioned by the Canadian linguist Professor Jim Cummins: "to reject a child's language in the school is to reject the child"[264]. If children are asked, implicitly or explicitly, by their school, their teachers or even by their parents, to limit the use of their home language(s) to settings outside the school, then they are forced to leave behind a central part of their identity, which will have a detrimental impact on their self-confidence, motivation and active participation at school and educational achievement.

A positive attitude towards linguistic diversity is indispensable for creating a language-friendly and language-aware school environment. The Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages introduced the concept of '**language awareness'** as an element that can be embedded in the school culture.

Language awareness in schools implies embracing an overarching approach to languages:

- Teaching the language of schooling and supporting literacy and language development across the curricula;
- Taking into account learners' personal linguistic abilities and interests: language awareness is based on an analysis of all languages existing at school and starting with all the other languages and prior knowledge that children bring to school which may be different from the language of schooling and / or the official language(s) of the region / country;
- Ensuring that teachers and school leaders have knowledge about languages and are aware of how children's use of language and the school's attitudes to language interact to affect learning. It equally implies awareness on how these elements interact and interlink in schools.

It is important that schools create physical and symbolic spaces for the different languages that children use and learn; languages should not only be reflected in the curriculum and teaching practices, but also be 'heard and seen' in schools.

BOX 24. Ireland, the Netherlands and Italy – Linguistic diversity in schools

In **Ireland**, Scoil Bhríde primary school shows how a school can manage linguistic diversity in practice through adopting an inclusive language policy. The school's policy is based on three principles: (1) pupils can use their home language during pair or group work in the classroom; (2) learners are allowed to use their home languages to scaffold their learning of English and Irish; and (3) pupils are encouraged to explain concepts in their home language to enrich the curriculum and learning for all other pupils. The approach of Scoil Bhríde primary school and

[262] Sierens, S. van Avermaet, P. (2013), 'Language diversity in education: evolving from multilingual education to functional multilingual learning'. In: Little, D.; Leung, C.; Van Avermaet, P., *Managing diversity in Education: languages, policies and pedagogies*. Bristol, Buffalo, Toronto

[263] Benson, C; Elorza, I. (2015), *Multilingual education for all (MEFA): Empowering non-dominant languages and cultures through multilingual curricular development*. The Sage handbook of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

[264] Cummins, J. (2001), 'Bilingual Children's Mother Tongue: Why is it important for education?' In: *Srpogforum 19, p. 19. Available at: https:// www.lavplu.eu/central/bibliografie/cummins_eng.pdf*

its positive impact on pupils' educational outcomes and well-being was recently evaluated[265]. The evaluation found that, by allowing pupils to use their home language at school and supporting them to develop literacy in their home language, pupils acquire English as the language of schooling more quickly, have increased motivation to learn other languages and have earlier emergence of language awareness (as early as the age of 6). Minority-language pupils also understand subject knowledge more easily as they can make cross-linguistic semantic references and their parents – many of whom do not speak the language of schooling – can get more systematically involved in helping them with their homework. Another important impact is that allowing pupils to use and develop their home language at school promotes their overall well-being and self-esteem and encourages them to undertake autonomous learning activities. Autonomy also plays an important role in the development of 'executive function' skills, i.e. a set of cognitive skills, which enables children to be focused and ignore distractions. Evidence shows that multilingualism has a positive impact on the development of executive function skills, as well as working memory.

Source: https://scoil-bhride.com/

The Dutch Language Friendly School is a network of schools that have developed a language plan involving all members of the school: students, teachers and staff. It is a plan that is adapted to the school's own needs and aims at creating and inclusive and language friendly learning environment for all students. The Language friendly school is an initiative of the Rutu Foundation for Intercultural Multilinugal Education, a non-profit organisation based in the Netherlands. The Language Friendly School is endorsed by leading experts in the field of the mother tongue and multilingual education and the right to education of the child.

Source: https://languagefriendlyschool.org

"L'AltRoparlante," is an **Italian** action-research project started in 2016 within an inter-regional network of multilingual schools. The name of the project "L'AltRoparlante" is the result of putting together two Italian words: "altro," which means "the other" (understanding the "otherness" as a resource and as an added value), and "altoparlante," which means "loudspeaker." The main goal of the project, is in fact, to give high voice to all the languages and varieties spoken in Italian schools, besides standard Italian. "L'AltRoparlante," aims at legitimizing the multilingual repertoires of the students, trying to activate dynamics of empowerment and to prevent youth marginalization and language hierarchization phenomena.

Activities included: seminars and workshops for professional development about bilingualism and its advantages, multilingual education and translanguaging as a pedagogical praxis; meetings with the parents of the pupils involved, in order to explain the purposes of the project and to investigate microlevel family language policies; ethnolinguistic investigations in the different classes, aimed at collecting detailed information about collective and individual multilingual repertoires, as well as specific perceptual and emotional patterns toward language plurality; translanguaging-based pedagogical activities (designed with teachers); involvement of parents in moments of bi/multilingual storytelling; oral, written or multimodal translinguistic work; and dissemination activities.

The project has involved more than 700 pupils and 70 teachers, mainly belonging to primary schools, but also to kindergartens and middle schools. In 2018 L'AltRoparlante was awarded

[265] Little, D. and Deirdre, K. (2019), *Engaging with Linguistic Diversity: A Study of Educational Inclusion in an Irish Primary School*, Bloomsbury Academic.

the European Language Label.

Source: http://altroparlante.unistrasi.it/

Encouraging learners to make use of and develop their full linguistic repertoire, i.e. their home language(s), language of schooling and any other language(s) they might speak, has benefits beyond communication alone. Several clinical studies have shown positive effects of multilingualism on cognitive control of behaviour, attention control and social cognition[266]. These health benefits of language learning exist not only for bilinguals from birth, but also for people who become bilingual later in life[267].

Examples of adopting effective and evidence-based **techniques for language instruction within multilingual classrooms** include the use of ICT, offering language education across the curriculum through language-sensitive teaching and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and whole school approaches. Furthermore, translanguaging offers a means for learners to share their linguistic repertoire reflectively with their peers.

More in general, **intercultural education** helps build a school climate that expresses a positive appreciation toward the learners' migrant and ethnic minority cultural background and facilitates communication among learners, between school and their parents through bilingual coordinators and intercultural advisors and mediators.

In order for schools and teachers to be aware of educational and social benefits of multilingual teaching and learning, there is a need for increased awareness-raising and promoting inter-cultural and inter-linguistic dialogue within classrooms and schools and to make research on the subject more widely accessible and understandable.

Supporting newly arrived migrants and refugees

There is a diversity in schools throughout Europe in terms of linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as educational experience. This diversity is reinforced by the welcoming a high number of people fleeing the war in Ukraine in 2022. Supporting newly arrived migrant and refugee children to integrate into schools is key for their successful participation in society and a powerful tool for building more inclusive societies. Schools have the potential to be real hubs of integration for children and their families[268].

To cope with the situation, many Member States set up immediate programmes and adopted measures guiding education institutions on the inclusion of young refugees (especially in schools and higher education institutions). They do not start from scratch. Indeed, with the substantial rise in numbers of refugees between 2014 and 2016, Member States have increasingly been concerned with developing strategies for effectively integrating young refugees into education and expertise can be drawn from this experience. The influx of displaced Ukrainian children is nevertheless much larger than what the education systems

[266] Kovacs, A.M, Mehler, J. (2009), *Cognition gains in 7-month-old bilingual infants. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 106* (16):6556-6560; Bialystock, E. (1999), 'Cognitive complexity and attentional control in the bilingual mind', in *Child Development*, 70(3)

[267] Vega-Mendoza, M., West, H., Sorace, A., Bak, T.H. (2015), 'The impact of late, non-balanced bilingualism on cognitive performance', in *Cognition*, 137

[268] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027', COM(2020) 758 final

experienced before. This adds to the already intense pressure that schools and their support agencies have in coping with the ongoing disruption to education caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The holistic education model developed by Cerna[269] identifies the relationship between student needs, factors, policies, and educational integration. It assumes that educational integration of refugee students can take place when education practices address their:

- **learning needs** (e.g. learning of the language of instruction, catching up on schooling, and adjusting to the new education system)
- **social needs** (e.g. communication with others, including non-refugees, feeling a sense of belonging and bonding, and developing a strong personal identity)
- **emotional needs** (e.g. feeling safe, copying with separation, loss, grief, and trauma).

Each of these three pillars carries a different weight, depending on the personal and educational background of the student and resulting individual needs. The prevalence of these needs is shaped by:

- **individual factors**, such as (host country) language proficiency, mother-tongue proficiency, physical and mental health
- **interpersonal factors**, such as friendships and connections with peers, family support and social networks
- **school-level factors**, such as learning environment, school engagement, teacher/student interactions, assessment at school level, extra-curricular activities, parental involvement in the school community.

These individual, interpersonal and school-level factors should be analysed and inform practices. The factors are shaped by policies and practices. At the same time, the factors influence policies and practices for integration. This means that policies determine the context in which the practices operate. Hence, depending on their design, policies can support or hinder holistic refugee education practices. Additionally, addressing the complex needs of students requires collaborations of educational institutions with multiple stakeholders, such as policy makers, social work, health organisations, community organisations, migrant and refugee organisations, private companies, and other support services[270].

In addition to the measures proposed in the section above, key recommendations at a policy and practical level to integrate newly arrived migrants and refugees, include **embedding effective practices at each stage of the 'language learning pathway' for newly arrived migrants.** There are distinct stages within the arrival and engagement of migrant learners with the host country's education system, and key learning points corresponding with each of them. Documented good practices[271] in this respect relate to the following:

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269 Cerna, L. (2019), *Refugee education: Integration models and practices in OECD countries*, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 203, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/a3251a00-en.

270 Koehler, C., N. Palaiologou and O. Brussino (2022), *Holistic refugee and newcomer education in Europe: Mapping, upscaling and institutionalising promising practices from Germany, Greece and the Netherlands*, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 264, OECD Publishing, Paris,

271 European Commission (2020), *Inclusion of young refugees and migrants through education - Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu)* and European Commission (2018), *Migrants in European schools - Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu)*

- Reception and assessment: a comprehensive and multi-dimensional assessment of migrant learners upon reception, encompassing literacy, language and other key competencies. Based on the assessment, individual goals and expectations should be determined for each student and individualized learning plans should be followed through differentiated learning and teaching to respond to the diverse preconditions and needs of students. Support the acquisition of the language of schooling of newly arrived migrants through early immersion within mainstream classes and curricula, with additional one-to-one support provided at an appropriate level to accelerate social and academic learning is key.
- Placement and admission: ensuring that initial preparatory classes are time limited, where they are deemed necessary, and setting in place welfare and academic supports to facilitate a smooth transition into mainstream education. Monitoring is also important, to prevent the geographical segregation of migrant learners through school entry and admissions criteria.
- Acquisition of the language of schooling: early immersion within mainstream classes and curricula, with additional one-to-one support provided at an appropriate level to accelerate social and academic learning. Continued access to linguistic and academic support measures and career guidance, along with parental engagement and intercultural education, also plays a key role.
- Maintaining existing languages: access to home language instruction, and encouragement to speak existing languages on a day-to-day basis at school, including structured opportunities to do so. The use of mother tongue and multiple languages as well as the involvement of parents and community facilitate communication. Additionally, these elements foster students' sense of belonging and bonding, personal identity and bridges the gap between home and the school
- Diverse learning approaches: this includes pedagogies applied by teachers, as well as support from peers. Appropriate non-formal measures are peer-to-peer mentoring schemes (or buddy and Ambassador programmes) for refugee and newcomer students, both as beneficiaries and mentors, to empower and encourage them to use their experience to support their peers
- Psycho-social support for strengthening resilience: refugee students often suffer from poor mental health conditions and trauma caused by experiences in their countries of origin and during flight. They may also face difficult conditions in reception centres or be affected by administrative and procedural challenges related to their legal status. This requires professional responses and continued psycho-social support to strengthen their resilience and social inclusion.

Several Horizon 2020 research projects and Erasmus+ projects developed interventions and tools for supporting the integration of refugee children in schools[272].

[272] - REFUGE-ED: Effective practices in education, mental health and psychosocial support for the integration of refugee children https://www.refuge-ed.eu
- RefugeesWellSchool - Psychosocial support for adolescent refugees and migrants in schools https://refugeeswellschool.org
- Immerse - Integration mapping of refugee and migrant children https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/
- CHILD-UP - Children Hybrid Integration: Learning Dialogue as a way of Upgrading Policies of Participation http://www.child-up.eu/
- MiCREATE - Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe http://www.micreate.eu/ - KIDS4ALLL - Key Inclusive Development Strategies for LifeLongLearning https://kids4alll.eu/

Identifying and implementing the necessary system-level supports is another measure to support integration of pupils with migrant or refugee background. Collaboration between the implementing educational organisation, Ministries of Education or other relevant governmental bodies, and external stakeholders is key. The financial basis for the practices must be secured on a long-term basis to enable long-term planning. To meet the diverse needs that migrant students may have, the staff must include a sufficient number of teachers as well as. While the proportion of learners speaking a language at home other than the language of their schooling is increasing in Europe, rates vary at a country level and strategies must be tailored accordingly. The pace and scale of new migration, the range of languages spoken and the capacity within education systems to respond are all key considerations. In any scenario, **schools cannot tackle the challenge alone**. Action at a national or regional policy level, and coordinated efforts between schools are needed, which include the following:

- Creation of specialist resource centres or advisory teams (eg: teaching assistants, social pedagogues, psychotherapists and other specialised support staff), to equip schools with the necessary tools and pedagogies for supporting newly arrived migrant learners and working across multiple localities and schools. Volunteers can also assume relevant roles in the practices.
- Review of funding arrangements for newly arrived migrant learners, including the use of targeted funds or entitlements to ensure access to tuition or preparatory classes where these are needed, and to accommodate learners who first enter the education system at ECEC, primary, or secondary stage, alongside non-formal or informal learning by volunteers outside the school.
- Investment in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, so that teachers are equipped with the necessary skills for multilingual learning. This is further described in the measures to support teachers, trainers and school leaders (chapter 5.5.2).
- Investment in curriculum development in language education, to reflect a stronger multi-linguistic dimension. Such curriculum development must attend to the different cultural and linguistic contexts across Europe. Furthermore, it must draw upon the experiences of migrant children and reflect their aspirations.

Monitoring and evaluating success, and **striving for accountability** for migrant learners' outcomes would be needed to account for the effectiveness of the measures and to demonstrate that they help to narrow the attainment gap between migrant learners and their

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- NEW ABC - Networking the Educational World: Across Boundaries for Community-building https://newabc.eu/
- IMMERSE - Integration Mapping of refugee and Migrant Children in Schools and Other Experiential Environments in Europe https://www.immerse-h2020.eu/
- UPPER – Systemic Upscaling of Peace Education Practices http://eiplab.eu/upper-project
- SHARMED – Shared Memories and Dialogues https://www.sharmed.eu/
- TRAMIG – Training newly arrived migrants for community interpreting an intercultural mediation http://tramig.eu/
- CIRCLE – Inclusion of refugee children in education https://circle-project.eu/
- REIs2 – Refugee education Initiatives https://www.refugeeeducationinitiatives.org/
- TIEREF – Toward inclusive education for refugee children https://teachref.eu/en
- MigratED – Media Education for Human Rights https://www.migrated.eu/#
- MEDIS – Mediterranean inclusive schools https://medisinclusiveschools.eu/
- SEDIN – Creative methods for successful inclusion in multicultural schools https://sedin-project.eu/

peers. This requires the monitoring and evaluation of learning, personal and social outcomes, and mechanisms for reporting and holding schools and policy makers accountable. National school inspectorates also have a potential role to play in this regard.

These key considerations, principles and practices have been gathered together by the European Commission in consultation with representatives of ministries of education and stakeholder organizations in the paper "Policy guidance on supporting the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in education: considerations, key principles, and practices"[273].

BOX 25. Cyprus - ESF+ project DRASE+

During the 2021-2027 programming period of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Cyprus will continue to use ESF+ funding to implement the 'DRASE+, actions for school and social inclusion +' project. The word DRASE, which means 'act', has also inspired the project's motto: 'DRoume, Agkaliazoume, Stirizoume, Entasoume', which translates to 'we act, we embrace, we support, we include'. The project will expand and build upon the DRASE project, which was implemented during the previous programming period.

The DRASE+ project has been expanded due to increasing migration flows in recent years in Cyprus and is being built upon the results of a peer counselling programme coordinated by the European Commission, entitled 'Integration of students with a migrant background into schools in Cyprus' (2019). The integration of migrant pupils into schools is a complex process, and should give children access to quality education and provide any necessary language, learning and socio-emotional support.

DRASE+ aims to support social inclusion, reduce early school leaving, improve learning outcomes and tackle delinquency among disadvantaged students, including students with a migrant background. It is a comprehensive programme comprising morning and afternoon activities, to develop skills in various subjects and provide multilevel support to students and their families. The programme offers additional classes and access to socio-emotional support centres, new school equipment and educational material for developing social skills. As part of the programme, students from migrant backgrounds will be provided with extra tuition in Greek.

DRASE+ will be implemented in more than 100 pre-primary and primary schools, lower and upper secondary schools and technical schools, which have been selected based on objective and measurable criteria related to the composition and characteristics of their student population.

The programme's total budget for the 2021-2027 programming period is EUR 60 million.

Source: Education and Training Monitor 2021

Career guidance and support

In order to empower learners and gradually develop their career management competence, all learners should be entitled to career education programmes and career guidance from the

[273] "Policy guidance on supporting the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in education: considerations, key principles and practices" available at Policy guidance on supporting the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in education: considerations, key principles and practices (schooleducationgateway.eu)

earliest stages of education. As a lifelong process that begins during early schooling, career management skills and competences should enable learners to become aware of their strengths and needs, talents and interests, inspire and motivate them to advocate for themselves, participate in learning lifelong and increase their knowledge about careers, occupations and the labour market, raising aspirations in particular among students facing barriers.

Career education and guidance is directed toward career learning and competence development, including quality career advice and information and learning how to seek, critically evaluate and make use of labour market and career related information. Students with a career plan are more likely to remain in school and engage more with their education, while improving the decision-making in their careers, in employment and in further education throughout their lives.

Career guidance should be promoted as a transversal cross-curricular area and service integrated as part of the whole-school approach. It should be intensified at key transition points (for example: for a smooth transition from primary school to the initial years of secondary education; within upper secondary general education towards the work environment or tertiary education; or for students close to graduating from vocational education). In addition to dedicated courses, effective approaches could combine a wide range of curricular and non-curricular activities. These may include work experience programmes, job shadowing, career games, or taster courses also delivered online. This can also include counselling designed to enable learners to develop the knowledge, skills and competence they need to manage their lives and careers and to advocate for themselves, including the role played by digital mediation and tools for networking, self-help services and age-appropriate labour market information, and to understand the connection between schooling and their careers. Career education and guidance could be effectively complemented by career exposure journals or other reflective tools, and portfolio building.

Effective career education and career guidance require trained and qualified professionals, such as career educators, who work with teachers and school leaders in planning and executing the career-related programmes. While teachers and trainers have an important role to play in encouraging learners to pursue their interests and to acquire the skills and competences relevant to their career aspirations, a range of stakeholders also need to be involved[274] This includes qualified career guidance practitioners within school or cooperating across sectors and settings, such as career guidance centres or public employment services who serve school students or offer career activities, particularly those which adapt to students with disabilities or who have additional barriers. Such multi-disciplinary, collaborative practices can help develop tailored-made strategies to improve learning environment, sense of purpose and well-being at school.

Targeted and individualised support for learners at risk and learners facing specific difficulties

Inclusive education implies building the capacity of schools to support all learners through differentiated approaches. 'Differentiation' refers to the process of tailoring teaching and learning approaches to the specific needs of individuals or groups of learners, and/or to specific circumstances. It requires educators to be able to select from a wide variety of

[274] Cedefop (2021), *Briefing note: A fresh look at guidance practitioner professionalism*. Available at: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/9161

teaching and learning techniques and lesson adaptations in order to work with a diverse group of students, with diverse learning needs, in the same course, classroom of learning environments[275].

Certain students or groups of students may require enhanced and targeted support - schools need to pay specific attention to children and young people from socio-economically marginalised groups, those with disabilities or with special educational needs (including High Learning Potential or Gifted Children), learners from a migrant background and newly-arrived migrants, belonging to a disadvantaged racial or ethnic minority (Roma), those living in rural, or other disadvantaged areas or outermost regions, learners more at risk of discrimination, and other groups at risk, as well as to those with complex and multiple needs (e.g. refugees, children and young people in care, with a parent in prison, with caring responsibilities, victims of domestic abuse or violence, people with a history of substance misuse, as well as children with serious mental health needs, etc.). A holistic approach with a mix of support measures combined and adapted to the specific needs of the targeted population is recommended.

Learners facing learning difficulties (including learners with dyslexia, dysgraphia etc.) or underachieving in basic skills should also be offered **targeted support**. Intervention needs to be provided timely, in an inclusive way and through a multi-disciplinary team-based approach in and around schools, involving external professionals as appropriate, and all those interacting with the learners. This could include, for example:

- additional teaching time and support, through one-to-one approaches (mentoring, including peer mentoring) or small group teaching; team teaching or co-operative teaching (pairing a mainstream subject teacher with a teacher who has expertise in special needs education); interactive groups to enhance in-class support for learners;
- making use of flexible and heterogeneous learner groupings (eg: flexibility in the amount of time spent in the regular classroom; flexibility in organisation of the classroom environment) to increase and diversify meaningful interactions among different types of learners;
- group based after-school supports including through the arts, outdoor education and sport;
- extending the school day or offering extra learning time and opportunities during the school year and/or holiday period;
- access to blended learning environments, which can blend school site and other physical environments away from the school site (either with the presence of a teacher/ trainer, or separated by space and/or time in distance learning); or blending different learning tools, either digital (including online learning) and non-digital[276]. Other physical environments may include, for example: the home; hospitals (in the case of sick or injured children); cultural and memory institutions; farms, companies and other workplaces; nature sites and outdoors; sports and youth spaces. Research shows that outdoor education and engagement with spaces in the local community are particularly key to promoting students' engagement and sense of belonging in schools and in the larger community.

[275] European Commission (2015), *A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving – policy messages,* final report of the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Schools.

[276] Council Recommendation of 29 November 2021 on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education, OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 21–29

BOX 26. Projects to support specific groups of learners

RESCUR Surfing the Waves was a three-year Lifelong Learning Programme Comenius project that developed a resilience curriculum for early and primary education in Europe through intercultural and transnational collaboration.

The RESCUR project ran from 2012 to 2015 and was coordinated by the University of Malta and the partner universities of Crete (Greece), Lisbon (Portugal), Orebro (Sweden), Pavia (Italy), and Zagreb (Croatia). The project developed a specialised curriculum in resilience for marginalised groups such as Roma children, children with disability and individual educational needs and children with a migrant background.

- Developing a growth mindset
- Building strengths
- Developing self determination
- Enhancing communication skills
- Building healthy relationships
- Turning challenges into opportunities

The RESCUR curriculum has been translated into other languages and implemented in other countries including Australia, Bulgaria, Ireland, Lithuania, Romania, Russia and Turkey. The second edition of the English international version will be published in 2022 and training is organised by the University of Malta.

Source: https://www.rescur.eu/about-the-project/
https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/files/esl/uploads/ac170fc4.pdf

The project **EDINA - EDucation of International Newly Arrived migrant pupils** - has been developed by policymakers, schools and researchers from Finland (Helsinki), Belgium (Ghent) and The Netherlands (Rotterdam and Utrecht). The main objective of EDINA is to provide support to municipalities, schools and teachers in the reception and the integration of newcomer pupils into primary and secondary school education. There are tools for reception, observation, differentiation, assessment and communication.

Source: https://edinaplatform.eu/en

For those with multifaceted needs, enhanced **individualised support** and personal tutoring may be necessary, as well as specific interventions to enhance the learning of students with extreme emotional and behavioural difficulties who find it hard to settle in mainstream classes and who may disrupt the learning of other children. This could include individual learning plans as well as specific interventions through multidisciplinary teams and different services and professionals.

BOX 27. NURTURE GROUPS

A **Nurture Group** is a focused, short-term intervention for early years, primary or secondary school pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties which make it harder for them to learn in a mainstream class. A nurture group is a school-based intervention run by two members of staff with up to twelve pupils. The aim is to replace missing early experiences by developing positive pupil relationships with both teachers and peers in a supportive environment.

Source: https://www.nurtureuk.org/

For learners who are truly struggling with mainstream curriculum, **individualised learning paths or alternative education programmes** (with teaching methods adapted to facilitate the learning) could help achieve equivalent learning objectives and (re-)integration into education and/or training.

BOX 28. Ireland - iScoil: Empowering Young People to Re-engage in Learning

iScoil is a **non-profit online learning service** addressing the problem of early school leaving and educational disadvantage in Ireland, so that young people can achieve their full potential. In partnership with local services and agencies, iScoil has created a safe place to learn, where young people receive **personalised learning programmes** based on their unique needs, interests and abilities. Each day, online tutors and mentors review the student's work, provide feedback on it, and adapt the next day's learning plan as needed. Apart from re-engaging students with education, this service also offers **employment opportunities** by building a portfolio of work for students. Since its launch, iScoil has awarded 1146 QQI certificates to 437 young people.

Source: https://iscoil.ie/

Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities declares that inclusive education offers the best opportunities for **learners with disabilities**. To support disability rights, countries need to shift from medical models, which define disabilities as impairments, to social models, which emphasise the importance of providing opportunities for inclusion.

Effective support for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties relies on a whole school approach, including: a clear focus on learning for all; recognition of different kinds of achievement (not only academic success); effective and distributed school leadership; collaboration of schools with the local community; and participation of learners and their families in decisions about their own learning.

It is also important to consider that children and young people with disabilities are more exposed to bullying, violence and harassment[277]. They have an increased risk to face mental health problems, which may sometimes not be recognised as such. Consequently, information provision to educators, early identification of signs of mental health difficulties and early

[277] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Downes P.; Cefai, C., (2016), *How to Prevent and Tackle Bullying and School Violence: Evidence and Practices for Strategies for Inclusive and Safe Schools*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. doi: 10.2766/0799

intervention, are key recommendations to address the mental health of these students[278], meaning that schools should invest also in targeted interventions for mental health promotion for students with disability and not solely depend on universal interventions that may not answer the specific needs of these groups[279].

Research has underlined the importance of a **multidisciplinary approach** to provide a multidimensional solution to complex problems, in order to coordinate a common strategic response among professionals to the complex needs of learners and their families[280].

When discussing targeted measures to support disadvantaged children and young people, however, it is crucial to consider the **heterogeneity** of all these groups and how best to address their needs. Narrow group interventions can facilitate cultural adaptations and community engagement, but promote fixed identities, stressing the differences and distance between students. In turn, broader programmes risk not properly addressing different groups' needs. One possible solution for this dilemma seems to be an approach where **universal and targeted interventions coexist to take advantage of the benefits of both interventions**.

Social and emotional support

Over the past decade especially, there is increasing recognition of the educational impact of students' mental health difficulties (such as anxiety disorders or depression) on engagement and achievement (see chapter 4.3.1), especially when coupled with chronic complex needs[281]. A stronger focus on policies directed to those with complex needs is therefore recognised as an aspect without which no approach to preventing underachievement and early leaving from education and training can succeed[282].

Children and young people exposed to risk, disadvantage and marginalisation, such as those coming from a poor and low socio-economic background, from a migrant background, children exposed to abuse, family dysfunction, violence and bullying, children in care or with a parent in prison and children who experienced other forms of trauma, including refugees, are more at risk of developing mental health problems. Students attending high achieving, competitive schools may also be at risk of mental health difficulties due to the academic pressure, high expectations, and fear of failure**.**

Schools are in a unique position to prevent the onset of mental health issues and address the mental health needs of vulnerable students at a critical time - before problems become more complex and chronic. To do this, they must focus their efforts in preventive and resilience building interventions. **Such interventions need to be implemented within an inclusive**

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278 McMillan, J.; Jarvis, J. (2013), **'**Mental Health and Students with Disabilities: A Review of Literature', *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 23(02), 2013, DOI:10.1017/jgc.2013.14

279 McMillan, J.; Jarvis, J., *Mental Health and Students with Disabilities: A Review of Literature*.

280 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Downes, P., Nairz-Wirth, E., Rusinaite, V. (2017), *Structural Indicators for Inclusive Systems in and around Schools in Europe.*

281 Quiroga,C. V., Janosz, M & Bisset, S. (2013), 'Early adolescent depression symptoms and school dropout: Mediating processes involving self-reported academic competence and achievement', *Journal of Educational Psychology, 105(*2), 552–560.

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

setting to avoid labelling and stigmatization. This strategic focus will be instrumental in strengthening the role of schools in promoting equity and equality.

Social and emotional support should be available and easily accessible. This could include: a) strengthening the role of staff responsible for the pastoral care of students (such as advisor and mentor figures) in identifying, monitoring and measuring emotional and behavioural difficulties in learners and providing support; b) facilitating pupils' access to qualified mental-health and support professionals and services in an around schools (such as emotional counsellors/therapists to support students in one to one sessions), including early intervention for victims and perpetrators of bullying to prevent problems from accelerating; c) developing multidisciplinary teams in and around schools to offer multifaceted supports for complex multifaceted needs, including a family support outreach dimension.

Specific support should also be available to refugees and newly arrived migrants, to help them overcome challenges related to fleeing war, migration or integration experience. For them, social and emotional support has to be embedded in a broader and cross-sectorial support scheme to take into account all their specific needs when they arrive and on a longer term.

As mental health is a multifaceted phenomenon, schools need to work with other sectors and agencies to provide targeted interventions for students at risk or experiencing difficulties, starting as early as possible. Close **cross-sectoral collaboration** with the health services, mental health agencies, social services and other related services and agencies, will ensure schools will be able to address the mental health needs of students within a transdisciplinary approach, including parents and students themselves in the decision-making process. It is essential that these intersectorial interventions are as accessible, responsive, appropriate and equitable as possible. The key role of schools in mobilizing and coordinating the support for students and families also ensures that services are more accessible and destigmatizing, and can be linked with other support services available at the school. Interventions could include, for example, opening up pathways for all schools and communities to have access to sports facilities, creative arts and nature, which are known to be resources conductive to the well-being of young people who have been diagnosed with mental health issues.

Research also calls attention to important **behavioural and psychological factors** that make it hard for the socially disadvantaged children – especially those in the state of poverty and social exclusion – to succeed in school. To reinforce their resilience and support them in setting aspirations that are also matched by their achievements, they often need additional support that goes beyond the necessary structural changes. A wide range of more specific and flexible programmes and interventions may help build their resilience, support executive functions and hope. Beside others, these include training teachers and educators to understand emotional and behavioural responses, helping children to acquire important socio-emotional competences in schools and care for their well-being with an attention to inclusiveness[283].

Extra-curricular and out-of-school activities

The concept of extracurricular and out-of-school activities can be applied to a wide range of activities, from sport and the arts to volunteering or youth work, community projects

[283] European Commission, Joint Research Center, Cassio, L.; Blasko, Z; Szczepanikova, A. (2021), *Poverty and mindsets. How poverty and exclusion over generations affect aspirations, hope and decisions, and how to address it*. EUR 30673 EN, Publisher City, 2021, ISBN 978-92-79-35968-5, doi:10.2760/472292, JRC124759

regarding green spaces in local environments, as well as homework clubs. Research confirms that art projects in particular can make certain students' abilities and multiple intelligences more apparent, can reengage the disengaged, reduce antisocial behaviour and improve social climate[284]. Activities after and outside the school can provide opportunities to value and recognise the students' strengths and hence boost their self-esteem and motivation and support their learning process. They can offer spaces to improve children's relationship with their peers and with adults, opportunities for active citizenship and to develop a sense of belonging, identity and connection with the broader community and their school. For students whose families cannot afford extra private tuition, homework support schemes with university students or retired teachers volunteers can provide them with the additional support needed.

Financial and non-financial barriers should be addressed to ensure that all children and young people can have access to and benefit from such activities. Participation in such activities should be adequately valued, and the documentation and validation of their learning outcomes be enhanced. Partnerships between schools, local authorities and actors can help create better afterschool activities and facilities and facilitate recognition.

5.2.2 School leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff

School leaders, teachers, trainers and other staff need to be recognised and valued as fundamental actors of learners' educational success and key "change-makers" for inclusion. They need the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to understand and tackle educational inequality, underachievement and disengagement, and to be empowered to work with learners at risk. They need to have time, space and adequate support to design and adopt engaging teaching and learning and create supportive and positive learning environments.

School leadership

Effective school leadership has a positive impact on student achievement, teaching quality and staff motivation[285], creating a safe, positive environment based on democratic values. Dedicated, value-led, competent and highly motivated school leaders are crucial to help establish a clear and shared vision; to encourage reflective practices and foster dialogue and cooperation among all school actors around shared goals and responsibilities; to build trustful relationships with parents and families; to create partnerships and collaborations with external stakeholders, local services, other schools, and the rest of the education system; to support school development projects. School heads are also in the position to facilitate a supportive environment for teachers, where peer learning, time for feedback, reflection, and networking within and between schools is encouraged. They have an essential role to play in providing the time and space necessary to support professional communities, as well as opportunities and environments for initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD) which must include a focus on underachievement and early leaving from education and training[286].

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[284] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Downes, P., Nairz-Wirth, E., Rusinaite, V. (2017), *Structural Indicators for Inclusive Systems in and around Schools in Europe.*

[285] OECD (2016), *School Leadership for Learning*.

[286] European Commission (2017), *School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life,* Communication from the Commission top the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM/2017/0248 final

According to research, successful school leaders are ones which are able to sustain a sense a commitment and personal accountability towards their work, maintain an intense moral purpose, create trusting relationship with others, focusing on learning and self-development, create learning opportunities for deeper understanding and seek to be rational in their decisions[287].

To be effective, school leaders need to be appropriately selected, prepared and supported. Initial and continued professional development for new, established and aspiring school heads should, in particular, raise awareness on underachievement and early leaving mechanisms and on the importance of leadership and of collaboration.

BOX 29. The Czech National Pedagogical Institute's project SYPO (systematic support).

The SYPO project aims to create, verify and implement a system of modular support for practitioners in education, helping their professional development through a community of practise and peer learning. The project helps teachers and school directors at the beginning of their teaching career as well as those who have been in the profession for a long time through the transfer of experiences and best practices. The support is channelled through professional communities which make use of a wide range of collegial support and continuous professional development with defined quality standards. As the majority of the activities of the project takes place online, the project became especially relevant in the context of the coronavirus crisis when it provided webinars to teachers on distance learning. The European Social Fund is financing the SYPO project with €10 million.'

Source: https://www.projektsypo.cz/

School leaders should be able to share authority and responsibilities by **distributing leadership roles within the school**. In a 'distributed leadership' model, the school leader, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, as well as parents and families are encouraged to take on leading roles in a particular area of expertise, to assume responsibility individually or as part of a group, and to take initiative. Distributed leadership providers can create opportunities for more flexible working relationships and multi-disciplinary projects and collaborations. This may require developing institutional structures: creating new procedures and working arrangements (such as formal and informal committees, teams, working groups, etc.); organising time and allocating resources to enable collaborative working and testing of innovative ideas, among others. Adopting a distributed leadership model also requires enhancing learners' and families' participation in school life and in formal and informal decision-making processes. Successful initiatives include appointing some members of the staff **as middle managers/coordinators** and allowing flexibility for the formation of **teaching teams.** Past initiatives have also shown that it is important to have the appropriate selection of support staff (experts, mentors, coaches) who can guide the process of change and support school heads and teachers as appropriate[288].

[287] Day, C. and Leithwood, K. (eds.) (2007), *Successful Principal Leadership in Times of Change*, Springer.; Kaser, L., and Halbert, J. (2007), *Leadership Mindesets. Innovation and Learning in the Transformation of Schools*, New York, Routledge.

[288] See: European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Șerban, V. (2015) *The teaching profession in Europe: practices, perceptions, and policies,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/63946. European Policy Network on School Leadership (EPNoSL): online platform with case studies on good practices in the

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers

Teachers and trainers are increasingly expected to become facilitators of learning with their role becoming broader and more demanding[289]. They are expected to use a wide variety of methods, tools, and approaches and to adapt them to the different needs and learning styles of learners, especially with regard to those needing additional support. They are expected to create a positive and inclusive learning environment, to be able to respond to a variety of challenges in and outside the classroom, and collaborate with other teachers, professionals, and stakeholders within and around the school in order to provide timely support to learners. Teachers' skills and competences are the base for the teaching profession and can only be achieved through excellent teacher professionalization, which includes shared and specialized knowledge based on national standards for access to the teaching profession, practice-oriented Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and research-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

The results of the Open Public Consultation called for strong support towards improving ITE and CPD. More than one-quarter of all respondents emphasised that educators (teachers and trainers) are not adequately prepared to support learners with cumulative disadvantages (27 %) and almost half of all respondents (49%) consider that investing in training of educational staff to address ELET and underachievement is the measure which should be given the greatest priority. Respondents emphasised that teacher training should be based on scientific evidence, for example in relation to social impacts and which teaching approaches have proven most successful to promote achievement and well-being of learners as well as preventing ELET (see, for example, the Successful Educational Actions developed as part of the EU-funded INCLUD-ED project[290]. OPC respondents also emphasised that teacher training should take knowledge from neuroscience and developmental educational psychology into account to enhance the quality of education provided at educational institutions.

Preparing teachers and future teachers to include all children in their classes should be seen as a core part of teacher education and should be included in all aspects of the teacher training curriculum and professional learning.

At the same time, however, it is important to acknowledge that the whole set of competences that teaching professionals require throughout their careers cannot be fully mastered by any

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field of school leadership policy in Europe, available at: https://issuu.com/epnosl/docs/deliverable_3-3_epnosl_case_studies/93; OECD (2014) *TALIS 2013 results: An international perspective on teaching and learning,* TALIS, OECD Publishing. Http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en

289 Caena, F. (2014), 'Teacher Competence Frameworks in Europe: policy-as-discourse and policy-as-practice', *European Journal of Education,* vol 49, issue 3. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12088.; Feiman-Nemser, S. (2008). 'Teacher learning: How do teachers learn to teach?', in M. Cochran-Smith , S. Feiman-Nemser , & D. J. McIntyre (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring questions in changing contexts* (3rd ed., pp. 697-705). New York, NY: Routledge.; Williamson McDiarmid, W. and Clevenger-Bright, M. (2008) 'Rethinking teacher capacity', in M. Cochran-Smit, S. Feiman-Nemser , & D. J. McIntyre (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring questions in changing contexts* (3rd ed., pp. 697-705). New York, NY: Routledge.; and Epale: https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/21st-century-teacher-skills

290 Flecha, R. (2015), *Successful Educational Actions for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe*. Springer.

individual, and especially not at the very beginning of their career[291]. Teacher education should thus be viewed instead from an incremental perspective (competences to develop over one's career), and within a teaching team and a system (not every member of a teaching team will need all the competences to the same degree). In fact, several studies emphasize the role of trust and the importance of integrating the whole school community into a creative learning culture[292]. Teaching and learning should be linked to research and to formative, inclusive and non-comparative evaluation[293]. A continuum perspective on teacher education should take into account all key actors and their responsibilities: the education ministry, ITE providers, school leaders, teaching professionals and other education stakeholder groups.

Initial teacher's education (ITE)

ITE is the first and crucial stage of teachers' career-long professional development. It should lay the foundations of a professional mind set and provide new teachers with a first essential toolbox to make meaningful learning happen in the classroom. ITE is generally characterised by a combination of courses in subject matter, pedagogy and psychology, methodological and didactical preparation, and practice in schools[294] and it aims to provide future teachers with competences supporting "their capacity to lead and facilitate successful student learning"[295].

Research suggests that a number of factors should be ensured for effective initial teacher education[296]:

(a) an extensive, structured teaching practice, with different learning opportunities (including informal work-based learning) and incremental levels of difficulty, to fit student teachers' development;
(b) effective partnerships between ITE providers/universities and schools, with joint responsibilities and structured roles for planning, management, monitoring and assessment;
(c) sustained, structured mentoring, with set time and opportunities for modelling, practice, assessment, support and feedback by school professionals who are trained for the task;

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[291] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2019), *Education and training Monitor 2019.*

[292] Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., Easton, J. Q. (2010), *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[293] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Simões, C., Caravita, S., Cefai, C., (2021), *A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU : analytical report*. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/50546

[294] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Șerban, V. (2015) *The teaching profession in Europe : practices, perceptions, and policies*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/63946; Musset, P. (2010), *Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Training Policies in a Comparative Perspective: Current Practices in OECD Countries and a Literature Review on Potential Effects*, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 48, OECD Publishing, Paris.

[295] European Commission, ET 2020 Working Group on Schools Policy (2015), *Shaping career-long perspectives on teaching. A guide on policies to improve Initial Teacher Education*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[296] Darling-Hammond, L. (2006), *Securing the right to learn: Policy and practice for powerful teaching and learning*. Educational Researcher, 35(7), pp. 13-24.; Hagger, H. and McIntyre, D. (2006), *Learning Teaching From Teachers: Realising The Potential Of School-Based Teacher Education*. McGraw-Hill Education.

(d) opportunities for student teachers' 'reflective practice' – critically examining their own ideas about teaching by observation of teaching, practice in class, debate with expert teachers and peers, research, dialogue with teacher educators and mentors;
(e) an individualized focus on student teachers as reflective learners – whose beliefs, experiences and concerns should be taken into account and discussed in ITE, in order to allow for successful learning;
(f) an integrated ITE curriculum that can support student teachers' critical thinking, teaching and learning with relevant knowledge, understanding and research.

Teachers require specific abilities to affect positive learning outcomes for all learners and to ensure no learner is discriminated against. This ability, known as adaptive expertise, enables teachers to adapt plans and practices to the needs of different contexts and students. In fact, teachers should be **capable of selecting and using different teaching techniques and active learning strategies** (including enquiry-based and project-based teaching, collaborative learning, etc.) in order to effectively tailor learning for all learners in a diverse group of students who, although in the same learning environment, may have different learning needs and preferences. These may include learners with disabilities, those with special educational needs, High Learning Potential or Gifted children, people from ethnic minorities, with a migrant background and newly arrived migrants, as well as learners with more complex needs.

In addition to this, during initial teacher education programmes, teachers also need to be **equipped with the knowledge, competences, attitudes, and positive mind-set needed to cater for specific learners with learning difficulties.** The development of basic literacy skills for all, for example, requires ITE and CPD programmes to put a stronger emphasis on teachers' skills to supporting students with dyslexia and dysgraphia.

As part of their initial education, it is important that all students and new teachers have opportunities to enhance their understanding of the **nature, causes, and extent of ELET, underachievement and educational disadvantage**. All teachers should understand their key role in supporting the continuity of children's development and learning and should be equipped to recognise students' early signs of learning difficulties or disengagement. This includes the need for teachers to collaborate effectively among themselves, with other professionals inside and outside the school, and with parents and families.

BOX 30. Austria – European Toolkit For Schools as Part of ITE

The European Toolkit for Schools is part of the ITE programme proposed by the WU - Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien - Vienna University of Economics and Business - Abteilung für Bildungswissenschaft. The programme proposes a seminar which aims are, firstly, to introduce students to the importance, as a future teacher, of confronting the problem of ELET and to broaden, through their own individual research the toolkit for best practice.

In a first step the lecturer presents the students with a basic knowledge of ELET, its causes, consequences and implications for the society. The students learn the different dimensions which are also covered in the toolkit. After this each student chooses one of the dimensions which particularly interests them and where they would like to engage in further research.

Students present their best practice research on their chosen topic. This includes a review of the academic literature.

In this way:

1. the students are engaged in academic research and increase their knowledge of best practice in the field of ELET.
2. They enrich the toolkit for schools with further examples, whereby strengthening their integration in and commitment to improving the education system.

Source: https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools.htm [297]

There is also an increasing need to prepare future teachers to use the **benefits of diversity in the classroom**, shifting from compensatory to inclusive learning processes. A comprehensive system of teacher education is crucial to equip teachers with the intercultural competences necessary to respond, manage and make the most out of the evolving and diverse school environment. This includes preparing all teachers, regardless of their teaching subject, to deal with linguistic diversity and non-native language students[298].

BOX 31. Listiac - Linguistically Sensitive Teaching in all classrooms

The **Erasmus+ KA3 funded Listiac project** (Linguistically Sensitive Teaching in all Classrooms) seeks to encourage (future) teachers to adopt linguistically sensitive beliefs, attitudes and teaching practices in mainstream classrooms. It does so by developing and experimenting with a theoretically informed reflection tool aimed at pre-service and in-service teachers. The overall objective of the project is to make subject teachers realise that supporting pupils to develop the language of schooling is important to give all students – not only those with a migrant background, but all students with learning difficulties – equal opportunities to succeed at school.

The project's results include:

- a reflection tool to make teachers more linguistically sensitive in their beliefs, attitudes and actions;
- a model for a new ITE curriculum, which will be more supportive of multilingual pedagogies;
- a report and a set of recommendations for policymakers, teacher trainers and pedagogical counsellors

The project was coordinated by Åbo Akademi University, Finland, with partners from various universities from Belgium, Spain, France, Portugal, Lithuania and Education Ministries in Slovenia and Portugal.

Source: https://listiac.org/

Preparing student teachers for diversity also implies a better understanding of the world and its cultures. Teachers should learn how to effectively address issues of tolerance, fairness, and equity, notably by understanding the historical, structural, and political contexts that can lead to structural inequality, prejudice and discrimination in education.

[297] Implemented by WU - Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien - Vienna University of Economics and Business - Abteilung für Bildungswissenschaft/Educational Sciences

[298] De Araujo, Z., Roberts, S.A., Willey, C., Zahner, W. (2018), 'English Learners in K–12 Mathematics Education: A Review of the Literature', *Review of Educational Research*, *88*(6), 879–919

Figure 265. Framework of teacher competences for engaging with diversity



Source: Arnesen, A.L., Allan, J. & Simonsen, E. (eds.)(2010)[299]

Teachers who specialise in dealing with low-achieving students can be of use in reducing differences between schools in terms of student achievement, especially at secondary level, but they are rarely available[300].

BOX 32. Hungary – Recruiting teachers specialized in teaching for disadvantaged students

In Hungary, the availability of teachers specialised in dealing with low-achieving and disadvantaged students is part of a project reaching about 300 primary and secondary level schools. Schools meeting certain criteria (scoring high a on a segregation index, having many disadvantaged or low-achieving students etc.) have to apply to participate in this project[301].

Source: Horváth, A., et.al. (2020)[302]

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Considering that teaching is demanding and that expectations of staff evolve with time, a lifelong learning approach to teacher development is essential. The growing diversity of learners, the greater integration of children and students with special needs and the increasing use of information and communication technology (ICT) all demand new skills for teachers. In TALIS 2018 results, teachers report a high level of need for training in advanced

299 *Arnesen, A.L., Allan, J. & Simonsen, E. (eds.)(2010), Policies and practices for teaching socio-cultural diversity: a framework of teacher competences for engaging with diversity,* Strasbourg, Council of Europe Publishing, 2010.

300 European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*.

301 https://www.oktatas.hu/kozneveles/projektek/efop315 and www.palyazat.gov.hu/efop-315-16-a-tanuli-lemorzsoldssalveszlyeztetett-intzmnyek-tmogatsa# . The methodology of the segregation index is described in http://www.econ.core.hu/file/download/bwp/bwp1407.pdf .

302 European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*.

ICT skills, teaching methods for multicultural/multilingual settings and teaching methods for learners with special needs. Both the participation rate and the need for training in these areas have increased over the last five years. Other areas where teachers seem to have moderate or high need for CPD:

- Competence to identify learners at risk
- Underachievement and ELET: causes, consequences, prevention, intervention and compensation measures
- Ways to communicate and collaborate with parents
- Teaching cross-curricular skills
- Student career guidance and counselling
- Innovative technology in the workplace, including schools
- Approaches to individualised teaching and learning
- Conducting classroom-based individual and collaborative research
- Socio-emotional learning, well-being, and mental health

There is a considerable amount of CPD provision for teachers being delivered in many forms and covering most subjects and many aspects of school life. For this reason, it is particularly important for policy makers to agree on funding needs-based and sustainable conditions for CPD that avoid inequities in CPD access at both teacher and school level. For example, schools with many disadvantaged learners should get additional resources, since these often have less experienced teachers who have greater needs for professional development.

CDP can take various formats and approaches, such as training courses and workshops, studying for a qualification or accreditation, online courses and webinars, observation and shadowing, mentoring, peer group exchanges, attending conferences, international exchanges, among others. Interest is also growing in approaches that encourage more informal ways of learning among staff, through reflection, joint problem-solving, networking and sharing of expertise and experience. These ideas are reflected in concepts such as "learning organisations" and "professional learning communities".

Over the last decade, technological innovations have also provided new avenues for teachers' professional learning. A broad range of digital, online and open educational resources (OERs) are now freely available to support teachers' work and massive open online courses (MOOCs) offer new modes of delivering education. Certain European Commission tools also offer direct support to teachers, trainers and different stakeholders, such as eTwinning, School Education Gateway and the European Toolkit for Schools.

Cross-institutional sharing of CPD-resources and the support of professional communities fosters professional exchange and development. Online professional learning communities (in which all teachers should be involved), online student working and peer groups for adapting to the new COVID-19 situation need to be supported. This implies that all schools and teacher training institutions need to be equipped with sufficient and appropriate digital resources. For example, a recent OECD Education Working paper proposes working in tandem with internal specialists to engage in modelling, to provide observation and feedback, or to act as instructional coaches[303].

[303] Boeskens, L., Nusche, D., and Makito, Y. (2020). *Policies to Support Teachers' Continuing Professional Learning: A Conceptual Framework and Mapping of OECD Data*. OECD Education Working Papers 235. Paris: OECD Publishing.

BOX 33. Slovenia – professional development programmes on inclusive education, emotional and social skills and well-being

In recent years, practitioners have received training and information on how to ensure well-being in education. Emotional and social skills, inclusive education, well-being and approaches to create a good atmosphere at school are part of ongoing professional development programmes that are financially supported by EU funds. Slovenian network of healthy schools, which includes 60% of educational institutions, focuses on strengthening mental health, preventing addiction and developing social and emotional skills. In schools and in early childhood education and care, particular attention is paid to nutrition on the basis of national healthy eating guidelines and sports activities are promoted (e.g. Youth Sport programme). In primary schools, an experimental expanded programme is being carried out to test various activities that could contribute to the well-being of pupils through two content strands:

1. Physical and mental health, which includes sub-strands of physical movement (emphasis on sport, relaxation and creativity), diet (healthy eating habits, hygiene, etc.), health and safety (physical and mental health, healthy environment, safety, prevention of addiction and violence, quality leisure time)

2. Culture and tradition with a sub-strand called Culture of Coexistence (culture of conversation, social learning, development of school and civic culture).

The Slovenian Centre for a Safer Internet provides information, support and training on how to use the Internet safely.

Source: Education and Training Monitor 2021[304]

BOX 34. Project EUROPE – Ensuring Unity and Respect as Outcomes for People in Europe

Carried out in 12 schools in three European countries (Portugal, Sweden, and the Netherlands), the EUROPE project aimed to prevent violence and promote inclusive education. The project targeted schools with a high proportion of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, newly arrived migrants, or students who had dropped out of schools. One of the key outcomes of the projects was the creation of five regional teacher training centres, which offer short courses on how to deal with disruptive behaviour and promote better social inclusion at school in general.

Source: See https://europe-project.org/

On one hand, it is important to compensate and recognize the participation of teachers in CPD, if this takes place outside their teaching commitment. On the other hand, during the consultation, one position paper stressed that continuing professional development should be available for all levels of education during working hours and free of charge. All teachers should have free access to resources from officially recognized providers of CPD offers. Successful CPD generates a high level of perceived professional status for participants, raises their sense of self-efficacy and satisfaction with their profession and their work environment. It can contribute to making the teacher profession more attractive and relevant as it can increase both competences and motivation of the workforce.

[304] https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/sl/slovenia.html

BOX 35. Spain – Opportunities for CPD

In **Spain**, Dialogic Pedagogical Gatherings are supported and promoted by the Spanish Government and regional Governments. Dialogic pedagogical gatherings among teachers' groups have been organized for years now in Valencia, Catalonia, Madrid, Andalucia, the Basque Country and more recently in Cantabria and Asturias. Participants in this voluntary training program read first-hand the scientific articles, research reports or theoretical sources relevant for their teaching experience. Teachers, and other professionals as well as family and community members get together regularly (i.e. once a month, bimonthly) to share their reflections and discuss the selected texts, based on sharing arguments supported by validity claims that means not by the opinion of the participant holding the strongest power position within the group of participants in the gathering but making literal references to the text discussed[305]. For instance, in the region of Valencia there are six "On the shoulders of giants seminars" which gather more than 500 participants, mostly teachers, every month from dozens of schools. These seminars worked collaboratively with the authorities from the Centers for Teachers' Training and Support (Valencian' Educational Administration) to create them. The positive impacts in terms of promoting educational achievement and improvements in school climate have been reported by different studies.

Source: Rodriguez, J. A., et.al. (2020) and Roca-Campos, E., et.al. (2021)[306]

Supporting new teachers

New teachers are especially prone to feeling stressed, disillusioned and emotionally exhausted during their first year of teaching and show a significant decrease in pedagogical beliefs[307]. Some teachers describe the entrance into the profession as "reality" or "practice shock". In view of this, student teachers should be offered practical exposure to the everyday reality of educational disadvantage and multicultural environments during their initial education, for example, through participation in work placements in schools with high early leaving rates or high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, or in activities with vulnerable families.

All newly appointed teachers should attend a systematic induction programme which is coherent with their needs and participate in training, including through a professional community and additional support by a well-qualified mentor. Working in schools that are learning organizations and which have an effective leadership that fosters a creative learning culture can also mitigate emotional exhaustion and reduce the stress that new teachers experience. Moreover, teachers who receive induction support at the beginning of their careers show less strain and are less inclined to leave. This can be provided by mentors who

[305] Campos, E. R., Gómez, A., & Burgués, A. (2015), 'Luisa, transforming personal visions to ensure better education for all children', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(10), 843-850.

[306] Rodriguez, J. A., Condom-Bosch, J. L., Ruiz, L., & Oliver, E. (2020), 'On the shoulders of giants: benefits of participating in a dialogic professional development program for in-service teachers', *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, 5; Roca-Campos, E., Renta-Davids, A. I., Marhuenda-Fluixá, F., & Flecha, R. (2021), 'Educational Impact Evaluation of Professional Development of In-Service Teachers: The Case of the Dialogic Pedagogical Gatherings at Valencia "On Giants' Shoulders"', *Sustainability*, 13(8), 4275.

[307] Voss, T. and Kunter, M. (2020), 'Reality Shock of Beginning Teachers? Changes in Teacher Candidates' Emotional Exhaustion and Constructivist-Oriented Beliefs', *Journal of Teacher Education* 7(3):292–306

have completed a special, research-related training which enables them to support new teachers.

BOX 36. Project ENTREE

The project ENhancing Teacher REsilience in Europe (ENTREE) aims to enable young European teachers to improve their resilience in the face of increasing demands of rapidly changing school contexts. It was launched in 2014 and provides diverse learning opportunities and tools for teachers, both online and face-to face; it is supported by a team of international experts from five European countries (CZ, DE, IRL, MT, PT) and from Australia. The ENTREE project refers to teacher resilience as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of positive adaptation and ongoing professional commitment and growth in the face of challenging circumstances". Teachers are assisted to draw on personal, professional and social resources, to "bounce back" and to also thrive professionally and personally, and to experience job satisfaction, positive self-beliefs, personal wellbeing and an ongoing commitment to the profession.

Source: http://www.entree-online.eu/

Diversity in the teaching profession

The consultation activities highlighted that there is a lack of diversity among the educational staff in many schools, for example in terms of different personal, professional and socio-cultural backgrounds. This was stated to mean that the value of inclusion in education systems is not always reflected by the composition of teachers and educators at schools (or other educational institutions) and that perhaps not all students can identify themselves with a teacher or trainer as a role model. Some position papers likewise recommended promoting diversity in the teaching force, for example by allowing more interested outside professionals and individuals with a migrant or minority background into the teaching profession, or people with disabilities. One position paper also recommended increasing the number of female science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) teachers to overcome skill stigmatisation and motivate more girls to acquire STEM skills.

Access to the teaching profession for diverse groups and more diversity in the teaching community may in fact boost motivation and sense of belonging among learners with similar backgrounds or situations. It also increases the ability of school to take into account the specific situations of certain learnersthus contributing to addressing all forms of diversity in school. A more diverse teaching force would also contribute to increased attractiveness of the profession and help address the teacher shortages faced by various European countries.

To improve the diversity of the teaching profession in Europe, specific national-level incentives to ITE institutions, as well as alternative pathways to the teaching profession, should be considered.

Well-being of teachers

Many respondents of the Open Public Consultation underlined the importance of ensuring that teachers can fulfil their educational duties in enabling and constructive environments. Some respondents pointed out that there is need for an improved social recognition of teachers, arguing that it must be ensured teachers receive decent salaries. It was further recommended to protect them from psychosocial risks and excessive workloads which may

cause stress. Teachers' well-being is indeed of important concern in many EU Member States. Any solution to this challenge involves a long-term process and the interaction of several factors:

- Increasing the value and prestige of the teaching profession in EU member-states, including the recognition that teachers play a central role in preparing the students for the challenges of the future.
- Adequate remuneration, including safety of contracts and possibilities for career progression.
- Creating and enabling a framework for opportunities to engage in professional communities, self-assessment and autonomy in the choice of teaching practices.
- Fostering a supportive school culture and positive school environments. It is important to provide teachers with adequate time and space for collaborative work. A collaborative culture involves mutual support, the possibility to actively participate in school decisions and a culture of trust based on shared values. Furthermore, a positive school climate for teachers is characterised by appraisal, autonomy, encouragement, collegiality, trust, encouragement and administrative leadership. Being part of a professional learning community that is shaped both by collaborations within schools and networks with other schools and the community is vital for teacher motivation and retention.
- School principals and their styles of leadership, values, personality and actions also play a major role in promoting teacher well-being.
- Initial teacher education provides a sound basis for teacher well-being and is relevant for retaining teachers in the profession. CPD plays a crucial role in enhancing teacher performance, commitment and job satisfaction. Since collaborative mentoring relationships are strongly related to work enjoyment, motivation, self-efficacy, well-being and teacher retention, experienced mentors have to be carefully selected. Teacher peer networks also support well-being. Teacher education (both ITE and CPD) in mental health promotion as well as in relational, child centred and collaborative pedagogy, is crucial for the success of mental health promotion in school. Areas for education include mental health promotion, implementing mental health programmes in the classroom, creating a positive classroom climate, constructivist and collaborative pedagogy, dealing effectively with bullying, working collaboratively with colleagues, parents and professionals, identifying symptoms of mental health difficulties in students, developing their own social and emotional competences, and taking care of their own health and well-being.
- Positive teacher-learner relationships. Positive relationships between teachers and learners are a necessary precondition not only for learner success, but also for teacher well-being. Positive teacher-learner relationships support teachers' intrinsic motivation. Such relationships can intrinsically reward teachers and increase their motivation. Furthermore, good relations with learners not only help to avoid distress, but also increase teacher well-being.

5.2.3 Schools

School governance

Effective school governance processes and mechanisms are necessary to promote a positive and collaborative culture and environment, striving for educational success of all learners. Since the adoption of the 2011 Council Recommendation, work at European level has explored

school governance and has highlighted the importance of processes which involve all school actors and establish strong bonds with the community around the school. The following dimensions should be considered:

School autonomy

School autonomy is largely recognised as a way of improving student achievement[308]. The complex nature of educational failure requires more flexible and innovative approaches in teaching and learning practices and curriculum implementation, with enhanced scope for experimentation. Schools need to be able to plan effectively and manage their own development, while remaining accountable to parents, local communities and education authorities. They need to build effective cooperation with local services, professionals, businesses and the community at large (such as libraries, arts, youth and sports clubs, local NGOs and other community-based centers and organisations). A strong degree of school autonomy, coupled with effective non-judgemental, non-punitive, accountability mechanisms, allow schools to be more responsive to pupils' needs and adjust to more complex situations. This is largely confirmed by the results of the consultation activities: stakeholders consider that the inclusion of all learners in education requires school leaders to be able to take more autonomous decisions (e.g. on curricula, funding, or the hiring of teachers) and devise their own strategies to preventing underachievement and early leaving, adjusted to the local context and the specific profile of their school population.

Research confirm that, overall, student performance could benefit from the combined use of school autonomy and accountability policies[309], such as clear national standards and monitoring through nationally standardised tests and external school evaluationPISA results show that, in general, school autonomy and accountability have a positive impact on overall student performance, leading to higher achievement of basic skills [310]. However, some analysis suggest that a too high degree of school autonomy could also lead to differences in the quality of education provision and thus to aggravation of the existing imbalances within students, particularly with those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This could be linked to the fact that a high degree of school autonomy may lead to a lack of coherence in the education system and to competition between schools, which can have a negative effect on equity[311].

Quality assurance

The interplay between school autonomy and accountability calls for strong but flexible quality assurance systems[312]. As compared to the 2011 Council Recommendation, the Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success places a stronger focus on the need to ensure internal and external quality assurance mechanisms.

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308 Schnepf, S.V., Klinger, D.A., Volante, L. and Jerrim, J. (2019), 'Cross-national trends in addressing socioeconomic inequality in education', in Volante, L., Schnepf, S.V., Jerrim, J, Klinger, D.A. (eds) *Socioeconomic Inequality and Student Outcomes. Cross-National Trends, Policies and Practices*, Singapore, Springer.

309 European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Hippe, R., Araújo, L, and Costa, P. (2016), *Equity in education in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

310 OECD (2016). *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II). Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*. PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/19963777.

311 European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Hippe, R., Araújo, L, and Costa, P. (2016) *Equity in education in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

312 European Commission (2017), *School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life,* Communication from the Commission top the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM/2017/0248 final

Quality assurance mechanisms vary greatly across Europe and encompass a broad range of tools, processes and actors, at different levels. However, it is essential that coherence and balance is ensured across different mechanisms and support improvement at all levels: school, local, regional and national[313]. The Commission's report on quality assurance strategies for school education[314] suggests that it is vital to have a climate of quality enhancement and trust as well as a shared and balanced understanding on learner development as a basis for effective school environment. This includes, inter alia, a balanced system of school's self-evaluation and external reviews and assessment that systematically focuses on improving learning outcomes.

During the consultation activities, almost half of the consulted practitioners and organisations in the field of education and training (46%) recommended the implementation of **quality assurance mechanisms focusing on inclusion, well-being and addressing underachievement**, with clear targets and indicators, as a key element to ensure school success, raise achievements and avoid ELET.

Within such mechanisms, **school self-evaluation** is now widespread and an expectation that schools will engage in some form of self-evaluation activity has become established as an element of the national quality assurance strategy in most if not all European education systems[315]. At the same time, it is essential that self-evaluation is designed in a way to drive a cycle of continuous improvement in school, focusing not just on learner outcomes but also on the overall quality of the learning and teaching processes in the classrooms or other learning environments. **Whole school improvement processes and planning** (school development plans, mission statements, annual or multi-annual pedagogical plans, etc.) should consider learner competence development and the promotion of educational success for all pupils, as well as learning climate and learners' well-being (including bullying prevention, anti-discrimination, gender sensitivity and health issues). National sets of indicators, developed in consultation with teachers and supported by training and development in their use, can play a role in this regard.

BOX 37. Ireland - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

This is Ireland's Department of Education's policy platform to tackle social and educational disadvantage. All schools are required to engage in a self-evaluation process which seeks to identify both the strengths of the school and the areas in which it faces challenge. Introduced formally in 2012, schools have been provided with comprehensive guidance and support to assist them in their work. More recently, in 2016, the Department published a quality framework for schools in which, for the first time, statements of effective and highly effective practice were provided for schools in two key dimensions of school life: management and leadership as well as teaching and learning. The quality framework (Looking at Our School) is designed to ensure complementarity between schools' self-evaluation work and external inspection conducted by the Department of Education's Inspectorate.

313 European Commission, ET 2020 Working Group on Schools (2017), *Quality assurance for school development. Guiding principles for policy development on quality assurance in school education,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

314 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Maxwell, B. (2018), *Better learning for Europe's young people: developing coherent quality assurance strategies for school education: report from an expert assignment,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/86303

315 Ibid.

More specifically, the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process in Ireland enables schools to identify their own areas for development, set targets and monitor progress through a six-step action research process. Schools monitor their progress in selected areas, including wellbeing, and are engaged in ongoing monitoring and evaluation of learning. Schools are required to develop targeted learning plans, for all children with additional needs as per the official guidelines and the continuum of support framework. They must monitor and revise these plans on an ongoing basis.

The Inclusive Education framework 2011 (updated 2016 and 2020) provides schools with a framework through which they can reflect on inclusive practices in the school. The basic criteria for supporting inclusive education in schools have been developed and established through ministry policy and circulars and published guidelines and frameworks.

The Inspectorate engages regularly with a range of stakeholders: management bodies, teach unions, national parents' association, and others in relation to most aspects of education provision. The embedding of inclusive practices in schools is an ongoing process. The Inspectorate is committed to improving its processes and there is regular review and revision as required.

Source: https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/4018ea-deis-delivering-equality-of-opportunity-in-schools/ and http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/sse-2016-2020/

At the school level, school improvement processes should be developed and implemented in a participatory way and **involve the input and perspectives of all relevant stakeholders, including** public authorities (as appropriate depending on the national context), parents, families and community groups, as well as external partners, such as for example, social care and support services; and, of course, members of the school community, including the learners[316]. Openness and transparency of these processes is of utmost importance. School development plans should be based on common goals and clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and clear indicators, based on risk and protective factors, should be established to monitor improvements. Support measures for school staff, including for example structured induction programmes and continuing professional development, should also be fully embedded in school development plans. Moving from a 'checklist' approach focused on formal compliance with rules and procedures, to a supportive approach focused on school development raises standards and improves learning outcomes[317].

BOX 38. Cyprus and Malta – School improvement plans

In **Cyprus** a new system of Teacher Professional Learning was first implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2015. Teachers are engaged in the development, implementation and evaluation of their school's annual action plan for improvement. Based on this action plan, each school develops its overall professional learning action plan and every teacher develops an individual plan. These plans include incorporate teacher self-assessment and data on school successes as well as areas for improvement. These elements are regularly compiled, and reviewed, and a new action plan is developed based on findings.

316 Ibid.

317 ouncil conclusions of 20 May 2014 on quality assurance supporting education and training, OJ C 183/30 of 14.06.2014.

Source: European Commission (2018)[318]

In **Malta, s**tandards were developed for use in school external reviews with indicative success criteria' of the Quality Assurance Department of the Ministry of Education. The internal review and support unit within the Ministry for Education supports schools and their learning community in engaging in an ongoing, cyclical reflective process which is directed at improving educational outcomes for all their learners. One standard requires that in schools there are internal evaluation processes, which are referred to for school development planning. 'The school development planning documentation (SDP) has appropriate structure, content and format facilitating effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation.'

Source: Malta Quality Assurance Department, 2016.

External quality assurance mechanisms may include national or regional school evaluations and/or large-scale student assessments. It is important that external mechanisms complement internal processes, promoting school self-evaluation and a culture of self-reflection and improvement. They should address school success for all learners and well-being at school and include targets and indicators also on issues such as learning climate, bullying and well-being. **External evaluation/inspection** should be based on quantitative and qualitative measures that reflect the diversity of activities for which schools are responsible, and take into account the different starting points and contexts in which schools operate (e.g. trying to measure the school's 'added value'). They should play an advisory and supportive role to schools in implementing their strategies to improve educational performance and well-being, and promote collaboration within schools and school networks, and cooperation with wider communities. The main purpose is not to compare schools in a 'league table' but to highlight and further promote successful change and development processes within schools. **Qualitative surveys**, covering a broad range of topics, offer the possibility to collect views on areas that are difficult to measure through traditional assessment methods, such as learners' well-being, and may help to identify areas where policy interventions may be appropriate.

BOX 39. Scotland and Greece – National-level strategies for school improvement

In **Scotland** (United Kingdom) the Government has a National Improvement Framework which is designed to focus schools' improvement activities around a small set of key shared priorities, whilst allowing them scope to shape their own agendas to meet local needs. In particular there is a strong focus on taking action to close the 'attainment gap' between students from more affluent backgrounds and those experiencing social disadvantage, in order to secure 'excellence with equity' for all learners. The Scottish Attainment Challenge programme is providing a major injection of additional resources to schools to address this issue.

The National Improvement Framework focuses schools' attention on six key drivers of improvement. It is supported by a National Improvement Plan and a new national progress report which is now being published annually. The progress report reflects the full breadth of Scotland's 'Curriculum for Excellence', bringing together analysis of a wide range of qualitative and quantitative evidence to track how well Scottish students are developing across the Curriculum competences of *'successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors*

[318] European Commission, ET 2020 Working Group on Schools (2018), *Quality assurance for school development. Guiding principles for policy development on quality assurance in school education,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

and responsible citizens'. It draws on statistical data and inspection evidence and includes information on well-being as well as academic achievement.

Source: https://www.gov.scot/publications/2018-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan/ and European Commission (2018)[319]

With the support of the Commission's Technical Support Instrument (TSI), the **Greek** Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (MERRA) aims to develop and implement a broader and more contemporary understanding of what inclusion entails in the national context. This transition is the core of the recently introduced law 4547/2018 and the national policy on inclusive education: encouraging forms of teaching and learning that enable all learners to participate fully in the learning in mainstream setting, having the opportunity to achieve, not only in academic subjects, but also in wider terms that impact on social inclusion.

The law promotes the decentralisation of the educational system by supporting planning and self-reflection of schools' educational work at regional level. It focuses on empowerment of mainstream schools, enabling them to respond to the diversity of needs of all learners by reorganising the support structures of primary and secondary education: the Regional Centres of Educational Planning (PEKES) and Centres for Educational and Counselling Support (KESY).

The main focus of the action is to support the implementation of the new law by: (i) clarifying the mission and roles of the newly created support structures; (ii) strengthening the qualification of professionals involved; and (iii) building a strong collaboration among the support structures and mainstream schools.

Source: European Commission (2018)[320]

Schools as learning communities

Schools as learning communities mean that the shared goal of achieving the best education for all students is the guiding principle around which all the participation of families, community members and other stakeholders revolve. In doing so, the entire community commits to implement only those educational actions that have showed to obtain the best results in learning but also in the living together and the well-being[321]. By including all stakeholders in defining the school vision, purpose and dream, these interactions reach and impact the entire community.

This is achieved by opening the school to the engagement of all stakeholders in dialogues that reach higher levels of thinking, reasoning, and understanding which lead them to make decisions based on scientific evidence with social impact[322]. For this purpose, it is essential

[319] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Maxwell, B. (2018). *Better learning for Europe's young people: developing coherent quality assurance strategies for school education: report from an expert assignment.* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/86303

[320] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Maxwell, B. (2018), *Better learning for Europe's young people: developing coherent quality assurance strategies for school education: report from an expert assignment,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/86303

[321] Gatt, S., Ojala, M., & Soler, M. (2011), 'Promoting social inclusion counting with everyone: Learning Communities and INCLUD-ED', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 21(1), 37–47.

[322] Padrós, M., García, R., de Mello, R., & Molina, S. (2011), 'Contrasting scientific knowledge with knowledge from the lifeworld: The Dialogic Inclusion Contract', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(3), 304–312

that researchers and stakeholders co-create new knowledge which will benefit the schools and communities themselves. In doing so, teachers, families and other relevant stakeholders increase the actual praxis of dialogic spaces and interactions with diverse adults that have shown to achieve best learning opportunities for all.

BOX 40. Interactive Groups

An example of how **Schools as Learning Communities** establish Pathways to School Success by engaging all the community in student learning is the **Interactive Groups** (IG). IG consists of grouping students in a class into small heterogeneous groups, each of them supported by non-teacher adults volunteering. The teacher manages and orchestrates the class whereas the role of the volunteer is to facilitate and promote quality interactions among them. Volunteers are often family and community members – including illiterate persons or those with very low educational levels, former students, volunteer university students and adults from community organisations. During the IG children are required to interact to help each other, to explain the activity to those who have not understood it. This overarching goal of IG builds dynamics of mutual support among participants: boosts cognitive gains, inclusion and democratic values such as solidarity, support, and friendship among the students, teachers, families or those who volunteer[323].

Source: García-Carrión, R., & Díez-Palomar, J. (2015)[324]

Multidisciplinary teams, local community outreach and interagency collaboration

Cross-sectoral multidisciplinary working is part of a systemic conception of a whole school approach. This includes stronger cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders (social services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists, guidance specialists, local authorities, NGOs, business, unions, volunteers, etc.) and the community at large, to deal with issues that schools cannot face alone.

Multidisciplinary teams are needed to provide a multidimensional response to multifaceted problems, to coordinate a common strategic response to address the complex needs of children, young people and their families. While the precise range of professionals on such a team may vary due to local circumstances, key issues that need to be addressed include family support outreach, emotional support services, and school attendance services.

Cooperation among multidisciplinary teams requires a common strategy or action plan, based on clear and shared goals and a common understanding of the challenges. The strategy/plan needs to be focused on the needs of the learner, and be based on a truly multi-agency approach, respecting the differing perspectives and missions of each stakeholder: "It is important that roles, responsibilities and structures are clearly defined and agreed from the

[323] Zubiri-Esnaola, H.; Vidu, A.; Rios-Gonzalez, O. & Morla-Folch, T. (2020), "Inclusivity, participation and collaboration: Learning in interactive groups, *Educational Research*; Valero, D., Redondo-Sama, G. & Elboj, C. (2018), "Interactive groups for immigrant students: a factor for success in the path of immigrant students", *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(7), 787-802

[324] García-Carrión, R., & Díez-Palomar, J. (2015), 'Learning communities: Pathways for educational success and social transformation through interactive groups in mathematics', *European Educational Research Journal*, 14(2), 151–166

start, possibly through contractual arrangements, in accordance with local circumstances"[325]. Cooperation should be centered around the schools, while limiting any boundaries to the involvement of other professionals.

In addition, Cedefop (2019)[326] advocates the need to reinforce or set up **community lifelong learning centres** (offering learning opportunities from cradle to grave) that act as a gateway to more specialised services/multidisciplinary teams. The community lifelong learning centre dimension can act as a gateway service within co-located teams, where some attending the lifelong learning sessions may receive additional supports if needed, such as emotional counselling, family support, etc. Such community based lifelong learning centres also offer an opportunity to engage marginalised parents in education initiatives, such as shared-paired reading and family literacy, and early maths support initiatives.

BOX 41. Italy – Strengthening the educational offer of schools to combat early school leaving in Campania

"Scuola Viva" is a project launched by the Campania Region in the 2016/2017 school year and financed through resources from the European Social Fund (ESF). The project aims to structure and enhance the educational offer of schools and related networks as well as to promote social innovation and inclusiveness to combat early school leaving, also by expanding, diversifying and enriching cultural experiences within training courses. The activity is structured in the form of thematic modules, chosen by each school, lasting at least 30 hours each: for example, didactic and technical / professional workshops for the development of basic skills; artistic, theatrical and musical workshops, recreational activities, psychological counseling courses or initiatives for the direct involvement of families and businesses. Around 450 schools have been funded each year. About 420,000 students from different types of schools were involved, with an average of 26 pupils enrolled per laboratory. The didactic laboratories activated every year amounted to 4,000, for a total of over 150,000 hours of activity for the school population and the territory of the region as a whole.

"Scuola Viva" project duration: 2016-2021 Budget (total cost): EUR 25 million per year (total awarded: EUR 100 million)

Source: www.scuolavivacampania.it

Professional learning communities and networking between schools

Networking should be encouraged at regional, national and international levels to promote mutual learning and circulation of practices. Within education systems, this can take different forms – from networking and professional learning communities to more formalised clustering of schools. 'Networking' includes teachers and other school staff coming together to discuss ideas and share good practices on certain topics, or reciprocal sharing of resources to benefit the individual schools and communities. 'Clustering' is usually a more formal grouping of a number of schools in the same city or local region, with joint vision and development

[325] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2015), *A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving – policy messages,* final report of the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Schools.

[326] Xhomaqi, B., Downes, P. & Psifidou, I. (2019), *Implementing a holistic approach to lifelong learning: Community Lifelong Learning Centres as a gateway to multidisciplinary support teams.* Cedefop, Lifelong Learning Platform & Educational Disadvantage Centre Briefing Paper for Romanian EU Presidency Forum, Brussels.

processes as well as decision-making. Representatives from schools come together to share resources or work on larger initiatives together that contribute to schools and the region as a whole.

Based on successful initiatives in Members States, this way of working has been shown to have excellent benefits for:

- easing transitions between educational levels (e.g. from early childhood education and care to primary, from primary to secondary, including vocational education and training);
- the continuity of learner support across schools/region and throughout a pupil's education;
- the provision of learner support (e.g. multidisciplinary teams able to take a variety of approaches but in a coordinated way);
- parental involvement; and,
- teacher training and, in particular, continuing professional development of teachers (CPD).

BOX 42. Portugal – Addressing geographical discrepancies in the school system

In **Portugal**, a major reorganisation of the school system aimed to address geographical discrepancies both in rural areas (where many schools are small and isolated) and in towns (were schools are often overcrowded). The reorganisation was to improve upon results of PISA 2000 and to address issues that contribute to high levels of pupil drop-out. The re-organisation led to the introduction of a network of 'school clusters' that bring together several schools (of different levels – from early childhood education and care to secondary) in a single educational project and under one main school leader. A typical cluster may consist of 5 to 10 pre-school units and primary schools feeding into lower secondary schools and a single higher secondary school.

Source: European Commission

Collaboration between schools and companies

A close collaboration between education providers and businesses can ensure that education content and skills training align with the needs of the labour market, and therefore enhance future employability of learners. Teachers and trainers in VET and general school education can play a pivotal role in building trust between educational institutions and the labour market. To achieve this, these sectors must collaborate closely together, primarily at local level. Strong partnerships, networks and co-creation of knowledge and expertise facilitated by schools can be effective ways for teachers and trainers to address new tasks and challenges and develop new learning pathways, environments and formats.

Sustainable school-business cooperation can be organised through a variety of methods, including the creation of special centres or through tandem trainings, where teachers and trainers are trained together[327], so far as the requirements for the successful implementation

[327] European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2019), *Teachers and trainers matter: how to support them in high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning: 12 policy pointers*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/129296.

of school-business partnership are fulfilled, such as the need for structural changes and financial and non-financial incentives to be in place.

Creating a positive and supportive learning environment

Promoting mental health and well-being in school

Incorporating programs of mental health and well-being promotion programs in schools has been found as one of the most effective strategies to support the mental health and psychological well-being in children and young people, including vulnerable and marginalized children[328]. Schools themselves are key contexts, as most of the children and young people spend a considerable part of the day there, during a vital time as their personality and social emotional competences are still developing. This resonates with the rights of children and young people for physical and mental health, quality education, protection and participation. The conceptualization of mental health and well-being has moved away from the traditional model of mental ill health to a broader and more focused approach to positive mental health and well-being, with the school system itself operating as a health promoting context. The WHO framework for health promotion in schools[329] stresses the importance of supporting teaching and learning within a school ethos and environment and family and community partnership.

BOX 43. Project: The Health Promoting Schools

The HPS initiative seeks to promote classroom and whole school activities which enhance knowledge about health and facilitates health behaviours (physical, mental, social) through a whole school approach. It uses six strategies to promote health and well-being in school, namely school policies, the physical environment, the social environment, the health curriculum, and links to community and health services. Recently there has been an effort to encourage schools to adopt the HPS model through the Making Every School a Health Promoting School initiative and development of global standards for health-promoting schools, including one standard that is focused on creating a safe social-emotional environment for students. HPS has been adopted in numerous schools across Europe.

Source: WHO and UNESCO – Making Every School a Health Promoting School[330]

Mental health and well-being interventions in school are more likely to have an impact when they adopt a systemic whole school approach on building individual competences, developing school policies, and improving social relationships[331].

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328 Goldberg, J.M., Sklad, M., Elfrink, T.R., Schreurs, K.M.G., Bohlmeijer, E.T. and Clarke, A.M. (2019). 'Effectiveness of interventions adopting a whole school approach to enhancing social and emotional development: a meta-analysis, *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 34*(4), 755–782.

329 *What is a health promoting school?* Retrieved from https://www.who.int/health-promoting-schools/overview/en/

330 https://www.who.int/initiatives/making-every-school-a-health-promoting-school

331 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Cefai, C. Bartolo, P., Cavioni, V. and Downes, P. (2018). *Strengthening Social and Emotional*

In line with European schools' culture of autonomy, empowerment democracy and ownership a whole school **approach to mental health and well-being needs to adopt a bottom up, participatory and flexible approach fitting of the ecology of the school and local community**. A bottom-up approach also helps to ensure that any initiative is culturally appropriate, it addresses the diverse needs of the school population and fits better into the local context. Teachers, students, parents and local community need to be actively involved in the planning and implementation of programmes and initiatives. The active involvement of parents and the local community will ensure that interventions are relevant and adapted to the local context, and that parents and the community will be more likely to adopt the appropriate interventions. A strong and meaningful student voice is vital for students to identify with and 'own' the interventions. This includes co-design of material, participation in delivery and implementation of interventions, participation in decision making, and contributing to peer interventions. It is important that student voice is representative and incorporates the voices of marginalised and vulnerable children.

Including students' mental health and well-being as a common indicator of school effectiveness and success will ensure these will feature prominently on the schools' agenda. Evaluation, however, needs to be formative, inclusive and systemic and avoids labelling, ranking and comparisons. This shift in educational priorities also requires the development of educational evaluation systems that are endorsed by governments in Member States.

BOX 44. ERASMUS+ project - Promoting Mental Health in Schools (PROMEHS)

PROMEHS is an Erasmus + Key Actions 3 project co-funded by the European Commission (2019-2022) designed to develop, implement and evaluate a mental health promotion curriculum in schools, serving to create a bridge between evidence-based school programs and educational institutions, thus linking research, practice and policies. The project is coordinated by the University of Milano Bicocca, Italy and includes 8 other European partners. The partners developed a mental health curriculum spanning the early years to secondary schools with four manuals comprising activities in social and emotional education, resilience building and prevention of risk behaviour and mental health difficulties. The curriculum has been implemented by trained teachers with 6000 students in schools in Croatia Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania and evaluated using a randomized control trial. The curriculum is being evaluated for its outcome on both students' and classroom teachers' mental health and well-being. The multi-lingual curriculum will be published in 2022.

Source: www.promehs.org

BOX 45. Ireland and Estonia – System level integration

The Well-being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice sets out the ambition and vision of the Department of Education that, by 2025, the promotion of well-being will be at the core of the ethos of every school and centre for education in Ireland, that all schools will provide evidence-informed approaches and support, appropriate to need, to promote the well-being of their students and that Ireland will be recognised as a leader in this area. The policy describes how schools can best promote well-being. The Well-being Policy Statement indicates

Education as a key curricular area across the EU. A review of the international evidence, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

that schools should adopt a whole-school, multi-component, preventative approach to well-being promotion that includes both universal and targeted interventions.

To implement this policy every school and centre for education is required by 2023 to use the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process to initiate a well-being promotion review and development cycle. Schools and centres for education will be supported in this process through using the Well-being Practice Framework and online Well-being Resources, and by the Department of Education Support Services.

Example of implementation measure in Ireland:

At upper secondary level, the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme[332] aims to support learners in making choices for health and well-being now and in the future. The framework supports the recently launched Action Plan on Bullying through the exploration of different types of bullying and strategies for dealing with abusive behaviour. SPHE is designed as a ninety-hour course in senior-cycle education. In SPHE, health is understood as a multi-dimensional concept; it includes not only physical well-being but also mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. The curriculum framework for SPHE in senior cycle is an enabling curriculum and is built around five areas of learning. These areas of learning focus on what is important for learners in senior cycle to know, understand and be able to do in order to make and maintain healthy lifestyle decisions. The five areas of learning are:

- Mental health
- Gender studies
- Substance use
- Relationships and sexuality education
- Physical activity and nutrition

Source: Irish Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018 – 2023[333] and the Irish Personal Health Education Curriculum[334]

In **Estonia's** education strategy for 2021-2035, a well-being-focused learning environment is defined as "a combination of mental, social and physical conditions for learning that support the learner's self-efficacy and self-esteem, the development of life skills and social competences, and mental and physical health in general". Since 2018, the well-being of students and teachers is regularly monitored through a satisfaction survey targeted at students, teachers and parents. Each school receives feedback on areas for improvement. The 2021 well-being survey focused on distance learning and self-management.

Source: European Commission – Education and Training Monitor 2021[335]

332 https://curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Social,-Personal-and-Health-Education/

333 https://assets.gov.ie/24725/07cc07626f6a426eb6eab4c523fb2ee2.pdf

334 https://curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Social,-Personal-and-Health-Education/

335 https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/en/chapters/chapter1.html#:~:text=In%20Estonia%E2%80%99s%20education%20strategy%20for%202021-2035%2C%20a%20well-being-focused,competences%2C%20and%20mental%20and%20physical%20health%20in%20general%E2%80%9D.

School and classroom climate, bullying and violence

A positive school and classroom climate with a focus on caring relationships, collaboration, equality and inclusion is essential for student learning and well-being, decreasing mental health issues as well as violence, bullying and substance use, enhancing academic motivation, improving achievement and preventing ELET as explained in chapter 4.3.1.

Foundational processes of a positive school climate thus include supportive peer relationships, inclusive practices, caring teacher-student relationships and pedagogical strategies promoting student autonomy and active engagement in meaningful activities and collaborative learning.

The school and classroom climate becomes a laboratory for students to experience care, support, empathy, respect, connectedness, inclusion, sense of belonging, and practice their skills in emotional regulation, set goals, problem solve, overcome challenges, give and receive support, work and solve problems collaboratively. On the contrary, peer bullying, coercive classroom management, unequal treatment, exclusion, and undue academic pressure and stress on students (potential causes of mental health issue themselves) have no place in such a climate[336].

BOX 46. A formative Assessment Tool of the Classroom Climate

A tool has been developed in the frame of the report *A formative, inclusive, whole school approach to the assessment of social and emotional education in the EU*. The tool consists of 9 indicators assessing the quality of the classroom climate, namely:

- Cultural responsiveness and inclusion
- Sense of safety, including prevention and protection from bullying
- Positive classroom management
- Caring teacher-students relationship
- Supportive peer relationships
- Collaboration, including collaborative learning
- Active student engagement in meaningful learning activities
- Challenge and high expectations for all learners in the classroom
- Student voice, including student participation in classroom decisions

Each of the nine indicator includes a number of statements illustrating the manifestation of the respective indicator in the classroom context. This is translated in a questionnaire and helps the teachers and students to identify the strengths and targets for improvement in each area.

The data collected from both the teacher/s and the students can then be integrated to provide a more comprehensive and holistic evaluation of the classroom climate, and serve as a guide for a collaborative effort by the teacher/s and students to transform the classroom climate into a more socially and emotionally enabling one.

The tool may be adjusted by the classroom teachers according to the nature of their group so that it would be culturally meaningful and developmentally appropriate.

[336] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Simões, C., Caravita, S., Cefai, C. (2021), *A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU : analytical report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/50546

In line with the collaborative nature of the formative assessment, the student version may be developed from this tool by the students themselves in collaboration with the classroom teachers according to the students' developmental level. The tool is available in the European Toolkit for School.

Source: Cefai, C., Downes, P., Cavioni, V. (2021) [337]

The development of a positive school climate has to go hand in hand with an effective **prevention of bullying** and violence in school.

"We believe that schools could design activities to raise awareness on the consequences of bullying, as well as set up mechanisms for the early tracking of bullying practices within the school community. Schools could, for example, appoint and train resource persons that are accessible and to whom learners being victims of bullying could refer to. The school should also provide free psychological and legal support"

Source: Source: Open Public Consultation, OBESSU position paper

Effective bullying prevention requires a whole-school anti-bullying policy, with priority actions targeting all learners coupled with more targeted actions, addressing specific risk groups and individuals, to increase the effectiveness of interventions. The selection and the implementation of the interventions and their components (e.g., peer education) need to be tailored to the specific needs of individuals (e.g., adolescents, minority groups), schools, and community and geographical area.

This process requests an assessment of the bullying phenomenon in the school/area, a constant monitoring of programme implementation and the work of the large network connecting the school to the experts, political leaders and all members of the community. School staff and parents should be also targeted in the intervention and their roles strengthened in programmes. Students' voice also needs to be listened to, and their active involvement valued according to their age. Furthermore, since prejudices often result from a lack of direct contact with different groups and can lead to bullying and violence in and around schools, a school violence prevention and non-discrimination strategy should also promote contact between groups from diverse backgrounds on structured cooperative tasks during and after school activities.

A whole-school anti-bullying policy should foresee at least some of the following structures and actions: a coordinating committee to implement the whole-school approach; a questionnaire survey to assess the scale of bullying in a specific school; school yard supervision; a school conference day for bullying prevention; concrete plan for supporting the transition from primary to post-primary for students; concrete and professionally prepared materials for students, teachers, and parents; explicit focus on bullying prevention in a social and emotional education curriculum; input of children and young people into developing

[337] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Cefai, C., Downes, P., Cavioni, V. (2021) *A formative, inclusive, whole school approach to the assessment of social and emotional education in the EU*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, doi:102766/905981 https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/91eca43d-61e2-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1. The indicators have been developed by the authors on the basis of existing literature and instruments.

curricular resources for bullying prevention, conflict resolution and overcoming prejudice; input from ethnically or culturally diverse students; cooperative group work in class; language learning integrated with emotional literacy for younger students; explicit focus on homophobic bullying prevention; cross-curricular integration of conflict resolution and bullying issues, including arts-based approaches.

BOX 47. Bulgaria, Lithuania and Poland – Safe school environments

In Bulgaria the project "**Key to School Free of Fear**" supports the creation of a school environment in which the values of good communication, mature conflict resolution and tolerance towards differences are promoted. It supports teachers in applying the teaching prevention programmes in all grades of school. This project was launched by the Animus Association Foundation, in cooperation with NGOs and co-founded by Switzerland (OAK Foundation). The objective was to promote healthy communication, non-violent conflict resolution and tolerance to prevent violence, harassment and humiliation among students. The duration of this project was foreseen for 5 years (2016-2021).

Source: http://endviolence.bg/

In Lithuania "Saugios aplinkos mokykloje kūrimas II" (Creating a safe environment at school II) has been funded by the European Social fund. The aim of this project was to create and maintain a safe school environment by: creating favourable conditions for the personal development of students; improving academic achievements; reducing social exclusion; and preventing pupils from dropping out of school.

The project planned targeted prevention programmes that had already been evaluated and the effectiveness of which had already been confirmed. The programmes aimed at: preventing violence and bullying at school, substance use, sexual abuse; and developing social skills.

Between 2017 and mid-2021, the project addressed 2 071 students from grade 1 to 12 in order to start prevention as early as possible. About 13 500 teachers and other school staff in 822 schools were also offered training in this period.

Source: https://www.nsa.smm.lt/svietimo-pagalbos-departamentas/projektai/saugios-aplinkos-mokykloje-kurimas-ii-nr-09-2-2-esfa-v-729-03-0001/

The **Polish** RESQL is an innovative, research-based system that supports schools in resolving problems of peer violence. It was created in collaboration with the school community itself (students, teachers, principals and parents) and its measures were piloted in primary and secondary schools before being rolled out further. For example, in 2019-2020, a team of psychologists and educators from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw piloted lessons on peer violence, leading to the development of a set of lessons on: relationship violence, cyberbullying, response to violence and the role of witnesses, resolving conflicts, and socio-moral thinking. The system allows heads of schools to monitor, report on and analyse the problems, and give appropriate pedagogical advice. The system consists of:

1. A mobile application enabling students to anonymously report incidents to teachers.
2. Materials on how to respond in crisis situations and in various peer violence scenarios, to help school staff take appropriate decisions and actions.
3. Tested scenarios for lessons on violence-related issues.

Source: https://www.resql.pl

Participation in school life

Learners need to feel ownership of their learning and be given the opportunity to voice their views. Being active in decisions and activities of the school increases a sense of belonging and may help learners to develop leadership and social skills. Proactive efforts to engage marginalised learners and ensure their voices are heard are essential.

All Member States include some degree of provision for child participation within their general Education Act or Code. In many countries, children's participation is promoted within schools through formal mechanisms, such as school councils, or targeted programmes. There is however a gap between legislation and practice and learners do not always have a real influence in decisions regarding fundamental aspects of their school experience and learning.

There should be sufficient time for classroom dialogue, as well as for discussions in the context of student councils or consultations on issues related to school life and to the learning experience. Learner contributions should be fully considered in subsequent decisions. Successful practices include:

- interactive and dialogic teaching and learning (for example in small groups), which increases opportunities for learners to talk with greater ease about issues impacting their learning;
- school projects that involve the entire school community (such as 'green school' projects), and give learners leading roles in key aspects.
- surveys, questionnaires and other methods of consultation to collect the views of learners.
- meaningful participation of learners in school decision-making processes through representation on school boards/council and in school evaluation and improvement processes.

Furthermore, a more differentiated approach to learners' voices and participation is needed for education, distinguishing learners as individuals, groups of learners and learners as a group, giving particular attention to ensuring representativeness of the ones with more limited opportunities to participate (such as Roma and migrants, LGBTQ, Muslim, Jewish populations and other minorities)[338].

BOX 48. Belgium – The Democratic School

In **Belgium, Wallonie-Bruxelles federation**, the collège Matteo Ricci is implementing the principles of "école citoyenne" (democratic school), with a view to help students develop empathy and respect for everyone's beliefs and culture, become capable to listen to others and overcome stereotypes, and engage in society. The "école citoyenne" approach includes several steps:

1. Building the "school law". At the beginning of the year, all classes are invited to discuss common questions: how will we live together, with respect, this year? What do I do not want to experience/make other people experience? Each class will propose rules, which will then be discussed by class representatives and summarised in a "school

[338] European Commission, Day, L., Percy-Smith, B., Ruxton, S., McKenna, K., Redgrave, K., Ronicle, J. & Young, T. (2015). *Evaluation of legislation, policy and practice on child participation in the European Union (EU),* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, p.235.

law". The chart is formulated in a clear language and all students and actors in the school are informed about it.

2. Living with the law. A celebration is organised during which the rules are read, approved and applauded, in the presence of all school actors; posters describing the law are produced, valid for the school year. A Citizenship Board is then elected, with representatives from all members of the school community (school leader, teachers, educators, students). The Board meets every two weeks to discuss issues proposed by pupils or staff.

Source: https://collegematteoricci.be/ https://www.ecolecitoyenne.org/

5.2.4 Parents and families

Parents and families have the most direct and lasting impact on children's learning and development. As the **first educators**, they play a crucial role in their children's educational journey. A stimulating **home environment** that encourages learning as well as parental engagement in in-school activities are crucial for a child's cognitive, social and emotional development. **Building family-school partnerships and engaging parents** as learning partners from the early years is therefore essential to improving children's and young people's development.

However, the relationship between schools, parents and families may be challenging. On the one hand, this may be due to parents' previous education experiences, educational, cultural and socio-economic background, different parenting styles and a sense of distance from the school 'culture' and 'language'. On the other hand, teachers may perceive parents as passive, opportunistic or intrusive, or may lack time and experience to communicate, reach out to or engage with parents from diverse backgrounds.

Effective family-school partnerships need to be based on **mutual respect and acknowledgement of each party's values, assets and expertise**. Parents and families from all backgrounds and educational levels need to feel **welcome at school** and be considered as **resources**. They need to be recognised and adequately supported as co-educators throughout their children's learning, starting from an early age[339].

BOX 49. Ireland: the Home-School Community Liaison (HSCL)

The HSCL initiative aims to establish collaboration between parents and teachers for children's

[339] The final report of the Thematic Working Group on early school leaving (2013, p. 18) recognises that 'Parents, as the primary educators of their children, should also be represented in the decision making process of the school'. The final report of the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Schools (2015, p. 16) expands on this point: 'A proactive focus on supporting all parents' participation in school activities and governance is needed. Marginalised parents in particular, need to be helped to take part in school decision making processes. The role of parents in the school organisation should be clearly laid out. Parental involvement should be fully embedded in school evaluation and monitoring processes'. The need to engage marginalised voices of parents is further amplified in the 2016 UNESCO report on supporting inclusive education: '… representation tends to be dominated by the most outspoken and articulate groups. This can result in consultation exercises, which, although intended to be inclusive, actually reinforce a sense of exclusion and disaffection among some of the school community' (UNESCO (2016). *Reaching out to all learners: A resource pack for supporting inclusive education*. Geneva: UNESCO International Bureau of Education, p.81).

learning, targeting, in particular, families from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or neighbourhoods and children at risk of underachievement and school drop-out.

In order to overcome parents' own negative experiences with school, the initiative tries to recover trust by recognising parents as belonging to the school (e.g. parents' rooms), offering adult education courses, involving parents in teaching mathematics and reading for primary school children, and involving parents of children with special needs in helping their own child in class. Parents thus gain knowledge and understanding of learning and can better support their children at home. Another key feature of the programme is the 'home-school coordinator', who acts as a mediator and contact person. The coordinator regularly visits families and can intervene in particular in crisis situations, after absences from school or in cases of disruptive behaviour.

In recent years, the HSCL scheme has been included as part of a major education policy programme aimed at reducing socio-economic inequalities – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS).

Source: https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/des_hscl.pdf

The following dimensions are essential to enhance parental involvement:

Better communication and information

Schools have a responsibility to develop and maintain communication and information flow with parents. In most European countries the role of parents within schools is recognised by law and their rights are guaranteed by regulatory provisions detailing the nature of these rights, including the right of parents to be informed about their children's schooling.

Whilst **formal arrangements for communication** can be enough to involve some parents, **a set of complementary measures are needed** to reach different groups of parents and families, including those with different parenting styles and levels of 'distance' from the school.

Communication needs be mutual, balanced and ongoing. On the one hand, it is important to make sure that parents and families understand what is expected of them and how they contribute to their children's learning. On the other hand, schools need to be attentive to involving and listening to the views of all parents, including those who are less engaged in their children's schooling.

Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates exactly how important **regular and direct communication** with parents is. In fact, during this period, parents often felt unable to reach schools and teachers or felt that they did not receive sufficient information to support and guide their children[340].

Communication and information must be clear and take into account the different cultural (notably linguistic) and economic backgrounds of each family. Communication channels need to be diversified and cater to heterogeneous groups of parents, allowing for a mutual exchange of information and experiences. This might include formal approaches such as

[340] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Ad hoc report no. 1/2021, Alieva, A. (2021). *Parental involvement in formal education*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

inviting parents to meet teachers and involving them in career guidance and career education related opportunities, or more informal initiatives, such as welcome sessions at the beginning of the school year, open days (to explain the curriculum, the values and mission of the school) or even optional or festive activities.

ICT tools can support communication with parents (e.g. use of e-diaries, text messages, newsletters, interactive websites, etc.), provided that a clear language is used, that it is accessible and that it is accompanied by other measures and training on how to use it for school purposes. Evidence from evaluations of the use of digital communication for parental involvement suggests that it has positive learning and behavioural outcomes among students.

BOX 50. Bristol University and Harvard University - Texting Parents

This project involved the sending of text messages to parents using school communications systems, such as Schoolcomms. These texts informed parents about the dates of upcoming tests, whether or not their children had submitted their homework on time and what their children were learning at school. A total of 34 schools took part in the evaluation phase between 2013 and 2016, incorporating 15,697 pupils. The results show that children whose parents were involved in the intervention: experienced roughly one month of additional **progress in Maths and English** compared with other children and showed **reduced absenteeism** compared with other children. No data supports that there was any impact in the learning of sciences, for example.

Results also showed that schools embraced the programme and appreciated its immediacy and low cost. The vast **majority of parents were accepting of the programme**, including the content, frequency, and timing of texts. Many respondents, however, felt that the presence of a dedicated coordinator would be valuable to monitor the accuracy and frequency of texts and that schools should consider whether they would be able to provide this additional resource.

Source: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/texting-parents/

Inviting parents to observe classrooms for a limited time can also be beneficial. Parents may feel reassured to see what happens in class and be inspired as to how to support their children at home; teachers can use these opportunities to establish dialogue with parents; and learners often take a more active role in class when parents are present.

Targeted efforts, such as personalised invitations, may be needed to reach out to more distant parents and families and to promote mutual aid between parents, regardless of the child's performance in school.

Communication with migrant or marginalised parents should also be facilitated, but requires the use of additional tools, such as outreach activities, cultural mediators, translators or interpretors, mentors and support from local NGOs.

BOX 51. Luxembourg - cultural mediators

Such resources were introduced into the education system in Luxembourg back in 2009. Parents can access support from mediators not only in the specific context of parental involvement, but in relation to all education-related questions: the overall structure of the education system, school enrolment, the health and well-being of their child at school, translation of documents, etc. At present, such support is offered in 37 languages. Other

languages not included in this list may also be requested.

Source: https://men.public.lu/content/dam/men/catalogue-publications/scolarisation-des-eleves-etrangers/informations-generales/mediateurs-interculturels.pdf

In order to build effective and positive communication with parents and families, it is essential for **school leaders and teachers to develop relational and communication skills. The teacher training curriculum** should thus help teachers reflect on the importance of parental involvement and the need to acquire relational and communication expertise.

Involving parents in educational activities

An effective way to create a positive family-school partnership and engage parents is to provide welcoming and safe opportunities for parents to be present at the school, share their expertise, build their confidence and their leadership capacities and expand their social networks and learning. Parents and families may have designated time and spaces at the school such as a **'parents' room',** where informal activities may be organised at their request and/or with the help of other professionals (e.g. social workers) or school staff. The room could be used during school hours to organise talks on school and parenting issues, meetings with external specialists and professionals, workshops and other informal activities.

Opening up school facilities outside school hours for programmes and classes for parents (e.g. language classes for parents with migrant background) can help increase parental involvement and break down barriers between schools and families. However, for parents with very negative past experiences of school, opportunities for lifelong learning in different locations, such as community-based centres, could be created in partnership with NGOs.

Parents also serve as **valuable resources to schools** and could be invited to share their skills and expertise. Family members could be invited to volunteer in educational activities within the classroom (e.g. reading to the class, teacher's support), or in other in-school activities (both curricular and extra-curricular, such as homework clubs and after-school programmes). Participation of parents in educational activities, including parents from different cultures or with different educational experiences, makes it possible to increase the number and diversity of interactions, which in turn accelerates the learning process. Such interactions can help learners overcome cultural stereotypes and generate more motivation. Parents and family members could also be involved in activities linked to career education and guidance, for example by talking about their profession and work experience.

BOX 52. Belgium/Flanders - the 'KAAP project' for Dutch language acquisition

Together with local schools, adult education centres and the city administration, the NGO 'Schoolbridge' has initiated a project with the aim of strengthening parent-school cooperation in the city of Antwerp. The project is aimed at non-Dutch-speaking parents of primary and secondary school students, who are invited to enroll in language classes. Each group consists of 15 parents, who attend language classes twice a week in the school premises. In addition, the NGO supports the schools by offering advice on better communication strategies with parents. An important aspect of the project is its emphasis on equal relationships between parents, educators and schools. Parents reported that their communication with the schools had improved following their participation in the project. In addition, their knowledge and understanding of the education system in Flanders had

deepened.

Source: https://www.deschoolbrug.be

Offering opportunities for family learning

'Family learning' refers to any activity that involves both children and adult family members (with all working toward their own learning outcomes) and that contributes to a **culture of learning in the family**. Research shows that, for example, involving families in literacy programmes is essential for increasing the literacy and numeracy levels of children and adults. Such family literacy programmes are highly cost-effective, both in improving child literacy and in improving parental support skills. It is important that they are in line with and complement classroom literacy activities.

BOX 53. Germany - Family Literacy (FLY)

The Family Literacy (FLY) project based in Hamburg, Germany, promotes a family learning approach which encourages parents to anticipate and engage in schoolwork in order to improve their children's literacy. The programme has been lauded for addressing the insecurity of parents about using different languages at home for fear that it might disadvantage their children at school. The FLY programme is also acknowledged for celebrating cultural diversity and recognising multilingualism as an asset in child development. The FLY programme has been awarded the 2010 King Sejong literacy prize by UNESCO.

The FLY programme 'Enjoying language together' book contains working sheets that have been tested in practice and can be applied in other programmes.

Source: https://li.hamburg.de/family-literacy/4552940/artikel-family-literacy/

Through family learning, parents build their self-efficacy, are empowered to become active agents at the school, and are more involved in their children's schooling.

There should also be a range of complementary programmes targeting the needs of specific groups, including low-income families and ethnically diverse groups. These programmes should seek to improve child literacy and socio-emotional development, while also developing the parents' capacity to support their child's learning. Enhancing general parenting skills is also an essential part of family learning. Such programmes should therefore be provided as early as possible in a child's development. Funding, quality of the programme and partnerships between key individuals are considered key to the long-term success of family learning programmes.

BOX 54. Latvia – Uzdevumi, Digital learning tool to support parents

The Latvian learning portal Uzdevumi recognises the importance of parental involvement to maximise the educational outcomes of their children, particularly in low-income families and families with low levels of educational attainment. Uzdevumi.lv thus supports parents in helping their children with their homework and tests (i.e. by helping them explain various subject-specific concepts), and also supports parents in keeping up with their children's achievements and progress in school subjects.

Source: https://www.uzdevumi.lv/

It is also important to **help parents to learn the right forms of support** to give their children[341]. This could be achieved through specialised workshops and short thematic courses with a strong practical element. Regular opportunities should be offered for parents to bolster their skills and supporting strategies, if possible, in the main languages spoken by parents within a particular school or school district, or using the support of cultural mediators. In addition, national and local educational authorities need to take into account the time constraints under which parents operate, and should be flexible with regard to the timing of such events (e.g. by offering evening courses, weekend courses).

Outreach to individuals, families and local communities

Besides offering support upon request, schools should also develop specific outreach programmes to encourage the active participation and representation of vulnerable parents and families. Where necessary, other services, NGOs and professionals (cultural mediators, mentors, social workers, etc.) can be involved[342]. For example, key family and community outreach aspects include:

- Establishing an individual family outreach strategy at the school level to foster engagement with families, especially those of highest needs
- Develop specific community outreach strategies relying on structured cooperation and communal spaces to allow different groups to meet, thus also helping overcome prejudice between groups[343]

These are also of strong relevance for the prevention of early leaving from education and training and well-being in school, as part of an integrated strategy with bullying prevention.

BOX 55. Luxembourg - Participation in after-school educational activities as a way to enhance and equalize opportunities for students to learn

In Luxembourg, the municipalities are responsible for providing additional activities after school at primary education level. The municipality itself or private non-profit non-formal education providers run the activities, which are funded by the State, and parents have to pay a small contribution depending on their income. The ministry responsible for education has established a quality assurance system for non-formal education, which comprises an educational framework, a network of regional advisors and continuing professional

[341] Research confirms that certain strategies, such as controlling homework and placing too much pressure on children, are frequently detrimental to their learning outcomes. However, parents frequently have no other tools at their disposal. They should instead be encouraged to adopt strategies that nurture children's motivation, autonomy and self-efficacy, in order to offer the most beneficial and long-lasting effect. European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Ad hoc report no. 1/2021, Alieva, A. (2021). *Parental involvement in formal education*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[342] European Commission, ET 2020 Working Group on Schools Policy (2015). *A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving - policy messages,* final report of the Education and Training 2020 Working Group on Schools.

[343] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Downes, P. & Cefai, C. (2016). *How to tackle bullying and prevent school violence in Europe: Evidence and practices for strategies for inclusive and safe schools*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

development for staff.

Source: Horváth, A., et.al. (2020)[344]

Assertive outreach recognises the need to move beyond the idea that leaflets, websites, posters and other forms of information will suffice to engage 'hard-to-reach' groups. Information-based communication approaches focus on the "what" question. It is other questions that deserve attention. The "where" question, which reflects on the location from which the marginalised student or family is engaged with. The "who" question, which not only reflects on the specific needs of the person being reached out to, but also inquires who is communicating to that marginalised student or family. Finally, the "*how*" question, about the way the person is being communicated with, needs to be focused upon as part of outreach approaches, as it emphasizes the *dialogue* process between the learner and the school.

Within discussions around outreach, the issue of system fragmentation of multiple, diffuse services and territories has also been raised. In fact, 10 European city municipalities observed a need for clarity of responsibility regarding supporting services, to ensure that families and young people do not fall through the gaps, as many vulnerable populations may not be in a position to access available supports. It is then key that there a lead agency is put in place to guide families and learners to become acquainted and access the services available for them in a given municipality and to ensure the educational and more holistic needs of children and young people from ethnic minorities and migrant families are being met.

Increasing participation in school decision-making and school life

Enhancing family-school partnerships and increasing parent participation in educational decision-making can be highly effective for promoting better educational outcomes. Wide parental participation in decisions related to learning, as well as to the organisation of the school and its activities, promotes transparency and better adjustment to actual family needs and creates a greater sense of shared responsibility around education. A significant share of respondents to the consultation activities (35 %) considered engaging families in the school's daily life and decision making to be among the most important measures to be prioritised at school level.

There are formal procedures in place to ensure the rights of parents to participate in some forms of school decision-making processes, e.g. through representation of parents in school boards and councils. Parents are therefore encouraged to participate, via their elected representatives, in the different school bodies, notably school councils and class councils.

In practice, however, as mentioned previously, different starting points and levels of parental involvement influence these processes. **Formal approaches** to parent participation, such as parents' associations, parent councils and parent consultations need to be accompanied by **less formal approaches** to ensure that all parents are taken into account and that parents and families from more disadvantaged backgrounds are adequately represented in school decision-making.

BOX 56. France - 'Parents' briefcase' (La mallette des parents)

[344] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*.

This programme was launched in 2008, initially across 40 lower-level secondary schools ('collèges') in disadvantaged areas by inviting 400 parents to participate in several rounds of discussions with educational stakeholders. By 2012, the programme had been extended to 1,300 secondary schools, and by 2018, it had become available to parents with children in pre-school, primary and secondary school.

There are spaces devoted to parents and to teachers. Parents are offered supporting tools, materials and guidance in understanding and navigating each stage of education and meetings are organised for them. Today, the programme covers a wide range of topics, from children's well-being to pedagogical tools for learning, language development, and so on.

An evaluation carried out by the Paris School of Economics found that the programme had a positive effect on parental knowledge of the education system as well as on parental involvement and on decreased rates of student absenteeism and behavioural problems.

Source: https://mallettedesparents.education.gouv.fr

Promoting opportunities and motivation to read from an early age

Abundant research demonstrates positive impact of daily reading to children from an early age[345]. More sophisticated language models are provided by parents during story time than during other activities and helps stimulate brain activity[346]. However, this may be challenging for children from more disadvantaged socio-economic background who may not have easy access to age-appropriate books. **Book giveaway programmes** are a relatively low cost and effective solution[347]. They help entice or nudge parents to initiate and sustain regular book reading routines.

BOX 57. Book giveaway programmes

There is well-established research literature on the benefits for children's literacy development of distributing books to their homes in the early years to develop a routine of parents' reading to their children. A recent meta-analysis of 44 studies on book giveaway programmes reported in English, Dutch, German or Italian confirmed that these programmes promote children's home literacy environment, resulting in more interest in reading and children scoring higher on literacy related skills prior to and during the early years of school. Studies with low socio-economic status samples were found to have stronger effects than mixed-SES samples. This study review concludes that in comparison with other family literacy programs, the effects of book giveaway programs on literacy skills reported here are

345 Children who had greater home reading exposure (a composite index including access to books, frequency of shared reading, and variety of books read) show greater brain activation during story listening. The areas of the brain showing higher levels of activity were those that support narrative comprehension and visual imagery, key elements of both language and reading . Hutton, J., Horowitz-Kraus, T., Mendelsohn, A., DeWitt, T., Holland, S.; the C-MIND Authorship Consortium. (2015), "Home reading environment and brain activation in preschool children listening to stories", *Pediatrics, 136*, 466–478.

346 Hutton, J. S., Dudley, J., Horowitz-Kraus, T., DeWitt, T., Holland, S. K. (2019), "Associations between home literacy environment, brain white matter integrity and cognitive abilities in preschool-age children", *Acta Paediatrica*. https://doi.org/10.1111/apa.15124

347 Dickinson, D. K., Morse, A. B. (2019). *Connecting through talk: Nurturing children's development with language.* Paul Brookes.

impressive.

A specific feature of book giveaway programmes which appears to strengthen impact is where parents receive advice on shared book reading in the context of a health care consultation, which may give special significance and weight to caregiving advice[348]. This finding highlights the importance of integrated strategic approaches between health and education.

Source: De Bondt, M., et.al. (2020)[349].

Promoting parental engagement in the early years for maths and science learning

Parental engagement during early years in informal and formal home numeracy activities or in home science activity sessions may have persistent effects on the growth of children's mathematical and scientific outcomes. Evidence demonstrates that informal and operational numeracy activities at home are longitudinally related to children's acquisition of fundamental mathematical skills and knowledge at school[350]. Access to science-education centres, mobile science laboratories, competitions and festivals should be promoted from an early age.

5.2.5 Structural measures

As indicated above, the design and quality of education systems may have a strong impact on learners' participation and performance, and certain systemic factors may negatively influence learning progress.

Eurydice published a Report in 2021 about: Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance[351]. The key findings point to several policies that are associated with higher levels of equity. These policies include increased public spending, especially in primary education, assigning students to different educational programmes or tracks at a later stage, limiting differentiation in school choice and admissions policies as well as reducing grade repetition and other measures. The report shows large differences between countries as to how these and other policies are implemented, and how well they work in reducing inequality in education.

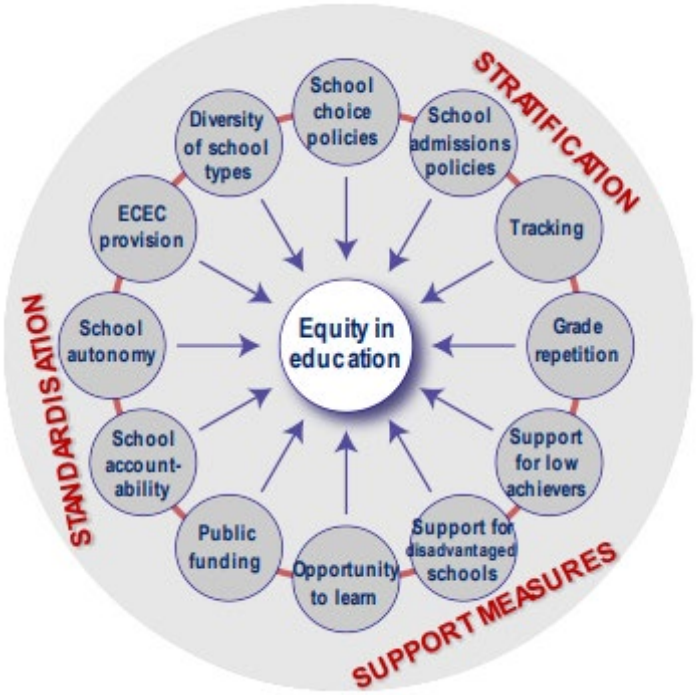
[348] A review found that models whereby book gifts are presented by a pediatrician or nurse practitioner in a health care context is by far the most effective (Dowdall, N., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Murray, L., Gardner, F., Hartford, L., Cooper, P. J. (2020). "Shared picture book reading interventions for child language development: A systematic review and meta-analysis", *Child Development, 91*(2), e383–e399). Providing an information brochure to families had no effect.

[349] De Bondt, M., Ingrid A. Willenberg, I.A., & Bus, A.G. (2020), "Do Book Giveaway Programs promote the Home Literacy Environment and Children's Literacy-Related Behavior and Skills?", *Review of Educational Research*, 90(3), 349-375.

[350] Susperreguy, M. I., Di Lonardo Burr, S., Xu, C., Douglas, H & LeFevre, J. (2020), "Children's Home Numeracy Environment Predicts Growth of their Early Mathematical Skills in Kindergarten", *Child Development, 91*(5), 1663–1680

[351] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/880217

Figure 27. Education policies and structures that may influence equity in education

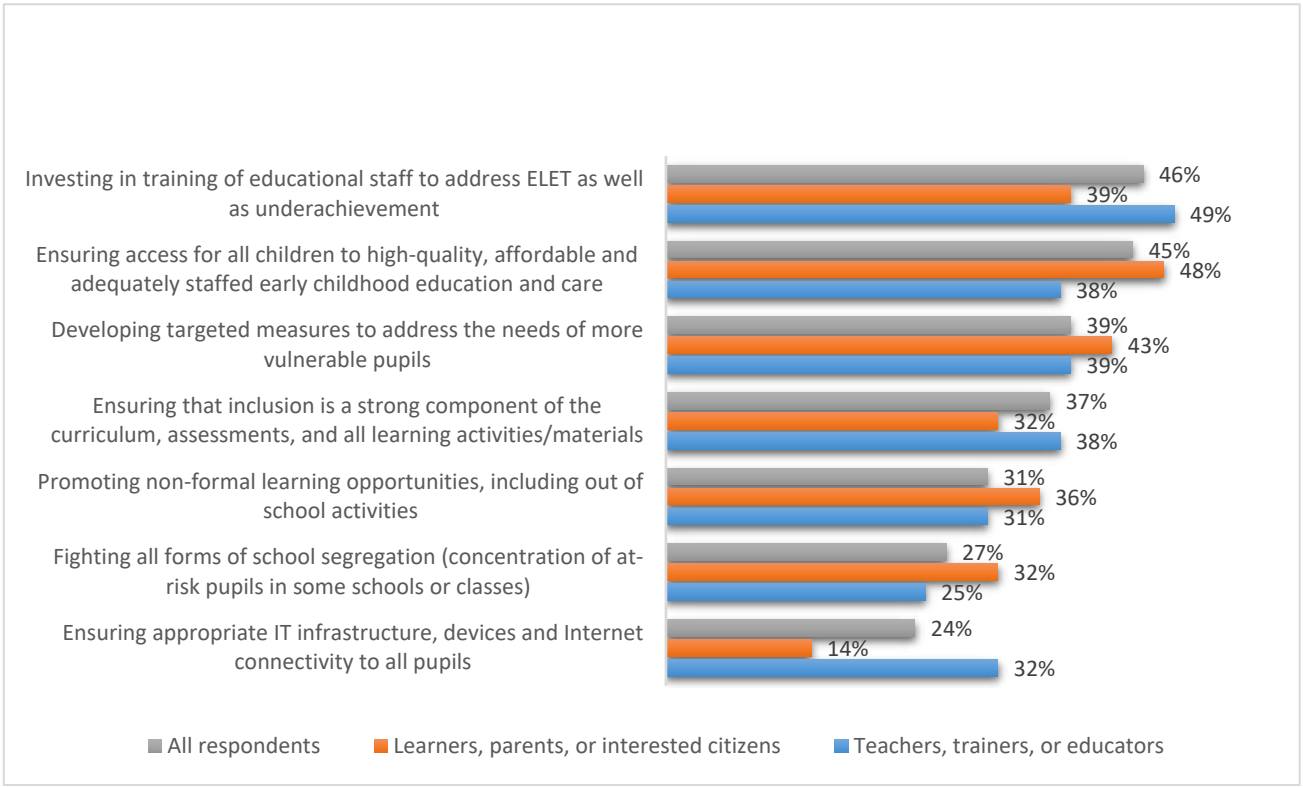


Source: Eurydice[352]

During the consultation activities supporting the preparation of the Commission proposal, a number of measures at system level were emphasised as particularly important.

[352] Ibid.

Figure 28 - Measures to be prioritised according to at least one-fifth of all respondents



Source: Open Public Consultation synopsis report

Some of the aspects identified in the Eurydice report and during the consultation have already been addressed in previous sections. This section focuses on the remaining key features of education systems that can have an impact on equity and inclusion and become barriers to school success.

Early Childhood Education and Care

There is compelling evidence, including longitudinal studies, that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) mitigates educational inequalities and improves pupils' average performance, since it increases cognitive and non-cognitive skills of children and prepares them for pre-school. PISA results suggest that 15-year-olds with less than a year ECEC enrollment compared to those with one or more years of enrollment are 3.1 times more likely to lack basic skills in science[353]. The provision of good quality universal and free or affordable pre-schooling is therefore an important means for improving the cognitive, physical, emotional and social development of younger children and their chances to succeed once they are in school, especially for children from disadvantaged families who benefit most from ECEC[354].

A significant share of OPC respondents (45 %) recommended a greater focus on **access for all children to high-quality, affordable and adequately staffed early childhood education and**

[353] OECD (2018). *Engaging Young Children. Lessons from research about quality in early childhood education and care'* Available online https://www.oecd.org/education/engaging-young-children-9789264085145-en.htm.

[354] UNICEF (2018), *An Unfair Start: Inequality in children's education in rich countries* https://www.unicef.org/reports/unfair-start; Blossfeld, H., Kulic, N., Skopek, J. and Triventi, M. (2017), *Childcare, Early Education and Social Inequality: An international perspective*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, United Kingdom.

care (ECEC). To make ECEC more accessible and inclusive for individuals from all backgrounds, respondents called for a workforce prepared for addressing the specific needs of different learners and greater diversity among education personnel. At the same time, several organisations flagged that learners from some disadvantaged groups, such as children with special needs or from lower socio-economic groups, tend to have lower enrolment rates in ECEC than their peers. This was linked to a growing educational gap between vulnerable learners and their peers at the start of school education.

BOX 58. Sweden – Increasing accessibility to ECEC

Considering equity of education system in **Sweden,** policy makers have been focusing on increasing accessibility to ECEC activities. More specifically, pre-school classes for six-year-olds, which were introduced in 1998, became compulsory in 2018. Since the school year 2001-2002 the municipalities are obliged to ensure that parents, who are unemployed or on parental leave, have access to ECEC activities for their children. Since 2002 pre-school institutions also cannot charge a fee higher than a maximum tariff.

Source: European Commission

Under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) EUR 7.29 billion will be devoted to early childhood education and care[355]. Investments in early childhood education and care are expected to increase participation rates, in particular among disadvantaged groups, hence reducing inequalities. About half of Member States' Recovery and Resilience plans proposed measures to improve access to high-quality ECEC by expanding its capacities.

Some of the investments in ECEC are also supported by reforms aiming to improve access, inclusiveness and quality. Some Member States plan to lower the age of compulsory pre-school education, review the financing model, reduce early childhood education and care fees, improve early diagnosis and support for children with disability and special needs, review the recruitment system for early childhood education and care staff and to adopt a legal framework that facilitates access to training and opportunities for further professionalisation of staff, including by introducing a legal entitlement.

BOX 59. Croatia – Increasing participation in ECEC through the Recovery and Resilience plan

One of the objectives of the **Croatian** recovery and resilience plan is to increase participation in ECEC, which is among the lowest in the EU, largely stemming from a lack of infrastructure and shortage of teachers, with wide regional disparities exacerbating inequalities. Croatia has taken a comprehensive approach towards ECEC in its recovery and resilience plan, combining both reforms and investments. The aim of one of the reforms is to improve access for children aged 3 or more and support participation, especially for children from disadvantaged groups. In this context, the number of teachers specifically trained for ECEC is expected to increase, while affordability is expected to improve through the introduction of a new funding model. The reform will further increase the number of hours in the last year of ECEC and will introduce a guaranteed place for children older than 4 in an early childhood education and care facility. These reform efforts will be complemented by investments in the construction of new ECEC facilities and the renovation of existing ones. The objective is to create 22 500 new places, thus reducing regional inequalities in the availability of early childhood education and

[355] European Commission (2021), *Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard – Thematic Analysis: Education*.

care.

Source: European Commission, Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard[356]

Active desegregation policies

Decreasing school segregation along socio-economic or ethnic criteria is generally regarded as a key factor for combatting underachievement and educational inequalities[357]. The accumulation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in certain schools has been identified as a systemic cause for consistent high ratios of educational failure and ELET. Despite differences between Member States, socio-economic background appears to be the main segregation factor in European school systems and few countries/regions have recent or on-going policies in place to restrict socio-economic segregation in schools.[358]. Segregation often interplays with other socio-cultural factors such as migrant background or minority status. Multiple disadvantages can result in particularly severe forms of intersectional segregation, to the point of referral to special education, which in turn increases the risk of educational failure.

Several position papers highlighted the lack of diversity and inclusion in some ECEC and school settings. The stakeholder organisation Eurodiaconia stated in its position paper that segregated schooling is an issue negatively affecting Roma children:

> *"Segregated schools are still a reality for many Roma children, which not only hinders social cohesion, but also their present and future civic engagement, and democratic participation. Both physical segregation and social marginalisation result in a disproportionate number of early school leavers among Roma pupils."*

The First Years First Priority campaign criticised ethnic segregation in ECEC settings, stating a lack of inclusiveness and differences in the quality of care provided as direct obstacles to school success. Further, the campaign's position paper argued that many families from ethnic minorities or migrant backgrounds are frequently exposed to such issues, making them feel unwelcome in relevant ECEC settings.

Source: Open Public Consultation position papers

Even though most EU countries have legislative regulations that aim to avoid discrimination, ethnic minorities are still disproportionally affected by it. According to the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030, cases of segregation of Roma pupils in education have increased in recent years; based on the Racial Equality Directive, the Commission has initiated infringement procedures over the school segregation

[356] European Commission (2021), *Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard – Thematic Analysis: Education*

[357] UNICEF (2018), *An Unfair Start: Inequality in children's education in rich countries*.

[358] European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, Cedefop (2014). *Tackling early leaving from education and training in Europe: strategies, policies and measures.* Eurydice and Cedefop Report. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

of Roma children against Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary[359].Desegregation policies aim to change the social composition of 'disadvantaged' schools and to provide better access for children from low socio-economic backgrounds to schools with higher socio-economic composition. A more balanced social composition of schools can improve the educational attainment of children from socially disadvantaged and low-education backgrounds without lowering attainment levels of the class as a whole. It also reduces the level of behavioural problems which are often concentrated in disadvantaged schools. This may entail controlling the conditions of entrance to individual schools as a mean of ensuring a broader socio-economic 'balance' in their population[360], especially since families with more information regarding the education system tend to choose “better” schools for their children.

BOX 60. Belgium (Flanders) and Portugal - Diversification of school population in terms of socio-economic status

In **Belgium (Flemish Community),** a double quota system must be applied by schools in primary and secondary education: a quota for socio-economically disadvantaged students and a quota for non-disadvantaged students, which means that both types of students are given equal priority. The quotas are based on the percentage of disadvantaged students in the municipality (i.e. the ratio between the number of disadvantaged students and the total number of pupils in primary or secondary education located in the municipality)[361]. The double quota system will be abolished from school year 2023/2024. Schools will be allowed to set quotas for underrepresented groups in compulsory education (primary and secondary education), subject to the agreement of the local authorities.

Portugal has launched a public website with alternative school indicators that highlight positive educational results in schools with a large disadvantaged population. These are value-added indicators that compare student progress, rather than absolute levels of attainment, and contribute to improve the public reputation of good performing disadvantaged schools.

Source: Horváth, A., et.al. (2020)[362]

BOX 61. The INSCHOOL Project

Inclusive Schools: Making a Difference for Roma children" (INSCHOOL) is a joint project of the European Union and Council of Europe focusing on inclusive education for Roma children. The project is based on the assumption that it is not enough to draw up policies of change. Change needs to be reflected at school level and in the environment of the children. There is often a gap between the statements and requirements in policy documents and the reality in which these need to be implemented. Practice has proven that for schools to overcome the rift of exclusive teaching and learning approaches, they have to re-examine what they teach, how

359 COM/2020/620 final.

360 European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg; European Commission (2011), *Reducing early school leaving,* Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving.

361 European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

362 Ibid.

they teach and how they assess learners' performances. A real link with non-formal education and the support for families and communities is necessary to create a shift in education - for the benefit of all learners.

Source: https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/inclusive-education-for-roma-children/about-the-project

Alternatives to early tracking

The most imminent education policy increasing school segregation is 'tracking of children' which refers to selecting students by ability into different schools and programs offering different curriculum or learning outcomes. Research generally agrees that **the earlier children are divided by ability into different school tracks, the greater are the resulting educational inequalities and, with that, the share of students lacking basic skills**[363]. In addition, studies such as the comparative analysis of policies in Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, UK, Sweden, Portugal, Spain[364] confirm the observation that learners who are tracked into vocational education early in their educational path have a higher probability of coming from a lower socio-economic background, perform lower academically, and are being restricted in their choice of further education paths.

BOX 62. Netherlands – Increasing mobility between education pathways

In the **Netherlands**, the 2016 strategy Equality Alliance aims at increasing mobility between education pathways and deferring pathway selection until students are older. In this respect, a pilot programme of twelve Teenage Schools is currently underway. Students aged 10 to 14 study in these schools which cover the later years of primary and early years of secondary education. Thus, the students can wait until they are 14 (instead of 12, which is the usual cut-off point) to decide which type of secondary education suits them best. The strategy also envisages financial support for schools with disadvantaged students or schools with a higher number of students more likely to underperform. The schools can decide how to spend the additional financial support to help these students[365].

Source: Horváth, A., et.al. (2020)[366]

Avoiding grade repetition, suspensions and expulsions

Across the OECD countries, as many as 13% of 15-year-old pupils experienced at least one grade repetition in primary or secondary school with country variations. In Finland and Norway, retention of children is very rare and grading of children receives less attention

[363] Strietholt, R., Gustafsson, J., Hogrebe, N., Rolfe, V., Rosen, M., Steinmann, I., Hansen, K. (2019), *The impact of education policies on socioeconomic inequality in student achievement: a review of comparative studies. Socioeconomic Inequality and Student Outcomes*, vol 4.; Volante, L., Schnepf, S., Jerrim, J., Klinger, D. (2019) *Socioeconomic Inequality and Student Outcomes. Cross-national trends, policies and practices*, Springer, Singapore.; Hanushek, E. and Woessmann, L. (2006), 'Does education tracking affect performance and inequality? Differences-in-differences evidence across countries', *The Economic Journal*, 116(510):C63-C76

[364] Szalai, J. et. Al. (2014) *Policies on Early School Leaving in Nine European Countries: A Comparative Analysis*. RESLEU Working Paper. https://cps.ceu.edu/projects/reducing-early-school-leaving-in-the-eu/comparative-analysis

[365] www.gelijke-kansen.nl

[366] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*.

overall at least during primary school years. In contrast, about one third of pupils in France, Portugal and Spain repeat a grade[367]. Grade retention is generally higher among students from lower socio-economic background.

Grade retention is generally associated with lower average achievement and higher school dropout. Research shows that repeating a year is likely to undermine pupils' confidence and trigger ELET. The demotivating effects of removing children from their own age cohort by placing them with younger students can strongly affect the successful inclusion of migrant children, who should be placed within the same age group as their native peers.

Accordingly, a number of countries have started to invest in individualised and targeted learning support. This shows the need to avoid grading within educational systems and to **replace it by instruments that monitor and early flag learning needs** of children and **by offering individualised and targeted support**, in order to support them positively with more flexible teaching practices during their learning pathways.

BOX 63. Approaches to grade repetition

Some countries allow underperforming students to progress to the next grade subject to certain conditions being met during the following school year. In primary education, this happens in seven education systems and in lower secondary in eight. Belgium (German-speaking Community), Spain, Austria and Switzerland allow this practice also in upper secondary, while Slovenia only at this level. For example: In some Länder of Germany, students may be granted a probationary promotion to the next school year during which some conditions have to be met (possibly including taking exams). Primary education students in grades 1-3 in Croatia can progress to the third grade if they have underperformed in one subject, as long as the student is expected to achieve the prescribed learning outcomes in the next school year. In Latvia, progression to the next grade is combined with support both in the current and in the next year. Having undertaken additional schoolwork in the current year, the school also provides the student with an individual support plan for the next year. In Austria, the teachers' 'class conference' may decide to allow a student who has failed a compulsory subject to progress to the next grade, taking into account their performance in other subjects and provided they are deemed likely to meet the prerequisites of the higher grade. A student can progress to the next grade in Finland, even if they have failed a subject, provided they are deemed to be able to cope with the demands of the next year's study.

Source: Horváth, A., et.al. (2020)[368]

Experience of exclusion also tends to be higher for those experiencing socio-economic deprivation and both suspension and expulsion from school are associated with higher risk of homelessness and ELET[369]. Since high-quality positive student-teacher relationships can lead

[367] OECD (2016), *Trends Shaping Education 2016*, Paris: OECD Publishing.

[368] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*.

[369] American Academy of Pediatrics (2013), 'Policy statement: Out-of-School suspension and expulsion', *Pediatrics, 131,* 1000-1007.

to reductions in problematic behaviour during school years[370], potentially reducing the probability of a students' suspension from school[371], the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in discipline sanctions requires more scrutin[372]. In fact, aalthough low-income and minority students experience suspensions and expulsions at higher rates, it is likely that these disparities also result from the policies, practices, and perspectives of teachers and principals regarding learners or certain groups of learners[373], meaning that there is still work to be done in terms of destigmatisation and in promoting fair and equal treatment of all students.

Inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream education

Persons with disabilities have the right to participate in all educational levels and forms on an equal basis with others. Children with disabilities and special educational needs include both children with a physical disability and children with learning disorders (e.g. dyslexia) or mental disorders (e.g. ADHD, autism spectrum conditions).

There is still a considerable need for action in this area, as demonstrated by the gaps in educational outcomes between learners with and without disabilities: more young persons with disabilities leave school early; fewer learners with disabilities complete a university degree; and many children and young persons with disabilities are enrolled in special schools which do not always offer effective bridges to the mainstream education system, continued training, or to the labour market[374].

Inclusive education for children with disabilities or special educational needs includes their enrolment in mainstream education to the extent possible, while ensuring that adaptations are made that facilitate their individual needs. During the consultation activities, there were strong calls for enabling all learners with disabilities to attend mainstream educational settings, removing barriers affecting their achievement of basic skills as well as promoting enrolment in higher education. This may involve the removal of obstacles in the physical school environment or the provision of access to learning materials available in appropriate formats accessible to this group (such as materials in Braille and easy-to-read format, or sign language interpretation, subtitling in video contents, among other things), as well as offering diversified teaching and learning approaches. This also includes individualised learning plans and learning support, with effective support provided by trained educators and other educational staff/counsellors, or health professionals.

More recently, during COVID-19 school closures, children with disabilities or special educational needs did not have access to special facilities present at schools and teachers were not able to provide the same individualised and personalised support.

BOX 64. Greece – Inclusive education for children with disabilities

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370 Pakarinen, E., Silinskas, G., Hamre, B. K., Metsäpelto, R. L., Lerkkanen, M. K., Poikkeus, A. M., & Nurmi, J. E. (2017), 'Cross-lagged associations between problem behaviors and teacher-student relationships in early adolescence', *Journal of Early Adolescence, 38*(8), 1100–1141.

371 Quin, D. (2016), 'Longitudinal and contextual associations between teacher-student relationships and student engagement: A systematic review', *Review of Educational Research*, *87*(2), 345–387.

372 Gregory, A., Skiba, R. J & Noguera, P. A. (2010), 'The achievement gap and the discipline gap: Two sides of the same coin?', *Educational Researcher, 39,* 59-68.

373 Welsh, R.O. Little, S. (2018), 'The School Discipline Dilemma: A Comprehensive Review of Disparities and Alternative Approaches', *Review of Educational Research 88* 5, 752-794

374 European Commission (2021), *Union of Equality - Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030*. https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1484

The **Greek** government sent out various circulars on the education of children with disabilities, including detailed instructions on where accessible digital material is provided, adapted according to different types of disability and educational needs.

Source: See, for example, the website of the Project: "Development of Accessible Digital educational Material" here: http://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/en/

Education policies will continue to be supported by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education[375].

Addressing boys' underperformance in education

There are considerable differences across the EU on whether or not underperformance of boys is recognized as an issue at all or in which way the issue is addressed in policy and practice. In fact, not all Member States and key stakeholders' acknowledge the phenomenon as a gender issue, preferring to focus on other individual factors for underperformance, such as socio-economic status, migrant background or minority status. In this sense, although there are policy measures which directly or indirectly attempt to address boys' underachievement, they are currently somewhat underdeveloped, and more research needs to be done on the subject to support better policy making.

At the level of EU stakeholders, there is a need to reinforce awareness of this issue at a national and regional level and make a long-term political commitment to improving the situation. In parallel, national and regional policymakers must support this political commitment and monitor progress.

To further address gender disparities, specific actions and strategies could be implemented at national level, starting from the earliest years of schooling. These strategies should take into account all of the factors which may contribute to boys' underperformance and all the features of education systems which impact their achievement, while never scaling down the efforts towards supporting girls' achievements in education (especially in STEM fields) and beyond. Challenging the low societal expectations for boys' achievement in education also requires better teacher education and training with a specific gender focus (both in ITE and CPD), active school leaders and a whole school approach to the issue[376].

BOX 65. Examples of targeted actions addressing boys' underperformance

The **Erasmus+ project, "Training Sports Students as Mentors to Improve the Educational Attainment of Boys and Young Men",** which received EUR 171,123.9 of Erasmus+ funding, involved training sports mentors to improve the educational attainment of boys and young men. The rationale behind this was that many sports coaches are already providing mentoring to boys around health and social issues but lack training to do so effectively. The project aimed to assist in reducing male ELET by developing a higher education course to enhance the knowledge and skills of undergraduate sports students. These students would then apply their

[375] The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education is an independent organisation that acts as a platform for collaboration for the ministries of education in its member countries

[376] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Staring, F., Donlevy, V., Day, L., et al., (2021), *Study on gender behaviour and its impact on education outcomes (with a special focus on the performance of boys and young men in education).* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/509505

learning in vocational settings to provide effective mentoring support to young males who are underachieving at school and at risk of ELET. This approach aims to motivate young men to stay at school and improve their educational attainment/outcomes.

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplusproject-details/#project/2017-1-UK01-KA203-036698

In 2018, the **Czech government** published a policy paper focused on boys and men in education. The paper outlines the discrimination and disadvantageous situation of boys and young men in the education system, highlighting issues such as the lack of male teachers, gender stereotyping by parents and teachers towards boys, and the advantageous position of men in a society which is not determined by the level of their education as much as for women. One chapter focuses on stereotypes and teachers' expectations of, and attitudes towards, boys in schools.

Source: Staring, F., et.al. (2021)[377]

Attractive VET; flexibility and permeability of educational pathways

As noted above, segregation can be enforced by rigid tracking pathways and parental choice of "better" schools[378]. Facilitating flexible schooling pathways (by modularising courses, offering vocationally oriented courses, alternating school and work or by promoting flexibility in duration and entry points of study courses) and avoiding ability-grouping into schools is likely to counteract rising inequalities and underachievement, providing avenues for better accessibility of new types of learners, including from disadvantaged groups. In addition, school funding linked to the share of children with disadvantaged background attending the school has been shown to combat inequalities and help schools to support underprivileged learners[379].

High-quality Vocational Education and Training, in addition to its vocational focus, fosters the acquisition of basic skills and of key lifelong relevant competences, and increases its attractiveness and flexibility.

Research conducted by Cedefop shows that high quality and effective VET offers students more variety and choices to suit their needs and may prevent and counteract early leaving from education and training. In fact, a majority of those at risk of dropping out from general education and who opted for a VET pathway have managed to complete their studies[380].

Some education systems show that facilitating the permeability of educational pathways is an explicit aim of top-level authorities. The introduction of regulations in this area may ease these transitions. First, they can create transparency by prescribing in detail the conditions for changing between all possible educational tracks. Second, curricular harmonisation across the

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377 Ibid.

378 Fjellman, A-M, Yang Hansen, K., Beach, D. (2019), 'School choice and implications for equity: the new political geography of the Swedish upper secondary school market', *Educational Review,* 71(4): 518–539.

379 Volante, L., Schnepf S., Jerrim J. and Klinger D. eds, (2019). *Socio-economic Inequality and Student Outcomes: Cross-national Trends, Policies and Practices.* London, Springer.

380 European Commission, Cedefop (2016). *Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training centre stage. Volume I: investigating causes and extent*. Cedefop research paper No 57, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/893397

different educational pathways can be introduced to facilitate transitions. Thirdly, creating, developing and promoting validation arrangements, as well as reinforcing quality career guidance and career education provisions is essential for smoothing these transitions and to empower learners with the skills necessary to shape their life.

BOX 66. Norway – Pathways in VET

In **Norway**, students in vocational pathways wishing to transfer to general education can take supplementary courses in the main curriculum subjects where they had fewer teaching hours in their original track.

Source: Horváth, A., et.al. (2020)[381]

However, while a small proportion of students who start general education tracks end up completing a vocational track, the proportion moving in the opposite direction is close to zero in almost all systems with data. This points towards very low levels of permeability from vocational to general tracks in European countries[382].

Following the principles layed out in the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation, various routes back into mainstream education and training should be offered by creating, developing and promoting validation arrangements. Reinforcing quality career guidance and career education provisions is essential for smoothing these pathways by enabling development of career management skills so students are empowered to shape their life-course and find available support and resources.

Compensation measures: Effective second chance education

While preventive measures can help to improve the risk for early leaving from education and training, second chance programmes can be a way to **re-engage early leavers in the education system**. Across Europe, second chance programmes are in place in most countries and offer educational schemes in several ways. A key feature in most second chance programmes is, however, the distinctiveness from mainstream education, as second chance programmes needs to take into account the learners' previous negative experiences with the mainstream education system.

Furthermore, effective second chance programmes have to recognize the **individual student's needs and reasons for leaving** the mainstream education. For most students this is a complex matter with multiple interconnected factors, including previous negative school experiences, personal or social issues, family situation or health issues. In addition, students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, vulnerable or at-risk groups and students with disabilities are more likely to leave school early. In order to re-engange the learners in the education system, the second chance programmes need to address these challenging factors in a holistic way.

[381] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2020) *Equity in school education in Europe: structures, policies and student performance*.

[382] Ibid.

The 2013 study "Preventing Early School Leaving in Europe – Lessons Learned from Second Chance Education"[383] undertaken for the European Commission points towards a number of **key features of effective second chance schemes**. Among others, these key features include:

- **Learner-centred approaches** that take into account the individual needs of the learners. This can be realised by conducting individual assessments of the student's skills and competencies when starting in the programme, developing personal learning objectives that address both the personal, social and professional development, smaller class sizes and consideration of different learning styles.
- **Integrated approaches** where schools, social services, healthcare practitioners, career guidance, etc. work together to ensure a holistic approach on the learners' development. These can also include collaboration with parents etc.
- Working with the students' individual **motivation for learning**. As there often is no obligation for the students to participate in second chance education, the teachers must work with the students' individual motivation for learning.
- **Learning opportunities outside the classroom and work placements** as these contribute to a contextualization of competencies and skills acquired in the education system. The relevance of learning for the local labour market can be a motivational factor for many students.
- **Flexible organisation of the school day** that allows learners to catch up on missed classes, gives the possibility for distance learning or give learners the chance to adapt the workload to their current circumstances and other commitments. This can be achieve by ensuring flexibility in the learning opportunities and modularization of the curriculum where the modules can be completed in more than one order.
- Encouraging **active participation of students** in the daily school life as well as the decision-making on school rules, curriculum and teaching methods.

BOX 67. Denmark – Preparatory Basic Education and Training

In August 2019, the new Preparatory Basic Education and Training (*Forberedende Grunduddannelse* - FGU) was launched in **Denmark.** The FGU is a new educational programme for 18 – 25 year olds and the programme lasts up to two years. The programme was a result of an education reform with the intention to reduce the percentage of youths who are not in association to either education or labour market and included the merging of existing preparatory educational programmes. The reform drew upon the good results of existing programmes combing them into a flexible scheme consisting of three entities:

- General basic education: Education in basic subjects like Danish language, mathematics, English, sciences etc. The general basic education gives the students the possibility to qualify for further vocational or general upper secondary education.
- Basic production education: Workshop-based education with high level of practical learning. The target group is young people who want to proceed to vocational

[383] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Redgrave, K., Day, L., Mozuraityte, N., McCoshan, A. (2014), *Preventing early school leaving in Europe – Lessons learnt from second chance education*, doi: 10.2766/61898, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

education and training or the labor market.

- Basic vocational education: Internship-based education that helps the students to proceed directly to employment.

Source: Danish Ministry of Children and Education, https://eng.uvm.dk/upper-secondary-education/preparatory-basic-education-and-training--fgu-

BOX 68. Erasmus+ Project - 'Bring young mothers back to education (BYMBE)

The Erasmus+ project 'Bring young mothers back to education' (BYMBE) aimed to provide support for young mothers to re-enter into education or training. The project developed a set of training tools and materials, which were piloted with groups of young mothers in each project partner country (training including peer-group activities, counselling, motivational activities). In addition, the project held trainings for professionals such as trainers or social workers, helping them to deepen their competences and skills needed for working with this target group.

Overall, the project aimed to improve the social inclusion of young mothers that are not in employment, education, or training – (NEETs) by bringing them back to school education or training. For this, BYMBE focused on awareness-raising among young mothers on the risks of dropping out of education early and on motivational efforts for them to re-enter education.

Source: https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/bymbe-bringing-young-mothers-back-education-project-results-tools-an

BOX 69. Austria - 'resp@ct' – Raum für Jugendliche (resp@ct – space for young people)

resp@ct is a 2017-2019 project run in Linz for young people aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education or training. The easy access set of services help young people expand their educational and professional prospects by offering counselling, employment opportunities, joint activities, advice, mentoring and mediation, including follow-up meetings.

The project encourages young people to explore their practical and cognitive skills, train and identify their individual strengths. They can come to resp@ct during opening hours, receive individual support in line with their concerns and discover job opportunities. Participants can access this service free of charge.

Source: Education and Training Monitor 2021[384]

Help for basic needs and targeted financial support

In its position paper for the Open Public Consultation, Eurochild[385] identified poverty and social exclusion as key obstacles for the school success of some learners:

"Many children living in poverty or social exclusion do not receive a healthy meal every

[384] https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2021/en/austria.html

[385] Eurochild is a network of organisations and individuals working with and for children in Europe. Their position paper is submitted on behalf of the Including Children Affected by Migration Programme.

day, cannot afford to attend school trips, buy the required books or school equipment, participate in after-school activities, or access online learning. Education is often assumed to be free for children, but for children growing up in poverty these extra costs are everyday barriers to their access and success in learning."

Source: Source: Open Public Consultation, Eurochild position paper

The need to combat geographical, social and educational inequalities is well established in the Paris Declaration of 2015. Although the risk of poverty or social exclusion for children in the EU decreased between 2014 and 2019, nearly one in four children are still exposed. Poverty-related factors such as lack of educational resources, digital and non-digital (i.e. a quiet place to study, reading opportunities, internet access, etc.) hinder equal access to education. Moreover, there is also a need to consider the specific impact of poverty on students' overall education, well-being and mental health, as well as its connection with preventing early leaving from education and training[386]. Severe material deprivation and hunger can have serious consequences on concentration, performance, memory, motivation, behaviour and relation with peers[387]. While tuition-free primary and secondary schools are available everywhere in the EU, indirect school-related costs (textbooks, school meals, school trips, uniforms, equipment including digital tools, etc.) remain a significant expense for many families[388].

According to Open Public Consultation respondents, further factors hindering schools' success include oversized classes that do not enable teachers to provide an appropriate individual attention to learners lagging behind, poorly equipped classrooms, as well as a high concentration of disadvantaged learners in some educational institutions. As one stakeholders' workshop participant pointed out, disadvantaged learners may be further challenged when attending schools that need additional funding and/or feature relatively large classroom sizes. These schools are likely to lack the resources and support staff required to ensure that all students in need of individual support receive adequate help.

Source: Source: Open Public Consultation synopsis report

It is important that solutions are identified at national, local and school level, in partnership with other actors, for learners who have difficulties in satisfying basic needs due to their socio-economic background (for example lack of educational resources and materials, difficulties in transportation, hunger, nutritional deficiencies, etc.). In fact, focusing on removing poverty-related barriers is essential, both in terms of school infrastructure, resources available to schools and services available. This type of support should be seen as a strategic feature of inclusive education systems.

One common measure to counter the effects of poverty in education is offering extra financial support, which can take different forms. Many Member States have introduced measures

386 OJ L 59, 2.3.2013

387 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, NESET Report, Downes, P., Nairz-Wirth, E., Rusinaitė, V., (2017), *Structural indicators for inclusive systems in and around school: analytical report*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/200506

388 COM (2021) 137 final.

allocating additional resources to schools with a high concentration of pupils from disadvantaged background. These schools can improve their educational offer, provide additional support to their pupils and create innovative learning environments adapted to their specific needs.

BOX 70. Portugal - the TEIP Programme

The TEIP programme (*Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária* - Educational Territories of Priority Intervention)[389], firstly introduced in 1996, focuses on inclusive education and better-quality education for the most disadvantaged students. The TEIP programme is aimed at combating school and social exclusion by granting the local actors more autonomy to find the most effective measures to address inequalities in their specific local context. Discontinued in 1999, the programme was reinstated in 2006 (TEIP2). The reinstated programme focused on improving educational outcomes and academic achievements of students, tackling ELET, improving school-to-work pathways, and increasing the importance of schools in cultural life of communities they belong to. There are currently 136 school clusters in total involved in the programme.

The programme schools can get additional financial and human resources and enjoy increased autonomy. At the same time, schools can always consult education experts and the school staff can participate in various workshops. During the second phase of the programme, a new role of external expert consultant was introduced. A role of an expert was to provide support for schools participating in the TEIP project as well as to supervise and assess the school's progress. The regional bodies of the Ministry of Education, together with the commission supervising TEIP programme, could appoint these consultants. However, it was not obligatory for schools to have such expert consultant.

Source: https://www.dge.mec.pt/teip

Targeted financial support schemes such as individual study allowances for learners from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds can also facilitate their progression to secondary and tertiary levels of education and their successful completion of upper-secondary level studies leading to relevant qualifications. In parallel, other types of support, such as the provision of hot meals to combat hunger in schools or the provision of afterschool activities and facilities for children whose parents work beyond school hours can relieve some of the pressure of more disadvantaged families.

Key takeaways

A new framework of action toward school success is proposed to Member States taking into account effective approaches based on evidence and extended consultations with stakeholders.

Overarching **conditions** for an effective framework include:

- An integrated and comprehensive strategy: coordination with different policy areas (such as health, social services, employment, housing, justice, inclusion of migrants (including those seeking or benefiting from protection in the EU) , non-discrimination) and cooperation between different levels of governance of the education system, as well as

[389] Diário da República. Law no. 147/B/ME/96. 1 August 1996

systematic dialogue with all relevant stakeholders from the design phase all the way through to implementation, and evaluation.

- Differentiation: targeting policies and measures according to the level of need, i.e. combining universal school-wide for all learners measures with targeted measures for some learners or groups of learners sharing similar needs or at moderate risk, and more individualised ones for those with complex or chronic needs and at highest risk.

- Combination of prevention, intervention and compensation, with a strong focus on preventive and intervention actions. - Data collection and monitoring systems to design and steer policy development, monitor implementation and evaluate effectiveness and efficiency of the measures adopted.

The framework proposes a set of **policy measures**, to be implemented at school and education system level to promote a whole school, whole system approach. Measures address - learners, - school leaders, teachers, trainers and others staff, – schools, and – system level features:

- Learners' interests and needs are at the center of the strategy. Measures to support learners include: early identification of development problems, competence in languages, learner-centred curricula, diversified pedagogical approaches, diversified assessment practices, socio-emotional education, targeted and individualized support, education guidance, extracurricular and out-of-school activities

- School leader, teachers, trainers and other staff are key change-makers for inclusion and school success. Measures to support them include: Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development to provide skills and competences to understand and tackle educational inequality, underachievement, disengagement, and to be empowered to work with learners at risk; support to new teachers, support the well-being of staff.

- All members of the school community (school leaders, teachers, trainers and other educational staff, learners, parents and families) as well as a wide range of stakeholders (social services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists, guidance specialists, local authorities, NGOs, business, unions, volunteers, etc.) and the community can engage actively and in a collaborative way to address underachievement, disengagement and ELET. To be able to implement a "whole school approach" schools should be supported with measures addressing: governance, autonomy, quality assurance, participatory school environment, cooperation with local services, professionals, community, parents and families, as well as measures to support schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

- A strategy to promote educational success for all learners needs to address system-level features that can affect equity and inclusion in education. Structural measures include: access to quality ECEC, active desegregation policies, alternatives to early tracking, avoiding grade repetition, suspensions and expulsions, inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream education, attractive VET; flexibility and permeability of educational pathways, effective second chance education, help for basic needs and targeted financial support.

Part 6

Opportunities for implementation



6. Opportunities for implementation

6.1 The role of the EU: synergies with other EU (and international) initiatives

6.1.1 Synergies with other Commission Initiatives

Pathways to School Success is one of the flagship initiatives proposed by the Commission Communication on Achieving a European Education Area by 2025, as part of the political agenda to ensure good quality and more inclusive education. The Commission Communication foresees another closely interconnected key initiative for school education, i.e. the creation of an **Expert Group** to develop proposals on strategies for creating supportive learning environments for groups at risk of underachievement and for supporting well-being at school. The expert group will outline policy guidance on developing supportive learning environments, promoting mental health and physical and emotional well-being, and for preventing bullying and violence at school, as well as proposals for effective up-take of successful practices in schools and recommendations for awareness raising activities at EU and national level.

As part of the policy agenda to ensure high quality and more inclusive education, set out by the Commission Communication on Achieving a European Education Area by 2025, the Pathways to School Success initiative will contribute to implementing a number of Commission initiatives:

The European Pillar of Social Rights[390], with inclusion and access to education forming the cornerstone of the 1st principle ("Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market"). In addition, he 11th principle recalls children's "right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality". This call to action is further underlined in President Von der Leyen's Political Guidelines in which the significance of "breaking down the barriers to learning and improving access to quality education" is highlighted.

The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child[391], which pools existing and future initiatives of the Commission on children's rights under one coherent policy framework, both in internal and external action. The strategy will ensure further mainstreaming of children's rights throughout all Commission portfolios. It will strengthen the Commission's work in the following fields: (i) child participation in the EU's political democratic life; (ii) socio-economic inclusion, education and health; (iii) combating violence against children and ensuring child protection; (iv) child friendly justice; (v) digital and information society; and (vi) the global dimension. The strategy aims to bring together all new and existing EU legislative, policy and funding instruments within one comprehensive framework. Concerning education, the Strategy states that: all children have the right to develop their key competences and talents, starting in early childhood and throughout their schooling and vocational training, also in non-formal learning settings. Access to inclusive, non-segregated, quality education should be guaranteed, amongst others, through a non-discriminatory treatment regardless of racial and ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, nationality, residence status, sex and sexual orientation.

The European Child Guarantee[392] aims at breaking the cycle of poverty and social exclusion across generations by guaranteeing the access of children in need – persons under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion – to a set of key services: early

[390] COM/2017/0250 final
[391] COM/2021/142 final
[392] COM (2021) 137 final.

childhood education and care, education, healthcare, nutrition and housing. The European Child Guarantee recommendation calls upon Member States to provide effective and free access to education and school-based activities, as well to at least one healthy meal each school day.

The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030[393]. The strategy aims at fostering social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and full respect of their rights, encompassing also the needs of children with disabilities. The initiative Pathways to School Success is explicitly mentioned. More in particular, opportunities to build synergies in "Enhancing teachers' agency in tackling educational disadvantage" could be identified, as in the Disability Strategy's chapter on accessible and inclusive education the Commission has committed to support Member States in addressing shortages of teachers in Special Needs Education and developing competences of all education professionals to manage diversity.

The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025[394] which, among other things, strategy aims to counter gender stereotypes affecting the well-being and opportunities of girls and boys in all their diversity from an early age.

The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020- 2025[395], which presents measures to promote inclusion and combat discrimination against LGBTIQ persons and their families, including children.

The EU anti-racism action plan 2020 - 2025[396], which envisages combating racism through policy and funding programmes in the areas of employment, housing and access to healthcare and education. As regards education, the action plan promotes actions to ensure that: (i) children with a minority racial or ethnic background have equal access to education; and (ii) teachers are trained to work with all children and be sensitive to the needs of pupils from different backgrounds. It also envisages a Commission report on the application of the EU Racial Equality Directive, which prohibits discrimination based on ethnic or racial origin, including discrimination of Roma children, in different areas such as education and social protection.

The EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation[397], comprising a Commission Communication and a proposal for a Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation, which was adopted by the Council on 12 March 2021[398]. The Recommendation calls on Member States to fight multiple and structural discrimination against Roma, in particular against Roma children, and to take stronger measures that support Roma children and their families in the interrelated fields of employment, social services, quality, inclusive mainstream education and early childhood education and care, health, housing and access to essential services, nutrition and access to leisure activities.

The Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027[399], which covers migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background and sets out a policy framework as well as concrete actions for the Commission, Member States and other stakeholders. The action plan focuses on the enabling factors essential for a successful integration and inclusion in four areas: (i) education and training; (ii) employment and skills; (iii) health; and (iv) housing. The action plan pays particular attention to children of migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background. With regard to school education, the action plan aims to achieve that (i) teachers are better equipped with the necessary skills, and are given the resources and support to manage

393 COM (2021) 101 final
394 COM (2020) 152 final.
395 COM (2020) 698 final.
396 COM (2020) 565 final.
397 COM (2020) 620 final.
398 COM (2020) 620 final.
399 COM (2020) 758 final.

multicultural and multilingual classrooms for the benefit of both migrant and native children and (ii) multi-stakeholder learning communities are created with the involvement of schools, health and social services and parents.

The European Year of Youth (2022)[400], which will propose a range of activities and engagement opportunitites for young Europeans to support their personal, social and professional development, as well as opportunities to voice their views on the EU project.

The European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience[401], which sets ambitious, quantitative objectives for upskilling (improving existing skills) and reskilling (training in new skills) to be achieved until 2025.

The reinforced Youth Guarantee, based on the Commission Communication 'Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation'[402] and the Council Recommendation A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee[403]. The Recommendation seeks to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

The new European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children[404], (May 2022), addresses cyberbullying, supports digital skills and children's participation in digital matters concerning them. It also addresses the digital divide with a focus on children in vulnerable situations who need support to acquire the necessary skills to stay safe online. Key to implementing the BIK+ strategy are the BIK platform and the EU co-funded network of Safer Internet Centres in the Member States who assist children, parents and teachers on all things digital, including digital skills and cyberbullying through awareness activities, helplines for support and hotlines to report child sexual abuse material[405].

EU Code Week aims to get children more acquainted with computational thinking, coding and to improve related digital skills. It mainly targets teachers and the initiative has proven to be particularly successful in reaching schools in vulnerable areas across the European Union and thus helps to address the digital divide.

Pathways to School Success complements other EU actions in the area of education and training under the European Education Area, such as:

The Council Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education[406], adopted on 29 November 2021, aims to create a shared vision and understanding at EU level of how school education can support the use of a blend of learning tools (both digital, including online, and non-digital) and environments (including school sites, museums, parks, sports centres and the workplace) that is effective, inclusive and engaging. It aims to support Member States in adapting their school education systems to be more flexible and inclusive of a broad range of learner needs, changing circumstances, and pedagogical approaches.

The Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, adopted on 22 May 2019[407], highlights the benefits of participation in such programmes for

400 COM (2021) 634
401 COM (2020) 274 final
402 COM (2020) 276 final.
403 2020/C 372/01', 2020/C 372/01
404 https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/en/home and COM/2012/196 final
405 This network is coordinated at the EU level by betterinternetforkids.eu platform, which offers a wide range of resources, with cyberbullying the most reported concern.
406 OJ C 504, 14.12.2021, p. 21–29
407 2019/C 189/02

children with personal or social difficulties; it also offers a European Quality Framework to guide Member States action in setting up more efficient and more inclusive systems.

The 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching[408] confirms the EU's commitment to supporting Member States make effective use of funding mechanisms to provide inclusive education that responds to the diverse needs of all learners, including those with special needs. It invites Member States to implement and monitor successful inclusive approaches towards equitable education systems that prevent marginalisation and transmit a sense of belonging, laying the foundations for tolerance and critical thinking.

The Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning[409], adopted in May 2018, sets out a common European reference framework for the provision of high quality, inclusive education. It presents eight key competences as the curricular foundation for the acquisition of basic skills and attitudes needed by all for effective lifelong learning, employability and integration. It encourages Member States to implement a variety of innovative learning approaches and assessment methods that nurture personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion for all learners.

The Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages[410], which sets the goal of ensuring that, by the time young people leave upper secondary education, they can speak at least three languages. In addition to this, by introducing the concepts of 'literacy' and 'language awareness', the Recommendation aims to change the mindset of policymakers and teachers, inspiring them to adopt comprehensive language education policies, as well as innovative and inclusive language teaching methods, ultimately strengthening proficiency in the language of schooling among pupils with diverse backgrounds.

The 'Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age'[411], presents an ambitious vision for digital education in a lifelong learning perspective with the inclusion of all learners across all ages at its core. Within this action plan, the Commission also foresees the Strategic Dialogue on the enabling factors for successful digital education, the development of common guidelines for teachers and educational staff to foster digital literacy and to tackle disinformation, a proposal for a Council recommendation on improving digital skills in education and training and the setting up of the European Digital Education Hub, strengthening cooperation and exchange in digital education at the EU level.

The Digital Decade communication[412] which presents the European Commission's vision for Europe's digital transformation by 2030. It sets out targets on government, infrastructure, business and on digital skills i.e. having at least 80% of the population with basic digital skills by 2030.

The Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience[413] and proposes a modernised EU policy vision of VET including its digitalisation and use of blended learning.

Following the Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle, HealthyLifeStyle4All[414], launched in September 2021, is a two-year campaign which showcases the Commission's commitment to promoting a

408 2018/C 195/01
409 2018/C 189/01
410 OJ C 189, 5.6.2019
411 COM (2020) 624 final.
412 Europe's Digital Decade: Digitally empowered Europe by 2030 (europa.eu)
413 OJ C 417, 2.12.2020, p. 1–16

healthy lifestyle across generations and social groups. Representatives of sport organisations, civil society, international, national, regional and local authorities, are invited to join in the co-creation of the initiative to promote healthy lifestyles amongst generations and across social groups. There are three pillars to the HealthyLifestyle4All initiative: Awareness - improved awareness of healthy lifestyles across all generations; Access - easier access to sport, physical activity and healthy diets. HL4A has a special focus on inclusion and non-discrimination to reach disadvantaged groups; Holistic approach - HL4A is about teaming up in a holistic approach to food, health, well-being and sport.

6.1.2 Synergies at international level

Pathways to School Success complements work at international level. It is fully consistent with the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[415] and contributes to actions supporting in particular SDG 4: 'Quality education':

- Target 4.1: Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
- Target 4.4: Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- Target 4.5: Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
- Target 4.6: Ensure that all youth (...) achieve literacy and numeracy

Pathways to School Success is consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[416], whose Article 24 provides for inclusive education systems. It resonates with the UN Global Education Monitoring 2020 Report on Inclusion. It is aligned with the UNESCO activities on School violence and bullying [417] and in particular with the Recommendations by the Scientific Committee on preventing and addressing school bullying and cyberbullying[418]. It is in line with the OECD Learning Compass 2030 framework[419] .

The results of the OECD 'Programme for International Student Assessment' (PISA) inform the initiative and will continue to allow international comparisons.

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414 Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle, https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ewos-tartu-call_en.pdf

415 https://sdgs.un.org/

416 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

417 UNESCO's actions against school violence and bullying can be found here: https://en.unesco.org/themes/school-violence-and-bullying/action

418 UNESCO (2020) International Conference on School Bullying: recommendations by the Scientific Committee on preventing and addressing school bullying and cyberbullying. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374794?posInSet=4&queryId=N-EXPLORE-c62a920d-2b9e-49c7-92cd-fb700d28f564

419 OECD Learning Compass 2030 is an evolving learning framework that sets out an aspirational vision for the future of education. It offers a broad vision of the types of competencies students will need to thrive in 2030 and beyond. It also develops a common language and understanding that is globally relevant and informed. https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/learning-compass-2030/

6.2 Use of EU opportunities, funds and investments and other platforms/tools in education

Pathways to School Success 'Pathways to School Success' has the ambition to set in motion processes of reflection and change, provide guidance on possible policy solutions addressing the above challenges, launch collaborations and dialogue with policy-makers and stakeholders and support concrete action by relevant stakeholders. In addition to the Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, the initiative combines different instruments:

a) regular monitoring and reporting by the Commission, on progress achieved against the EU-level targets and on the implementation of the Council Recommendation, in particular in the framework of the European Semester and of the EEA Strategic Framework;

b) peer learning, exchanges of information and experience between Member States, in particular through the new EEA Strategic Framework Working Group on Schools;

c) funding and support to policy reforms, notably through the European Social Fund+, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Erasmus+, the Technical Support Instrument, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, as well as the School Scheme, the EU4Health programme, the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme;

d) supporting EU-wide research and surveys through Horizon Europe.

e) sharing successful practices, guidelines and practical tools using the EU online platforms and communities for education and training, in particular the updated practical European Toolkit for Schools[420], eTwinning, the new European Platform for School Education, Erasmus+ Alumni, Cedefop's ambassadors for tackling early leaving and Cedefop's VET toolkit for tackling early leaving.

Monitoring and reporting

While the responsibility for education and training systems lies with Member States, the EU has a key role in supporting efforts to improve and modernise national education systems.

The Commission carries out country analyses across a range of policy areas, including in the fields of education and training, as part of the **European Semester**[421]. The monitoring of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights[422], supported by the revised Social Scoreboard, forms an integral part of the European Semester. The indicator tracking early leaving from education and training is a headline indicator of the Social Scoreboard, while basic and digital skills form part of the complementary indicators. These analyses support EU Member States to address social challenges identified at EU, national, and regional level. They also help national governments to assess progress on implementing necessary reforms, as well as areas in need of further investment. A series of country-specific recommendations are issued in the first half of the year as part of the European Semester to help Member States tackle the most urgent challenges.

420 https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools.htm

421 The European Semester provides a framework for the coordination of economic policies across the European Union. It allows EU countries to discuss their economic and budget plans and monitor progress at specific times throughout the year. https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester_en

422 https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/

Each year he European Commission's **Education and Training Monitor**[423] provides an updated analysis on the challenges, and gathers a wide range of evidence to indicate the evolution of national education and training systems across the European Union. The report measures countries' progress towards agreed targets and European cooperation in education and training. It also provides insights into measures taken to address education-related issues as part of the European Semester process. The Monitor offers suggestions for policy reforms that can help to make national education and training systems more responsive to societal and labour market needs. Furthermore, the report helps to identify where EU funding for education, training and skills should be targeted through the EU's next long-term budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework. The Monitor comprises a cross-country comparison and 27 in-depth country reports.

Policy cooperation and peer learning

The European Education Area strategic framework was put in place to promote and structure collaboration between European Union Member States and key stakeholders to achieve a series of common goals. The framework does so by

- strengthening means of policy cooperation and reaching out to stakeholders to encourage their engagement with the initiative
- enhancing synergies with other relevant initiatives, including the European Research Area and the Bologna Process
- identifying targets and indicators to guide work and monitor progress towards achieving the EEA
- fostering the integration of education and training into the European Semester process

In this framework, countries and stakeholders may share experiences, challenges and lessons learnt from their own initiatives, policies, mechanisms and complementary research via European peer learning and peer counselling. Policy cooperation include a whole range of peer learning methods, including Working Groups composed of experts nominated by Member States and key stakeholders; peer learning activities hosted by a Member State to showcase existing best practices at the national level or to explore a particular issue with other Member States; peer reviews involving a group of Member States providing guidance to another Member State on a specific national challenge; peer counselling bringing together experienced peers from a small number of national administrations to provide advice on designing or implementing a policy as a response to a specific national challenge; as well as conferences and seminars, workshops, high level fora or expert groups, panels, studies and analyses, web-based cooperation[424].

European Funding

Erasmus+[425] is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport. It has a budget of €26.2 billion, compared with €14.7 billion for 2014-2020. This will be complemented by about €2.2 billion from the EU's external instruments. Inclusion - ensuring equal opportunities and reaching out to participants with fewer opportunities, including people with disabilities and migrants, people living in remote areas or facing socio-economic difficulties - is one of the overarching priorities of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027. In order to implement the

[423] https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_en
[424] See https://education.ec.europa.eu/about/strategic-framework
[425] https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en

inclusion principles, an 'Inclusion and Diversity Strategy'[426] covering all programme fields is devised to support an easier access to funding for a wider range of organisations, and to better reach out to more participants with fewer opportunities. It also sets up a framework for those projects, supported through the programme, which intend to work on inclusion and diversity related issues. At the same time, the SALTO Resource Centres supporting the implementation of the programme are also key players in promoting and rolling out inclusion and diversity measures, in particular as regards to gather knowledge and to conceive and run capacity-building activities for National Agency staff and programme beneficiaries. In addition, in the school education field, Erasmus+ includes as a policy priority for cooperation projects reducing early leaving from education and training and helping all pupils reach a certain level of proficiency in basic skills. Stakeholders will be able to make use of Erasmus+ funding to bring recommended policy practices in place.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility[427] will make €672.5 billion in loans and grants available to support reforms and investments undertaken by Member States. The aim is to mitigate the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions. Member States have prepared recovery and resilience plans that set out a coherent package of reforms and public investment projects. To benefit from the support of the Facility, these reforms and investments should be implemented by 2026.

The European Social Fund+ (ESF+)[428] is Europe's main instrument (10 billion euros per year) for supporting jobs, helping people get better jobs and ensuring fairer job opportunities for all EU citizens. It works by investing in Europe's human capital – its workers, its young people and all those seeking a job. There is a great variety in the nature, size and aims of ESF projects, and they address a wide variety of target groups. There are projects aimed at education systems, teachers and schoolchildren; end at young and older job-seekers; People are the focus of the ESF.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)[429] invests in education infrastructure and equipment and creates incentives for educational reforms in the Member States. Nearly EUR 7 billion of ERDF resources have been invested in education, training and lifelong learning in the 2014-2020 programming period. This includes mainly infrastructure support, for example for early childhood education and care, primary and general secondary education, and vocational and adult education, but also e-learning equipment. This type of support will continue in the 2021-2027 period, with an ERDF specific objective aiming at improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training. In this context, ERDF could support, for example, school and out-of-school infrastructure and/or equipment to build inclusive and quality education and training, including through the provision of accessible remote learning opportunities. It could also be used for providing conditions for digital education, including access to internet, purchase of digital equipment and e-learning applications and platforms for schools, with a particular attention to marginalized students, including those living in rural and remote areas including the outermost regions and island communities.

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426 European Commission (2021) *Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy*, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity-strategy

427 https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en

428 Home | European Social Fund Plus (europa.eu)

429 https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.cfm

The Technical Support Instrument (TSI)[430] is the EU programme (€864 million for the period 2021-2027) on the basis of which the Commission provides tailor-made technical expertise to EU Member States to design and implement reforms. The support is demand driven and does not require co-financing from Member States. It is an important pillar of the EU's initiative to help Member States recover from the COVID-19 crisis in a way that embraces the digital transformation. The Commission stands ready to provide Member States expert support for reforms in digital education, reskilling and upskilling educators, including through cross-country technical support projects, whenever Member States deem it suitable. The TSI enables Member States to enhance the structural transformation of their education systems so that education systems adapt and thrive.

In 2018 the Commission proposed an ambitious research and innovation programme - **Horizon Europe**[431] - to succeed Horizon 2020. It has a budget of €95.5 billion. In Cluster 2 Culture, creativity and inclusive society[432], research related to children will focus on inclusive education and training, tackling inequalities, social fairness, social inclusion and migration. Current topics directly related to education are: HORIZON-CL2-2021-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-05: Integration of emerging new technologies into education and training; HORIZON-CL2-2022-DEMOCRACY-01-04: Education for democracy; HORIZON-CL2-2022-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-07: Conditions for the successful development of skills matched to needs.

Several topics of the 2021-2022 work programmes continue to be earmarked for COVID-related research. A series of these have also been highlighted for youth mental health in school or home settings, and education. For example, in Cluster Health[433]: HORIZON-HLTH-2022-STAYHLTH-01-01-two-stage: Boosting mental health in Europe in times of change and HORIZON-HLTH-2022-DISEASE-07-03: Non-communicable diseases risk reduction in adolescence and youth (Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases -GACD).

Horizon 2020 research projects funded under Societal Challenge 1 (Health) and Societal Challenge 6 (Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies) are supporting many of the proposed thematic areas of the Pathways to School Success Initiative such as educational inequalities[434], well-being and mental health[435].

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430 https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes/overview-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument-tsi_en

431 https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe_en

432 https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/cluster-2-culture-creativity-and-inclusive-society_en

433 https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2021-2022/wp-4-health_horizon-2021-2022_en.pdf

434 ISOTIS - Inclusive Education and Social Support to Tackle Inequalities in Society
Inclusion4Schools - School-Community Partnership for Reversing Inequality and Exclusion
SMOOTH - Educational Common Spaces. Passing through enclosures and reversing inequalities
PIONEERED - Pioneering policies and practices tackling educational inequalities in Europe
KIDS4ALLL - Key Inclusive Development Strategies for LifeLongLearning
RefugeesWellSchool - Preventive school-based interventions to promote the mental well-being of refugee and migrant adolescents
NEW ABC - Networking the Educational World: Across Boundaries for Community-building
REFUGE-ED - Effective practices in education, mental health and psychosocial support for the integration of refugee children
ME-WE - Psychosocial Support for Promoting Mental Health and Well-being among Adolescent Young Carers in Europe
CHILD-UP - Children Hybrid Integration: Learning Dialogue as a way of Upgrading Policies of Participation
IMMERSE - Integration Mapping of refugee and Migrant Children in Schools and Other Experiential Environments in Europe

Research efforts to counter the profound mental health crisis related to COVID-19 have increased during the outbreak of the virus and in May 2020 the European Commission launched its second COVID-19 call for Expressions of Interest[436] addressing the immediate and long-term mental/behavioural, social and economic impacts of the pandemic[437].

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund[438] is the EU fund that aims to further boost national capacities and improve procedures for migration management, as well as to enhance solidarity and responsibility sharing between Member States, in particular through emergency assistance and the relocation mechanism. It supports in particular legal migration to the Member States and integration of third-country migrants, through support to measures tailored to the needs of migrants and early integration programmes focusing on education, language and other training (such as civic orientation courses and professional guidance) to prepare their active participation in and their acceptance by the receiving society.

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme[439] is the EU fund to protect and promote the rights and values as enshrined in the Treaties, the Charter and in the applicable international human rights conventions. This will be achieved by supporting civil society organisations and other stakeholders active at local, regional, national and transnational level.

With the EU programme **EU4Health 2021-2027**[440] – a vision for a healthier European Union, the EU will invest €5.3 billion in actions with an EU added value, complementing EU countries' policies, to improve and foster health in the Union and strengthen health systems. Its first Work Programme includes actions addressing also mental health in schools and healthy lifestyles in schools.

The **Connecting European Facilities** is aimed, amongst others, at supporting investment in key projects in the area of digital infrastructure (budget of €2.07 billion for the period 2021-2027). The CEF2 Digital should supports access to very high capacity networks, including 5G systems and other state-of-the art connectivity capable of providing Gigabit connectivity for socioeconomic drivers (including schools, universities, libraries). Priority should therefore be given to education and research centres, in the context of the efforts to facilitate the use, inter alia, of high-speed computing, cloud applications and big data, close digital divides and to

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MiCREATE - Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe

DIAL - Dynamics of inequality across the life-course: structures and processes

435 BOOST - Building social and emotional skills to BOOST mental health resilience in children and young people in Europe and UPRIGHT - Universal Preventive Resilience Intervention Globally implemented in schools to improve and promote mental Health for Teenagers

RISE, Prevention of child mental health problems in South-Eastern Europe - Adapt, Optimize, Test, and Extend Parenting for Lifelong Health;

PROSOCIAL, The neural basis of prosocial development in adolescence.

GUIDE (Growing Up In Digital Europe: EuroCohort) will be Europe's first comparative birth cohort survey providing longitudinal statistical evidence to support the development of social policies on well-being of children, young people and their families across Europe.

436 SC1-PHE-CORONAVIRUS-2020-2, topic: "Behavioural, social, economic and mental health impacts of the outbreak responses"

437 Among the projects funded, RESPOND aims to improve the resilience, well-being and mental health of frontline health and care workers and other high-risk groups like youth, and to optimise public mental health preparedness in face of future (other) pandemics and mitigate mental health inequalities across the affected populations.

438 https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/funding/asylum-migration-and-integration-funds/asylum-migration-and-integration-fund-2021-2027_en

439 https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/cerv

440 https://ec.europa.eu/health/funding/eu4health_en

innovate in education systems, to improve learning outcomes, enhance equity and improve efficiency.

European Tools for dissemination and networking

eTwinning[441] is the community for schools in Europe, offering teachers and school staff a safe platform for collaboration and professional development free of charge. Teachers from 34 Erasmus+ programme countries and 10 Erasmus+ partner countries are able to develop projects and take part in thematic discussion groups, webinars and other learning events, both online and on-site. Due to its range of online tools and services, eTwinning is well-placed to support a blended learning approach.

In the "eTwinning Live" restricted area, teachers can search for other registered eTwinners and schools, connect with them and follow their activities. Teachers can access all of the online and on-site events created by eTwinners, and can also create their own. Teachers can create their own projects and activities on different topics by collaborating with two or more teachers and their students. In the "TwinSpace", visible only to those participating in a specific project, teacher and students can meet and collaborate with peers from their partner schools.

The European Commission's **School Education Gateway**[442] platform, offers Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) developed by a team of online learning experts with the support of a Professional Development Advisory Board. It has now further developed its professional development offer to include both long (4-6 week) and short (1-2 week) courses for teachers, school leaders and other education staff from across Europe, plus regular webinars featuring guest experts and collaborative project leaders on different topics.

In 2022, the two platforms – eTwinning and School Education Gateway – will be integrated into a single European online platform offering a vast array of resources, tools and events to support professional, school and system development.

The online **European Toolkit for Schools**[443] offers concrete ideas for improving collaboration within, between and beyond schools with a view to enabling all children and young people to succeed in school. School leaders, teachers, parents and other people involved in different aspects of school life can find helpful information, examples of measures and resource material to inspire their efforts in providing inclusive school education. The Toolkit features a self-assessment questionnaire[444] to help schools evaluate their current capacity and identify areas for improvement and contains a variety of resources, ranging from research studies, project reports, to specific examples of school practices, describing how each measure was successfully implemented. It has a particular focus on measures to prevent early leaving from education and training, which can have a broader application to improving the school climate and community. A new section on well-being at school is under development. Following the adoption of the Council Recommendation, the Toolkit will be thoroughly updated to align with the new initiative.

The CEDEFOP **VET toolkit for tackling early leaving**[445] The toolkit aims to help VET practitioners and policy-makers to tackle early leaving at every stage, from identifying learners at risk and monitoring early leavers from education and training, throughout the development

441 https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm
442 www.schooleducationgateway.eu
443 https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools.htm
444 https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools/self-assessment.htm
445 https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/toolkits/vet-toolkit-tackling-early-leaving

and implementation of measures to support them, to evaluation of measures to help improve provision.

Erasmus Teacher Academies[446] is a new action in the Erasmus+ Programme. It will finance projects of creating networks of initial teacher education and Continuing professional development providers and other relevant stakeholders to enhance cooperation on key EU priorities such as digital learning, sustainability, equity and inclusion. The networks will develop joint learning offer, learning mobility and contribute to policy development.

SELFIE (Self-reflection on Effective Learning by Fostering the use of Innovative Educational Technologies)[447] is a tool designed to help schools embed digital technologies into teaching, learning and student assessment. It can highlight what is working well, where improvement is needed and what the priorities should be. The tool was launched in 2018 and is currently available in more than 30 languages.

A new tool, **SELFIE for Teachers**[448], aims to support educators' leadership competence as well their role as innovation and change agents in their school. Through their self-reflection, teachers can identify their strengths and gaps to further develop their competences. Through, the tool proficiency levels, educators are prompted to a progression from awareness to exploration, integration to expertise and leadership to innovation. Educators' proficiency is also extending from teacher's individual capacity to the school collective capacity, contributing to the school collaborative learning culture.

SELFIE for Work-Based Learning (WBL)[449] was piloted between September and December 2020 involving around 35,000 participants from around 150 VET schools and 300 companies in 9 countries (Germany, France, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Georgia, Montenegro, Republic of Serbia, Turkey). This was undertaken by the Joint Research Centre in partnership with EfVET and the European Training Foundation and national coordinators in each country. Responses gathered so far show that many schools also intend to use SELFIE WBL once it is officially released. After further improvements, SELFIE WBL is planned to be available by autumn 2021.

Following the 2017 Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle [450], the new initiative, **"HealthyLifestyle4All"** has been launched in July 2021 and will focus on the promotion of sport, physical activity and healthy diets. The campaign will invite Member States, regional and local governments, and civil society representatives to work together.

The initiative "**Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training**" will be launched on December 1st 2022. It will enhance evaluation and monitoring of education policies and investments at European level. It will address the currently limited evidence on the impact of specific education policies and the lack of data related to the costs of specific interventions in education and support the design of effective education policies in European countries[451].

"Learning Corner website"[452] is a rich repository of learning materials and games focusing on the EU, its values, how it works and what it does. Available in all EU languages, it is targeted mainly at primary and secondary school pupils and their teachers.

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446 https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/erasmus-teacher-academies_en

447 https://ec.europa.eu/education/schools-go-digital_en

448 https://digcompedu.jrc.es

449 https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9761&furtherNews=yes

450 Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle, https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ewos-tartu-call_en.pdf

451 https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/quality-investment-in-education-and-training-commission-publishes-first-findings-of-expert-group

452 Espace Apprentissage (europa.eu)

Annexes

Annex I – Synopsis of the results of the Open Public Consultation
Annex II - Glossary
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Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success



Synopsis report of the public consultation activities

Available at: https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/results-public-consultation-pathways-school-success

Annex II – Glossary[453]

(Educational) attainment	It **refers to the successful completion of specific education levels**, for example primary, lower or upper secondary education. In this definition, it is assumed that completion of a specific education level goes together with the acquisition of specific education level related competences.
(Educational) achievement	The concept refers to **children's learning progress and takes into account** their actual functional literacy, like reading, writing and numeracy abilities. The most known cross-national educational achievement survey, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges.
Basic skills	Basic skills are to be understood according to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures 15 year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. Underachievers in basic skills are therefore those 15-year-old pupils, still in education, who fail to reach OECD PISA proficiency Level 2, which is considered to be the minimum level necessary to participate successfully in society.
Bullying	Traditional definitions of bullying involve 3 pillars: power imbalance, intent and repetition. Bullying refers to physical, verbal and relational behaviours, which involve one party having the intention to repeatedly hurt or harm another, within an uneven power relationship where the victim is unable to defend him/herself. It is a repeated, aggressive behaviour intended to hurt another individual, physically, mentally, or emotionally. It usually involves the victim/s, perpetrator and bystanders, and perpetrator may be one individual or group (mobbing). However, children and young people often define

[453] Clarification on common terms related to mental health and well-being is mainly based on: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Simões, C., Caravita, S., Cefai, C., A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU : analytical report, 2021, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/50546

	bullying differently from adults, for example, by omitting "power imbalance" and claiming that the behaviour was not intended to harm but was "fun" or "a joke".
Cyberbullying (online bullying)	The use of technology to bully (harass, threaten, embarrass, or target) another person. It takes 4 main forms: i) written/verbal though phone-calls, texts, email, chats, blogs, posts on social media; ii) visual through posting compromising or humiliating photos or videos; iii) exclusion by intentionally excluding a person from a group; iv) impersonation by using another person's account details to cause harm. While there is general acceptance of the three pillars – intent to harm, a power differential, repetition over time – there is continuing debate over how these are expressed online, mainly because cyberbullying operates 24/7, resulting in potential multiplication of the effect on victims, with a consequent heightened risk to their mental health.
Classroom climate	Classroom climate refers to the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical environments in which students learn. The creation of a positive classroom climate involves the intent i) to establish and maintain a context that facilitates classroom learning, ii) to enhance the quality of life in the classroom for students and staff, iii) to pursue a curriculum that promotes not only academic, but also social and emotional learning, iv) to enable teachers to be effective with a diverse range of students, and v) to foster intrinsic motivation in learning and teaching. Key aspects of a positive classroom climate include sense of safety and security, sense of belonging and connectedness, healthy and caring relationships, inclusion and culturally responsive education, active and meaningful participation, and individualised learning support. A negative classroom climate would happen when none of the above conditions was addressed.
Early leaving from education and training	The EU indicator on ELET measures the proportion of 18–24-year-olds with, at most, lower secondary educational attainment (i.e. ISCED 0-2 levels) and who are no longer in formal or non-formal education and training. The data source is Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey. Shortly after the adoption of the 2011 Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, the previously used concept of early school leaving (ESL) slowly phased out and was substituted with the more inclusive concept of early leaving from education and training, which encompasses a broader group of learners, including those who take part in VET.
(Positive) Mental health	A state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. Health is a state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. "It is a positive sense of well-being and an underlying belief in our own and others' worth". A mentally healthy child or young person is one who has the ability to: develop psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually and spiritually; initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying relationships; use and enjoy solitude; become aware of others and empathise with them; play and learn; develop a sense of right and wrong; resolve problems and setbacks satisfactorily and learn from them; understanding that at times it is quite usual to experience feelings of

	loneliness, sadness, anxiety, stress at times.
Mental ill health	Mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, self-harm, substance misuse, conduct disorders and eating disorders. The two most common mental health difficulties among children and young people are depression and anxiety. Depression: two of the first three symptoms (depressed mood, loss of interest in everyday activities, reduction in energy) plus at least two of the remaining seven symptoms (loss of confidence/self-esteem, unreasonable feelings of self-reproach or guilt, recurrent thoughts of death/suicide, diminished ability to think/concentrate, change in psychomotor activity with agitation or lack of activity, sleep disturbance, change in appetite/weight). Anxiety: excessive anxiety and worry (apprehensive expectation), occurring on more days than not for at least six months, about experiences (such as popularity or school performance) (International Classification of Diseases-10). NB: It is important to take account of the fact that professionals themselves disagree on the precise definitions of mental illness. Destigmatising campaigns have inadvertently led to misinformation about mental illness so that many perfectly understandable emotions are now viewed in terms of mental illness. In reality, as Lucy Foulkes (2020) argues, sadness, stress and worry are part of the human condition.
Mental health literacy	"Mental health literacy is defined as understanding how to obtain and maintain positive mental health; understanding mental health problems and their treatments; decreasing stigma related to mental health problems; and, enhancing help-seeking efficacy". It provides knowledge on mental health such as recognition of mental health problems, their management as well as preventing and promoting mental health through social and emotional learning, resilience, sports and physical activity, creativity and arts, mindfulness and nature based activities.
Mental health promotion (in school)	Creating an environment that promotes and sustains positive mental health for all school members, with policies, activities and interventions designed to enhance protective factors and minimize risk factors (individual, systems, environmental and economic). Effective MHP is comprehensive and targets multiple health outcomes, involves the whole school, focuses on personal skill development (SEL and resilience), and includes parents and the wider community. Interventions include educating staff, parents, and students on symptoms of and help for mental health problems, promoting social and emotional competence, building resilience, and helping ensure a positive, safe school environment.
Resilience	Positive growth and thriving (including wellbeing and mental health) despite the presence of adversity/disadvantage. Usually refers to positive adaption of children at risk (abuse, poverty, migrant background, linguistic, ethnic minorities, etc), but sometimes refers to the universal competence of coping effectively with diverse challenges in life (eg COVID-19)
School autonomy	School autonomy refers to the degree of freedom individual schools have to make financial and operational decisions; the manner in which these decisions are made is also important. The management of human resources and finances, as well as various aspects of teaching and learning such as the curriculum, assessment, and teaching methods are all areas where schools

	commonly have a degree of autonomy, although this varies between education systems[454]
School climate	School climate refers to psycho-social characteristics of a school in terms of relationships among students and staff/teachers, learning and teaching processes values and norms, and shared approaches and practices. Key aspects of a positive school climate include positive teacher-student interactions, safe social and physical spaces, a culture promoting inclusion and celebration of diversity, policies promoting social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual competences and engagement, parental and community involvement, collaborative relationships amongst staff.
School violence /aggression	School violence refers to aggressive acts that take place inside schools, when travelling to and from school or a school-related event. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, bullying, and corporal punishment, and may be peer (student) or teacher mediated. There is widespread agreement that bullying is a subset of violence/aggression while subsets of bullying include sexual harassment, discrimination, hate crime, homophobia, and other types of social exclusion.
Social and emotional learning (SEL)	Refers to the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, build resilience, and make responsible decisions. Other terms used interchangeably include social and emotional education, and soft skills. The EU Lifelong Learning Competence Personal, Social and Learning to Learn, incudes a cognitive dimension (Learning to learn) besides the usual intra (Personal) and inter (Social) domains
Well-being	A dynamic state in which students are able to develop their potential, learn and play creatively, and productively, build positive relationships with others, and belong and contribute to their community. Definitions of wellbeing refer to two dimensions of wellbeing, namely subjective wellbeing (the individual's experience of their life) and objective wellbeing (the comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values). The latter includes health, education, family, socio-economic status, social relationships, safety and security, and civic participation/rights. Subjective wellbeing refers to children's overall sense of wellbeing, psychological functioning and affective states, namely their cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives, i.e. what they think about life satisfaction as a whole and in specific areas (home, school, friends, etc) and how they feel (happy, sad, bored, etc). The terms is used interchangeably with positive mental health
➢ **Emotional well-being**	Presence of positive feelings (eg happiness) and absence of negative feelings (eg sadness, anger).
➢ **Psychological well-**	Positive self-esteem, sense of autonomy, satisfaction with life, sense of

[454] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Eurydice, Desurmont, A., Coghlan, M., *School autonomy in Europe : policies and measures*, Eurydice, 2008, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/34099

being	control, hope for the future, the ability to develop relationships with others; ability to participate in the community.
➢ **Social well-being**	Healthy relationships, sense of belonging.
Whole school approach	A 'whole school approach' is an ecological way of viewing a school[455]. This approach acknowledges that schools, families, communities, authorities, etc. are distinct but connected systems, each having a set of relationships and mutual influences that impact the individual. The school is seen as a multidimensional and interactive system that can learn and change; an open learning hub which provides support to its neighbourhood and receives support from the community. In a whole school approach to school success all members of the school community (school leaders, middle management, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families, and the local community) feel responsible and play an active role in tackling educational disadvantage and preventing underachievement and drop-out, as well as developing a safe, inclusive and health promoting environment. The entire school community engages in **a cohesive, collective and collaborative action, based on multi-disciplinarity** and aimed at supporting each learner in the most appropriate way. It also implies a **cross-sectoral approach and stronger cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders** (social services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists, career guidance specialists, local authorities, NGOs, business, unions, volunteers, etc.) and the community at large, to deal with complex issues that schools do not (and cannot) have the relevant expertise for. A whole school approach to well-being includes three main interrelated pillars, namely curriculum, teaching, and learning; school ethos and environment; and family and community partnerships. Besides the curricular and cross curricular approach at universal level (eg Social and Emotional Learning curriculum for all students), it includes adequate support for students with social and emotional needs (targeted interventions), positive classroom and whole school climates, the voice of the students in decisions at the school, the education and wellbeing of school staff (including their own social and emotional competence and wellbeing), and the active engagement and collaboration of parents, the community, and external agencies.

[455] The underlying model is that which is presented in Bronfenbrenner, U., (1979), *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design.* Harvard University Press. His ecological model of development takes account of development in a range of different contexts and does not only focus on the individual characteristics of the child or young person.

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