EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Report of the conference of the European Network of Education Councils,

Vilnius, 18-20 November 2013

with the support of the European Commission

DG Education and Culture

Brussels, February 2014

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INTRODUCTION

EUNEC is the **European Network of Education Councils**. Its members advise the governments of their countries on education and training. EUNEC aims to discuss the findings and recommendations of all European projects in education and training, to determine standpoints and to formulate statements on these issues. EUNEC wants to disseminate these statements pro-actively towards the European Commission, relevant DGs and other actors at European level, and to promote action by EUNEC's members and participants at national level. EUNEC also has the objective that the councils should put internationalization and mobility high on the national agenda, that they should recommend and support a European policy in education and training towards all relevant stakeholders: ministry of education (and employment), sectoral and branch organizations, providers and other actors.

From 2008 on EUNEC has been **subsidized** as **European Association acting at European level in the field of education** (Jean Monnet programme). This conference is organized with the support of the grant.

CENTRAL QUESTION

Current situation across the EU

Reduce the number of early school leavers is a central issue in both the Education and Training 2020 programme and the Europe 2020 programme: by 2020 the share of early school leavers has to be reduced to maximum 10%.

The concern of the European Union is legitimate: research demonstrates that there is a relation between early school leaving and problems related to societal participation in different domains (employment, citizenship, health, social status, participation in culture,..). Moreover, the negative consequence of a low qualification level has impact on the next generations. According to the most recent data from OECD[1], a great deal of the economic and social hardship caused by the crisis fell chiefly on less-educated individuals. The unemployment gap between well-educated young people and those who left school early widened during the crisis.

Facts and figures

According to the Eurostat figures for 2012, a majority of EU Member States have made progress on the Europe 2020 education targets to reduce the rate of early school leaving to below 10%. However, there are still wide disparities between

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[1] Education at a glance 2013, OECD indicators
(http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm)

Member States and between males and females. The share of young people leaving school early now stands at 12.8% on average in the EU, down from 13.5% in 2011. Overall, girls tend to do better: the rate of early school leavers among girls is 24% lower than for boys.

According to the Education and Training Monitor 2012, which is a staff working document part of the European Commission Communication 'Rethinking education', reaching the target would require at least as much effort as in the past, if not more. "Targeted action remains necessary to reduce early school leaving through comprehensive, targeted evidence-based strategies."

State of the art of the innovation policies

EUNEC considers that it is a merit of European cooperation that this theme is high at the policy agenda and became a top priority.

The most recent EU recommendation on early school leaving[2] is from 2011. In this recommendation, the rate of early school leavers is defined as the proportion of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training. This document, focusing on prevention, intervention and compensation policies is a good basis for European cooperation.

In March 2012, the European Commission organized a conference[3] to discuss ways of addressing early school leaving and to share views on the most urgent needs for further policy development and to see some concrete examples of successful initiatives. The conference also marked the launch of a Thematic Working Group in this field.

Member States agreed at the Council meeting in February 2013[4] to focus on improving the performance of young people at high risk of early school leaving and with low basic skills. This can be achieved, for example, through early detection across the education system and by providing individual support.

The Commission reports on latest developments concerning early school leaving and tertiary attainment in the Education and Training Monitor, released on 30 October 2013. The yearly country-specific reports related to the follow-up of the European Semester show already that many Member States are not so successful in implementing the commitments taken[5]. The Communication of the Commission of May 2013 is a very severe one. The Commission concludes that the share of early school leavers, particularly for people with a disadvantaged or migrant background, remains unacceptably high in several Member States (…). These

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[2] http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:191:0001:0006:EN:PDF

[3] http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/esl/report_en.pdf

[4] Council Conclusions on investing in education and training — a response to 'Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes' and the '2013 Annual Growth Survey', February 2013.

[5] http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/2013eccomm_en.pdf

problems existed before the crisis but are especially problematic now in the view of the breadth of economic adjustments taking place, and the prospect of longer working lives. Skills mismatches and bottlenecks in many regions and sectors are a further illustration of the inadequacy of certain education and training systems. In the country-specific reports the warnings toward Member States to take up these problems are compelling.

While the factors leading to early school leaving vary from country to country, the causes of ineffective policies can be boiled down to three typical issues[6]:

- ¬ Lack of a comprehensive strategy: many countries adopt a patchwork of different measures to tackle various aspects.
- ¬ Lack of evidence-based policy-making.
- ¬ Insufficient prevention and early intervention. Compensatory measures are not enough to address the root causes of the problem.

Focus for the EUNEC conference

During the conference the education councils will make a state of the art of the reform in each country and identify what could be done to push national policies into a higher pace of reform.

Therefore we will examine the profile of the early school leavers and discuss the efficiency of policies to deal with these problems. One of the main levers for success seems to be to adjust learning processes to the motivation and learning styles of the present generation of youngsters. Another perspective is a multilevel analysis of the stream of incidents and context-related factors leading to detachment from education.

Roughly, two types of early school leavers can be distinguished:

- ¬ The profile of the pupil that drops out of school just before the end of schooling
- ¬ The profile of the pupil who belongs to a multi-problem group.

The first profile has followed a 'normal' curriculum, but decides to quit right before the end of compulsory education. Causes are diverse: 'dead end' trajectories, demotivation, wrong choices... This group already acquired a lot of competences. They should be able to reach a sufficient qualification level, with only limited extra efforts.

The second group is the most problematic one; the outcomes of the conference should include policy recommendations to address the needs of this particular profile. These are pupils that have followed a very fragmented curriculum and lack a lot of competences.

Motivation, or lack of motivation, is a central concept to be addressed. In that sense, the conference will also include information and debate on the general profile of the current generation of pupils: How are they living? And how are they learning?

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[6] Communication from the Commission'Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda', COM(2011) 18 final, January 2011.

The theme of the Vilnius conference is closely linked to former EUNEC topics: the conference on guidance (Budapest 2009), the conference on new skills and new jobs (Lisbon 2011), the conference on migration and education (Larnaca 2012), and the seminar on community schools (Brussels 2013)[7].

PROGRAMME

Monday 18 November 2013

Chaired by Mia Douterlungne, general secretary EUNEC

09.00 – 09.30   **Opening session**

Adrie Van der Rest, president EUNEC

Audronė Pitrėnienė, Chair of the Seimas Committee on Education, Science and Culture

Vilija Targamadzė, President of the Lithuanian Education Council

09.30 – 10.30   **A holistic approach to early school leaving prevention in Europe: Key strategic priorities for system level development**

Dr Paul Downes, Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre, Senior Lecturer in Education (Psychology), St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin City University, Member of European Commission Network of Experts on the Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET) (2011-13)

10.30 – 11.00   **Questions and debate**

11.00 – 11.30   **Coffee break**

11.30 - 12.15   **Early school leaving in Lithuania: current situation and policies**

Dr Saulius Zybartas, Director of the Department of General Education and Vocational Training, Ministry of Education and Science

In search for a good school

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[7] http://www.eunec.eu/statements/shared-viewpoints

Gražvydas Kazakevičius, Director of the National Agency for School Evaluation

12.15 – 13.30	**Lunch**
12.30 – 13.00	**Press conference**
13.30 – 14.30	**Guided tour of the Seimas**
14.30 – 17.00	**Visit to Gabijos Gymnasium in Vilnius**

Tuesday 19 November 2013

Chaired by Adrie van der Rest, president EUNEC

09.00 – 10.00   **Reducing Early School Leaving**

Annalisa Cannoni, European Commission

10.00 – 10.30   **Questions and debate**

10.30 – 11.00   **Coffee break**

11.00 – 13.00   **Parallel workshops: first round**

Martine Poirier, Sherbrooke University: Presentation of ***Trait d'Union*, a school dropout prevention programme** adapted to students (with the support of Laurier Fortin and Danyka Therriault)

Andrea Fraundorfer, Head of the Unit for tackling early school leaving, Department of Psychology and Educational Counselling, Ministry of Education, Arts & Culture, Austria: '**The long way from a strategy on early school leaving to sustainable changes in schools'**

13.00 – 14.30   **Lunch**

14.30 – 16.00   **Parallel workshops: second round**

Professor David Justino, President of the Portuguese Education Council: '**Early school leavers and labour markets: the Portuguese case in a European context'**

Koen Stassen, Vlor (Flemish Education Council): **'Measures to tackle early school leaving in Flanders'**

17.00 - 22.00   **Conference dinner** offered by the Ministry of Education and Science at *M. K. Čiurlionis* Arts Gymnasium

Wednesday 20 November 2013

Chaired by Professor Juozas Augutis, Deputy Chair of the Lithuanian Council of Education

10.00 – 11.00	**Presentation of the outcomes of the working groups**
11.00 - 12.00	**Debate leading to conclusions**
	Moderated by Roos Herpelinck, Flemish Education Council
12.00 – 13.00	**Closing remarks**
	Adrie van der Rest, president EUNEC
13.00	**Closing lunch**

Opening Session

Adrie van der Rest

Adrie van der Rest is president of EUNEC and secretary director of the Dutch Education Council

Adrie van der Rests offers a warm welcome to this EUNEC conference on early school leaving, with a special welcome to the guests who will be helping to kick-start the thought processes on this important topic with an introductory presentation.

EUNEC president also extends a special welcome to all the colleagues from Lithuania, and invites and encourages them to take a full part in the discussions. He thanks the Lithuanian education council for organizing the event and making the meeting in Vilnius possible.

It is fitting that this conference of the network of national education councils is being held in the parliament building, as education councils give their recommendations on sensible education policies, which are then debated and enacted by parliaments. The recommendations of education councils benefit the quality of public decision-making.

Early school leaving is an important, but highly complex problem. It is important because leaving school too early without a qualification leads to all kinds of problems for the young people in question. Finding and keeping a job is more difficult than it is for those with qualifications. Early school leavers tend to suffer more health problems as they grow old, and they participate less in cultural and social activities. It is a problem that has a negative impact on the individual and on society.

It is not a minor problem. Many young people are affected. Despite policy efforts in recent years, the target of the Europe 2020 programme to reduce the number of early school leavers to no more than 10% is not yet in sight. The average percentage of early school leavers across the European Union was still 12.8% in 2012, and there are large differences between the member states and between boys and girls. The number of early school leavers among girls is 24% lower than among boys.

From the principle that every pupil counts, this issue needs attention.

But how to deal with this problem? What works and what doesn't? And why? This is where the complexity of the problem becomes clear. Numerous factors are continually at play. In the first place, of course, the pupils themselves; the group of young people that now drop out of school is very diverse. The pupil's environment (family, friends, neighbourhood) plays a role, as does the labour market; but the school and the education system are also factors.

There is a group of young people that drops out unnecessarily and is actually capable of gaining a qualification, but not through a mainstream route or within the standard time. By offering more flexible routes to learning, drop-out rates within this group could be reduced and a group of these young people would still be able to gain a qualification.

However, there is also a group of young people who are unable to obtain a qualification. These young people should be helped to find work and continue supervised learning in the workplace.

Education councils are expected to feed the democratic decision-making process with robust recommendations. In preparing their recommendations, education councils make use of scientific knowledge and experiences from the teaching profession. All the information is deliberated and considered, and at the end of this process the recommendations are formulated. The structure of this conference is largely the same. Keynote speakers will inform the participants about the relevant policies at the European level and their effects. We will zoom in closely on the situation in Lithuania. The situations in Quebec, Austria, Portugal and Flanders will also come under close inspection during workshop sessions. On Wednesday, all this information will lead to conclusions that we can draw in relation to the current policy and how, where needed, to push that policy in the right direction.

Audronė Pitrėnienė

Audronė Pitrėnienė is Chair of the Seimas Committee on Education, Science and Culture

Opening speech: How can Europe address the problems of early school leavers?

Early school leaving is a recognized problem in the European Union already been covered by the European Trade Unions during the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The problem of premature drop-outs or early school leaving was analyzed by the managers of the Lithuanian educational institutions and the community of teachers at the conference held in the Seimas a few days ago.

According to various sources, more than six million young people in the European Union drop out of school every year having achieved *lower secondary education at best.* We understand well how serious the social problem is. Early school leavers face severe difficulties in finding jobs, are more often unemployed and more often dependent on social benefits. This hinders economic growth and development of society. Studies also show that people without secondary education are less involved in democratic processes and are less active citizens.

The European Commission, therefore, has set an ambitious target of reducing the EU average rate of early school leavers to 10% by the end of the decade. The President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, has once said, "Europe cannot afford that so many young people who have the potential to contribute to our societies and our economies are left behind. We need to realize the potential of all young people in Europe in order to recover from the crisis." The European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou, added, "Reducing the share of early school leavers across Europe by just 1 percentage point would create nearly half a million additional qualified young people each year. Most EU countries have made progress in

reducing the number of young people leaving school with low qualifications, but more needs to be done."

I think our conference will substantially analyze the reasons for early school leaving and come up with possible solutions for the problem. Although indicators of early school leaving in Lithuania are really low, just seven per cent, we need to closely follow the situation and to find ways to improve it. Lithuania is a small country; therefore sensitive to seven per cent of early drop outs. I am happy that schools in regions put a lot of genuine effort in order to encourage children of school age to stay in schools and to prevent them from dropping out without having achieved lower secondary or secondary education qualifications. It is easier to do this in smaller towns, where members of communities know each other very well. The staff working in district authorities is best suited to assist schools when it comes to problem solving, including that of early school leaving. In big cities, relationships among people are often broken off; therefore, a child in school is not always under careful supervision.

I participated in quite a few meetings during which Lithuania's indicators for early school leavers were referred to as exemplary. I am convinced that it is possible and necessary to improve them, particularly because of active and targeted social partners, such as trade unions representing educational community and the forum of parents, who contribute to the solution of the problem.

There is room for improvement in Lithuania. I think, information technologies have not been used to their full potential to solve the problem of pupil attendance and early school leaving. For example, instruments for recording the attendance of schoolchildren should also serve as instruments for informing parents. This would definitely serve as a means of control and some sort of "surveillance". I welcome the idea to address the problem of early school leaving by modernizing our schools and education and by involving our society into a broader dialogue on education. Various surveys and research have demonstrated that a modern school has already crossed the boundaries of school walls or schoolyards.

Apart from caring efforts by the community, school or social services, or apart from various control measures, I believe we should also develop institutional and personal competences. We should look for new forms to motivate pupils, to balance their workload, learn better the needs of children, and seek development of conflict management skills. In other words, we need to create the conditions at school to show to children that they are welcome there and that they may feel safe there, rather than forcefully make them return to school. We should remember as often as possible that the modern school is much more than a place merely for teaching, but rather an institution intended for upbringing a young human being– a future active citizen.

Vilija Targamadzė

Vilija Targamadzė is president of the Lithuanian Council of Education

Vilija Targamadzė insists on the fact that this conference on early school leaving is organized during the year of doctor Meilutė Lukšienė.

Meilutė Julija Lukšienė–Matjošaitytė (August 20, 1913 Vienna, Austria - October 16, 2009 Vilnius, Lithuania) was a Lithuanian cultural historian and activist. The significance of her works proves M. Lukšienė to be a scholar of European orientation and global level; a personality, who has significantly contributed to the development of democratic society and modern education. The celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Meilė Lukšienė highlights the role of culture in education. Her contributions are important in raising cultural awareness with modernization of education and social justice, and continue to influence development of education, science, and culture in Lithuania. She always stressed the importance of the maturity of the child.

Today, the rate of early school leaving in Lithuania is 'only' 7 %, which is lower than the EU average. For a small country, however, this figure is high; every child within this figure is a person who will have difficulties in finding his place in this world, in acquiring the necesseray skills to be employed and to adapt to today's world.

We lack emphasis on education systems that benefit people. Nowadays, often people seem to serve the systems. This is a methodological error: systems are created to benefit people. As EUNEC is not an institution with much regulations, this conference can be of help to search for best scenarios, applicable in the domestic situations of the present countries.

A holistic approach to early school leaving prevention in Europe:

Key strategic priorities for system level development

Paul Downes

Dr. Paul Downes is the Coordinator of the Educational Disadvantage Centre at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and Senior Lecturer in Psychology.

Dr. Downes obtained his Ph.D., Psychology, and Law degrees from Trinity College Dublin and has received a number of academic awards there, including the Butterworth (Ireland) Prize for Law, the Graduate Memorial Prize for Psychology, and is a TCD scholar of Law through the TCD Foundation Scholarship Exam. In 2001 he joined the lecturing staff at St. Patrick's College, directing the Educational Disadvantage Centre at the College since 2004. He was appointed as a Senior Lecturer in 2007.

His research interests are in early school leaving, drug prevention, community psychology, educational disadvantage, cross-cultural psychology, life-long learning and access to education.

With the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, as well as Directorate-General for Research, Dr. Downes has been involved in a number of expert advisory roles in the areas of social inequalities, early school

leaving and lifelong learning. He was also member of the Irish Senate and Parliament Expert Advisory Group for its 2010 study on early school leaving

Currently he is a Thematic Expert Advisor to EU URBACT initiative, PREVENT project, for its 10 city research project on early school leaving and family support (2012-2014). Dr. Downes is also Associated Expert of The European Institute of Education and Social Policy; and Member of European Commission Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training (NESET).

The presentation of Dr. Downes is structured along four axes:

- ¬ Beyond 'ineffective policies': Moving from an Individualistic to a System Blockage Focus
- ¬ Beyond the OECD's 10 Steps to Equity in Education: The Neglected Shadow of Emotions for Early School Leaving Prevention - 'It's the heart stupid'
- ¬ 'Beyond a patchwork' approach of System Fragmentation in National Policies to Early School Leaving
- ¬ A Strategic Systemic Approach to Early School Leaving Prevention – Structural Indicators

Moving from an individualistic to a system blockage focus

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1. Overcoming system blockages in communication: professional development for teacher conflict resolution skills and cultural competence/diversity training

Rumberger (2004) argues that it is important to study drop-out and completion not only from an individual perspective, but also within an institutional perspective. We need to look at institutions and systems, not only at persons.

Key results observed in TALIS (OECD 2009) include that one teacher in four in most countries loses at least 30% of the lesson time, and some lose more than half, in disruptions and administrative tasks – and this is closely associated with classroom disciplinary climate, which varies more among individual teachers than among schools.

Studies examine further this theme. Pyhältö et al. (2010) Finland, conclude that 'unjustified and authoritarian behaviour that undermined pupil's agency was considered as a source of burden, anxiety, and anger' (518 students, 9th grade, 6 schools).

In Poland (CBOS 2006), a national survey of 3,085 students, 900 teachers and 554 parents, across 150 schools reveals that:

- ¬ Concerning conflict with teachers, a clear difference between primary and postprimary students emerged. 33% of students had at least one conflict with a teacher in a school year in primary school, 52% in gymnasium and 54% in post-gymnasium.
- ¬ Experience of school violence from teachers towards students was reported directly as being hit or knocked over by 6% of students with 13% reporting having observed this occur for others. Teachers' use of offensive language towards students was reported by 16% as having been experienced directly individually and 28% as observed towards other students.

This is cleary an issue of teachers not coping. Teachers need more professional system support.

This also appears in Malta. Cefai & Cooper (2010), in the Malta review of qualitative research: 'the autocratic and rigid behaviour management approach adopted by many teachers in their response to misbehaviour. Their blaming and punitive approach was seen in many cases as leading to an exacerbation of the problem. It looks that perceived victimization by teachers was more prevalent and had more impact than victimization and bullying by peers'.

Again, the issue is raised of teachers who are ruling by fear themselves. This is a system blockage in communication that requires a system level approach. We cannot have a hate-based or a fear-based approach in our schools. If we do, students will walk away from the system.

There is a large body of international evidence for the importance of warm welcoming relations.

A wide range of US longitudinal studies provide evidence that a teacher's report of a warm supportive relationship with a student has positive effects on elementary students' behavioral and academic adjustment (Curby, Rimm-Kaufman, & Ponitz, 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson, 1999; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008).

We see a contrast in primary and post-primary systems of communication. In Dublin, Ireland, a survey (Downes et al., 2006) of students in 4 primary (n=230) and 2 secondary schools (n=162) reveals that

- ¬ Approximately 74% of pupils at primary level (6th class) and 55% of students at secondary level (first year) stated that they are treated fairly by teachers in school.
- ¬ Approximately 15% of pupils at primary level (6th class) state that they are not treated fairly by teachers in school, whereas 25% of students at

secondary level (first year) state that they are not treated fairly by teachers in school.

These differences between 6th class primary and 1st year secondary are statistically significant. We need to make sure that there is consistency in communication approaches in the transition from primary and post-primary education.

It has to be emphasized that there is large consensus in international research.

In the EU Commission public consultation 'Schools for the 21st century', classroom management strategies were raised as an issue needing to be better addressed by teacher initial education.

Modifications that appear to have merit according to WHO (2012) include:

- ¬ establishing a caring atmosphere that promotes autonomy;
- ¬ providing positive feedback;
- ¬ not publicly humiliating students who perform poorly;
- ¬ identifying and promoting young people's special interests and skills to acknowledge that schools value the diversity they bring.

A taecher, in some ways, is a manager in the clasroom. We do not accept that adults in the workplace work in an environment where their boss tells them in public that they are no-goods. Why do we expect, for a number of our young people, that they are motivated if they are told in front of the rest of the class that they are no-goods? Why do we accept this kind of demotivating approaches towards pupils in schools that would not be accepted for any communication with adults in enterprises?

This is a minority of teachers, but the approach is leading to alienation, and to school leaving.

The findings are confirmed by some more qualitative research results.

- ¬ Estonia

A school principal from the Estonian national report: "schools can create circumstances where unwanted students feel that they have to leave… and they do..." (Tamm & Saar 2010, in Downes 2011).

- ¬ Lithuania

The secondary education system in Lithuania according to a school management representative: "The attitudes towards students have to change and then they will feel better at schools. [...] at the moment students are selected under the criteria „good" and „bad" and those who get the „bad" label do not want to stay at such school – they leave it" (Taljunaite et al 2010, in Downes 2011). Labeling is a demotivating approach, internalizing an identity of failure.

A positive school climate can be created at classroom and school levels. In the classroom, teachers must be adequately prepared and motivated to meet students' needs through sensitive and responsive pedagogical interactions (Danielsen et al 2010). Strategies and approaches to achieve a positive developmental atmosphere in schools are recommended for pre- and in-service teacher training (Jourdan et al. 2008).

A student, experiencing teachers shouting at her, witnessed: there is no sunlight in my school. The key issue is how to find strategies to bring sunlight into the schools.

Some similar quotes from students participating in the Irish study:

- ¬ "I can't wait to leave, I would leave tomorrow if I had the choice because I get picked on by a teacher"
- ¬ "Now some (teachers) think they own the school" (Downes and Muansell 2007)

These are some quotes from Downes' (2004) student centered research in Ballyfermot, Dublin (12 focus groups and 173 questionnaire responses from secondary students):

- ¬ "Have anger management courses for teachers" (female, focus group):
- ¬ "The teachers shouting at you. That makes me really, really down" (Age 13, F)
- ¬ "If the teachers didn't roar at you" (Age 13, F)
- ¬ "Have an equal teaching system and sack ignorant snobby teachers…very harsh teachers usually make me stay out of school" (Age 16, M)

Magri's (2009) study of girls aged 12-16 in the Inner Harbour of Valetta and Northern regions of Malta illustrates this theme of alienation through authoritarian teaching:

- ¬ "I remember very clearly phrases from my teacher such as; 'you should really be in the B class', or 'this is above your level'. I felt incompetent compared to the other students and was very much aware of how happier I was in my previous class."
- ¬ "Disastrous, because they expect everything the way they want it. I cannot take it when they start shouting. They start shouting as soon as you utter a word".
- ¬ "It's not the subject that I don't like, it's the teacher… she starts shouting in your face"

This notion of the hostile teacher not coping is not a problem at the individual level, but and system level, and therefore requires system level support.

Acknowledged subsequently in the Council Recommendation (2011), the Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation in relation to early school leaving further highlighted this issue of teacher professional development:

"Targeted teacher training helps them to deal with diversity in the classroom, to support pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and to solve difficult teaching situations" (p. 12).

The issue is thus addressed at EU level. But will it be transferred sysematically into national strategies and policies? There is an emerging European and international consensus – not only that teachers need more support regarding conflict resolution skills, classroom management techniques and assistance in fostering a positive classroom and school climate – but also that these are key protective factors in prevention of early school leaving. (Downes (2013))

Implementation issues

Even where teacher professional development is required and implemented, the focus is often more on the subject. This is a missed opportunity.

In Slovenia teachers are formally entitled to 5 days yearly for in-service training. However, it appears from the information collected by our interviews that in-service training is primarily meant for the improvement of professional competences while more soft skills needed for conflict solving, participative learning appear to be more related to individual personality (Ivančič et al., 2010, in Downes 2011).

The TALIS study (OECD 2009) observes an extremely wide variation in teacher participation in continuing professional development across countries.

Downes (2013): "The danger exists that it is precisely those teachers who may be most resistant to professional development for conflict resolution skills who need them most; this applies a fortiori if there is no specific requirement or incentive provided to do so". And: "It is important to emphasize that it is not a matter of shifting blame from student to teacher; it is about going beyond an individual blame type of focus to a systemic one".

Implementation issues: Need for Transparent System of Quality

Lithuanian [secondary] school management interviewee on teacher professional development generally:

"I think it is a waste of money. It is a huge political fiction...Speaking about this centre – it's more money making than real knowledge. There are a lot of courses where teachers come the first and the last day. On Monday they come to this centre to register and pay for the courses, and on Friday they come and get the certificate. The course fee is usually paid (or is later reimbursed) by the school. There's no test, no final examination. Just for being on the list of participants one gets a certificate. Teachers need a certificate, the centre needs money and it is a vicious circle – wasting money. Hundreds of people are paid by the centre and they say that salaries of teachers are low – teachers should get that money, not this Centre" (Taljunaite et al., 2010, in Downes 2011).

<u>Cultural competence and staff from stakeholder groups – Access to Teaching Profession for Diverse Social Groups (Downes 2011)</u>

There is an increasing call for what is called cultural competence across the health professions, and teaching is a health profession; Lieberman et al (2011) note that, 'The shortage of infant mental health providers from minority groups has a particularly negative impact on immigrant and minority children and families, who need interventions that are provided in their native language by practitioners who understand their cultural values and childrearing practices' We need practitioners who understand the culture of the minority groups. This raises the issue of access to the teaching profession for diverse ethnic and social groups. Strategies are needed to make sure that the teaching profession is representative of the population.

> **2. Overcoming system blockages through a systemic focus rather than mainly individual risk factors focus. Moving to a systemic focus informed by more policy relevant research.**

Some concerns related to research on early school leaving ask for caution.

International research on identifying individual risk factors typically fails to analyze the mediating variable of system supports, i.e., services to prevent early school leaving, state supports available for students in schools or community (cf. Cederberg & Hartsmar (2013), Scandinavia: Those who were considering dropping out, but changed their mind, reported that they did so after advice from a teacher or a social worker). Risk factors do not exist in a vacuum.

Much of research on early school leaving focuses on correlations, which is not the same as causes.

Similarly, a lot of research is problem focused, not solution focused. A focus overwhelmingly on individual early school leaving risks is not solution focused, simply problem focused: a solution focused approach includes an awareness of risk factors but is not limited to simply stopping risks.

Risk factors are decontextualised stories (see also Bruner 2002), they may lack transferability through problem of ecological validity (Bronfenbrenner 1979) to other cultures/contexts. When we look at risk factors, it has to be done within a wider framework of system support.

A focus is needed on silent background enabling conditions for helping young people stay in school – not only individual protective factors but also system level protective factors, supportive systems.

Risk factors can lack policy relevance without a focus on how changeable they are and how they can be changed to protective factors at a system level.

Another concern with research on early school leaving, is that risk factors are seen as static traits of those likely to leave school early. Trait based psychology is highly limited, people's motivations are dynamic and situational, and they live in dynamic developmental contexts. Try to fix static traits is simplifying.

Policies need to move from a models of good practice approach to extracting key structural and process features of such good practice models (Downes 2013b)– rather than simply attempting to transfer a whole model from one complex context to another. Good practices cannot be simply transferred, given their sensitivity ot the cultural context.

Theoretical Framework for Understanding System Blockage

The theoretical framework adopted draws back on Bronfenbrenner (1979), who neglected system blockages, diametric splits and displacement (Downes 2013).

It also draws back on Foucault's idea (1972) described as a fundamental 'structure of exclusion': A system blockage focus examines ways of overcoming system structures of exclusion, system level diametric splits in communication and structures (Downes 2012, 2013). We should move to a focus on 'resilience fostering systems' to neutralize risk factors. We need to try to stop systems of exclusion and move to systems that can protect.

> **3. Overcoming system blockages: Beyond intergenerational splits in policy to lifewide community lifelong centres to engage ethnic minorities such as Roma.**

An insteresting example illustrating an intergenerational vision is the approach of the Balkan Sunflowers NGO in Fushë Kosova. Fushe Kosova hosts the largest Learning Center within the BSF Learning Center Network. Serving approximately 300 children daily, the center is staffed by seven facilitators and thirty-five tutors.

The center has programs both in Albanian and Serbian languages. Fushe Kosova Learning Center provides early childhood, elementary and secondary educational programming as well as additional support for staff currently enrolled in secondary school and college. Fushe Kosova also has a women's literacy program enabling a group of committed women to learn to read and write. The Center opened in April 2008 for homework help and the language club, began the preschool in June 2008, and the women's literacy program in April 2009.

The NGO has thus set up a number of community lifelong centers where they have the children and the mothers attending the same courses. The fact that the mothers are going to the same buildings as the children was a huge motivation for both.

This is a good example of an intergenerational education strategy, a lifewide approach of community learning, moving beyond blockages of split at a system level.

Figures below show important gains in attendance, enrolment and success.

Since the opening of the Balkan Sunflowers Learning Center in Fushe Kosova in April 2008, the number of children from the communities served quitting school– during primary school! – has fallen from 120 for the 2007-2008 school year to 14 during the 2009-2010 school year. While this is most dramatic in Fushe Kosova, as this is BSF's largest center, a similar story is also true in the other Learning Center towns: Gracanica, Plemetina and Shtime.

Primary school enrolment has more than tripled in Gracanica since the Centre's opening in 2004 from 25 to 85 children.

None of the children attending Gracanica Learning Centre dropped out of primary school in 2010, while only one child in Plemetina dropped out of school that year. 75% of all registered Roma children in Plemetina attend the Learning Centre, while girls' school attendance has increased and there are currently 58 girls in primary school.

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4. Overcoming system blockages in communication: student voices to be systematically consulted in policy and practice across EU

The EU has issued excellent documents on early school leaving, but with an important gap: the lack of focus on the voices of the pupils. Pupils should not only be the objects of policy, but have to be consulted about what why they are leaving school, and not only after having dropped out.

In Iceland, Brigisdottir (2013) highlights a process of communication with those dropping out from school, whereby the students are interviewed individually by an education Ministry official to find out why they are leaving school early. Yet this dialogue with students arguably comes too late in the process and needs systematic expression at a range of earlier stages as part of a Europe-wide prevention focus (Downes 2013).

This consultation of the child is not just some optional bonus, it is a right, written down in article 12 (1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which declares: 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or

her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'. Children's voices are largely absent from US research as they have not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The neglected shadow of emotions for early school leaving prevention - 'It's the heart stupid'

A mental health/emotional support and early intervention focus for national ESL strategies – depression, trauma, bullying, school climate, family support outreach, substance abuse prevention, fear of failure/success

A more intensive focus is needed on the interconnected issues of depression, poverty, school climate, family support outreach. In a lot of countries, there is a 'non not doing' approach: it is not that nothing is happening, but policies are not strategic and systematic.

Poverty impacts on mental health, mental health impacts on early school leaving

A wide range of international research recognizes the effects of poverty on mental health and on the school success.

Mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, disruptive behaviour disorders, eating disorders, or post-traumatic stress disorders, can negatively impact on a child's school success, as well as general well-being (Kessler 2009; World Health Organization 2003).

Children living in low-income families are especially vulnerable to mental health difficulties (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2009; US Department of Health and Human Services 2001).

Early interventions that aim at enhancing student mental health and sense of mastery could be instrumental in preventing premature school exit, as they are likely to increase academic engagement (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Quiroga et al. (2013) conclude, based on a high-risk longitudinal sample (2000–2006) of French-speaking adolescents living in Montreal recruited from two suburban secondary schools ranked by the Ministry of Education of Quebec (MEQ) in the three lowest deciles of socioeconomic status (SES) according to mother's education and parental employment (493 participants,228 girls and 265 boys) that depression scores were negatively correlated with self-perceived academic competence but not with self-reported academic achievement. Depression symptoms at the beginning of secondary school are related to higher drop-out

mainly by being associated with pessimistic views about the likelihood to reach desired school outcomes; student negative self-beliefs are in turn related to lower self-reported academic performance and predict a higher risk of dropping out. These findings emphasize that the connection between early depression and leaving school without qualifications is mostly indirect, as it is accounted for by achievement-related self-perceptions. Interventions that target student mental health and negative self-perceptions are likely to improve dropout prevention.

Even apart from poverty related depression, emotional distress contributes to early school leaving

A troubling number of adolescents are showing serious emotional distress and depression symptoms are at risk for school failure and dropout (Quiroga, Janosz, Lyons, & Morin, 2012; Thompson, Moody, & Eggert, 1994; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005).

A meta-analysis of 28 longitudinal studies found that bullying doubled the risk for depression an average of 7 years later, even after controlling for numerous other risk factors (Ttofi, Farringon, Lösel,& Loeber, 2011). Bullying and depression are interconnected issues, both relevant for early school leaving prevention.

Emotional trauma (bereavement, rape, sexual abuse, bullying, family break up, sleep related problems) – supports needed to prevent early school leaving

Irish Parliament and Senate present in their 'Report on early school leaving' (2010) case studies of those who left school early due to trauma factors of rape, bereavement, sexual abuse. It is important that emotional trauma is recognized to be a big issue for the prevention of early school leaving.

Evidence suggests that the emotional support needs of withdrawn students, who are at risk of early school leaving, may be missed by teachers compared with those students displaying and externalising problems through aggression (Doll 1996; Downes 2004).

Quotes from Downes & Maunsell (2007):

- ¬ "Why do you think some people are dying ? Because there is no one to talk to"
- ¬ "We should do more personal development"
- ¬ "Girls slit their wrists"
- ¬ "Girls take tablets and slice their wrists"
- ¬ "Girls sleeping around to hurt themselves, other ways instead of slitting wrists"

It is vital that pupils should feel that they have someone from the system on their side, someone to talk to.

Multiple domains intervention needed for bullying prevention success – a risk factor for early school leaving

Intervening at one level is not sufficient.

Pervasive teasing and bullying in a school may lead to disengagement and avoidance of school, distraction and inattentiveness in the classroom, and, ultimately, poorer academic performance (Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011; Lacey & Cornell, 2011; Mehta et al., in press).

Swearer et al (2010) conclude from their international review that bullying will be reduced and/or stopped when prevention and intervention programs target the complexity of individual, peer, school, family, and community contexts in which bullying unfolds.

School Climate, Teasing, Bullying

This issue was addressed in a recent study by Cornell et al. The first point they noted is that poverty has a direct impact on early school leaving. A one standard deviation increase in school-level poverty was associated with a 16.7% increase in drop-out rates, holding all other variables constant. (Cornell et al. (2013)).

Notably, one standard deviation increases in student and teacher-reported 'Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying' were associated with 16.5% and 10.8% increases in drop-out counts, respectively, holding all other variables constant.

For Cornell, being in an environment where teasing is part of the negative atmosphere, the 'school without sunlight', is an important factor influencing early school leaving, even if the pupil is not personally teased or bullied.

A basic conclusion from the study is that the prevalence of teasing and bullying in high schools deserves serious consideration by educators in addressing the problem of drop-out. In a sample of 276 high schools, the level of teasing and bullying reported by both ninth-grade students and teachers was predictive of cumulative drop-out counts over 4 years after the cohort reached 12th grade. This is, again, a correlational finding, but supported by qualitative research. Although a correlational study cannot demonstrate a causal effect, these findings are consistent with the hypothesis that a climate of teasing and bullying exerts a negative influence on students that contributes to the decision to drop out of school.

And more conclusions from Cornell et al. (2013): Because educators are often concerned about the impact of student poverty and academic capability on drop-out rates in their schools, these findings suggest that a climate of teasing and bullying in the school also deserves consideration. Notably, the increased drop-out count that was associated with prevalence of teasing and bullying was quite similar to the increases that were associated with FRPM (Free and Reduced Price Meals), poverty and academic failure.

Cornell et al. (2013) note that drop-out programs often focus too narrowly on changes in individual students, without considering broader peer and school influences.

Cornell et al. (2013): Teasing and bullying may be a neglected source of decay to the social capital of schools that generates an atmosphere of mistrust and alienation, animosity and fear that ultimately pushes students to abandon their educational aspirations.

Teachers and principals consistently underestimate levels of school bullying (Tattum 1997; Downes 2004, see also Young, Glogowska & Lockyer 2007 on related divergences), whereas dialogue with the students will tell what is really happening.

Estonian School management interviewee : "The majority of those who have dropped out of or left their previous school are lower secondary students. They had conflicts with teachers or other problems and could not continue in their old school" (Tamm & Saar, 2010, in Downes 2011)

There is thus the need for a combined universal prevention focus (school wide, curriculum), selected prevention focus (groups of students in classes of high levels of bullying/teasing) and indicated prevention focus (intensive emotional support work for chronic level bullies and victims).

Sleep aspects linked to academic achievement, mental health

This is again a neglected area obviously affecting motivation and academic performances.

Taras & Potts-Datema (2005) note that most children need at least 9 hours of restful sleep each night and conclude that the preponderance of literature that recognizes the detrimental effects of sleep disorders is astounding and perhaps not fully appreciated among many primary care providers, school health professionals and educators.

Other research has shown that adolescents require at least 8.5 hours of sleep per night and more appropriately 9.25 hours of sleep (Carskadon et al., 1980). A review by Blunden et al (2001) of 13 articles demonstrated that reduced attention, memory, intelligence and increased problematic behaviour resulted from sleep-related obstructive breathing. Other international studies have shown a relationship between insufficient sleep and lowered academic performance (Allen, 1992; Kowalski & Allen, 1995; Schuller, 1994; Wolfson & Carskadon, 1996, 1998).

Downes and Maunsell (2007) asked pupils at what time they usually go to sleep on a weekday. Many of the students don't have enough sleep.

"At what time do you usually go to sleep on a weekday?" (Downes & Maunsell, 2007)	Before Midnight	Midnight	After midnight	Varies/NA
Primary School A %	42%	16%	---	42%
School B %	54%	16%	15%	15%
School C %	78%	9%	6%	7%
School D %	83%	6%	---	11%
School E %	40%	26%	---	34%
School F %	60%	8%	---	32%
School G %	81%	15%	---	4%

Bridging health and education (Downes & Gilligan 2007)

We expect from the policy makers to look for a bridge between health and education. Simply reframing school drop-out as a health issue has the potential to bring new players into the effort — parents, health institutions, young people, civil rights groups — and to encourage public officials to think of the drop-out problem as central to community health and as a long-term solution beneficial to population health (Freudenberg and Ruglis 2007)

Family support Outreach for emotional and practical supports

Programmes are needed to engage with the families, with the involvement of professionals they trust.

The *Familiscope Morning Programme* is an intervention used to support children with chronic absenteeism. It is a family outreach programme set up in a socially disadvantaged area of Dublin, addressing the chronic need level.

familiscope

It involves:

- ¬ supporting parents to implement appropriate morning and night time routines
- ¬ monitoring and tracking children's attendance
- ¬ offering practical support and advice to parents to overcome the issue
- ¬ rewarding children for improved school attendance
- ¬ promoting an awareness of the link between poor school attendance and early school leaving
- ¬ resolving transport issues
- ¬ engaging the necessary outside supports to benefit the child.

The child welfare worker will regularly call to the child's home to

- ¬ support the parent implement morning time routines
- ¬ enable the breakfast, uniform and schoolbag preparation
- ¬ ensure the child gets to school on time
- ¬ support the parent to be firm and follow through when a child is school refusing.

Work is also carried out with the parents to support them with night-time routines i.e. homework and bedtimes. The child welfare worker will often transport the child to school or arrange for the child to take the school bus when available.

The ultimate goal is to improve school attendance for children living in families that are often quite chaotic. Long term the goal is to pass these skills to the parents and children so they will no longer require support. Children who are consistently absent in their early school years rarely catch up.

Gains are significant. It was observed that 16 out of 19 children on Familiscope's Morning Programme demonstrably improved their school attendance. 3 out of 19 did not improve attendance.

<u>Challenging fatalism and sustance abuse</u>

Fatalism is the feeling that nothing can be done. Fatalism is the killing of hope. "Hope was an instinct only the reasoning human mind could kill. An animal never knew despair." (Graham Greene). Fatalism is a factor that is often underestimated.

Strategies are needed to challenge fatalism which is a risk factor for drug use and other self-harming behaviour, including a fatalism associated with early school leaving (Kalichman et al. 2000, Downes 2003; Ivers, McLoughlin & Downes 2010), even if government departments usually are not interconnected.

O'Connell & Sheikh (2009) explored non-academic (non-cognitive) factors in early school leaving and found strong correlations with smoking and with lack of daily school preparation for early school leaving in a sample of over 25,000 8th grade US students from over 1,000 schools.

Fear of failure – Internalizing a failure identity

Pupils are afraid to try, because they are afraid of failing.

There is need for emotional supports and public ceremonies to recognize achievement (Hegarty 2007; Ecorys 2013).

A wide range of educational theorists and educational psychologists recognize the danger of labelling students as failures (e.g. Merrett 1986; Glasser 1969; Warnock 1977; Handy & Aitken 1990; Jimerson 1997; Kellaghan et al 1995; MacDevitt 1998; Kelly 1999; Downes 2003).

Fear of succes

Other pupils show fear of success: they are afraid of doing well, of standing out from the crowd, because this could make them loose their friends.

Ivers, J. & Downes, P (2012) published 'A phenomenological reinterpretation of Horner's fear of success in terms of social class'. (European Journal of Psychology of Education, Vol 27, Number 3, 369-388).

Suldo et al., (2010) discuss the supports needed for provision of 'a continuum of tiered intervention services, including prevention and universal intervention (e.g., school wide positive behavioral supports, school climate promotion), targeted interventions for students at risk (e.g., social skills and anger management groups, classroom management strategies), and intensive individualized interventions with community support (e.g., therapy, implementation of behavior intervention plans) in schools'.

Beyond a patchwork approach of system fragmentation in national policies to early school leaving

1. Clarity on which prevention levels the service is targeting

The three widely recognized prevention approaches in public health are: UNIVERSAL, SELECTED and INDICATED prevention (Burkhart 2004; Reinke et al., 2009).

- ¬ UNIVERSAL prevention applies to school, classroom and community-wide systems for all students and their families (e.g. teacher conflict resolution skills, whole school bullying prevention approaches engaging all families).
- ¬ SELECTED prevention targets specialized groups of students at risk of early school leaving and their families (e.g. some family support

programmes can work more efficiently at a group level than simply individually for families in need but not at chronic need levels).

¬ INDICATED prevention engages in specialized, individualized systems for students with high risk of early school leaving and their families. INDICATED prevention looks at the chronic need level and requires more than afterschool homework support approach (Downes et al 2006), more than 'mentors' to more complex emotional and academic supports.

The VaSkooli project in theTurku and Salo regions of South-West Finland acknowledges the 'difficulties in reaching the youngsters and their families, who do not participate in any of the special services provided by the sub-projects' (Ahola & Kivela 2007).

ALL 3 levels need to be focused on in a national and regional strategy.

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2. From multiple agencies to cohesive multidisciplinary teams

This is a second level of going beyond the patchwork, that may require a restructuring of agencies, working towards common goals within a much more cohesive strategy.

The Alliances for Inclusion report (Edwards & Downes 2013) reviewed the enabling conditions for the effectiveness of multidisciplinary teams and crosssectoral approaches for early school leaving prevention, building on 16 examples from 10 European countries.

¬ A policy focus is needed to go beyond multiple agencies.
¬ Need to minimize fragmentation across diverse services 'passing on bits of the child' and family (Edwards & Downes 2013).
¬ The multi-faceted nature of risk requires a multi-faceted response that needs to go beyond referrals to disparate services resulting in this 'passing on bits of the child'.
¬ For genuine interprofessional collaboration for early school leaving prevention, for example, between schools and multidisciplinary teams of outreach care workers, therapists/counsellors, nurses, speech and language therapists, social workers, occupational therapists, policy-led co-location is not sufficient. Efforts are needed to support inter-professional collaborations and overcome resistance. It is not enough just to designate a desk for these services in schools.
¬ There is a need to focus on interventions across multiple domains (e.g., family, school, groups, individual, community, see also Reinke et al's 2009 review of US combined school and family interventions) with a focus on system change (institutions and environment), as well as individual change.
¬ There is not one single generalizable ideal model or specific list of disciplinary professionals but a European framework of key structural

indicators could be established to guide such models. Such indicators could include addressing issues such as a) a continuum of care, b) stakeholder representation for distinct marginalised groups that are being sought to be reached, c) specific implementation plans for bullying prevention, c) specific alternatives to suspension and expulsion from school, d) an outreach strategy for supporting marginalised families, e) teacher professional development for conflict resolution and diversity skills.

¬ Need to focus on direct delivery and to minimize 'committee sitting' (Downes 2013a)

¬ To adopt a multifaceted approach via multi-disciplinarity through either one team or two collaborating agencies as a common direct delivery network (Downes 2013a)

¬ A focus is needed on expanding the multi-disciplinarity of existing teams (2 agencies or one team) in a local area, bridging (mental) health and education expertise.

Prevention and early intervention focus

¬ To engage directly with problems related to early school leaving, for example nonattendance, trauma, bullying, mental health difficulties, language development, parental support, sleep deficits, risk of substance misuse, suspension/expulsion, conflict with teachers.

¬ Outreach work to reach most marginalized families.

¬ Each family has one 'lead professional' to link them with others (Edwards & Downes 2013a)

Field et al's (2007, p.97) OECD study illustrates the Finnish approach of adopting a multidisciplinary team as part of a continuum of interventions in schools. These include professionals from outside the school, such as a psychologist and social worker, together with the school's counsellor, the special needs teacher and classroom teacher.

However, a major issue of the need for confidentiality has been highlighted in a range of student centred research in Ireland, with relevance for the needs of potential early school leavers in the context of multidisciplinary teams (Downes 2004; Downes et al., 2006; Downes & Maunsell 2007; Mellin et al 2011).

> ### 3. Alternatives to suspension/expulsion to stop diametrically opposing strategic approaches

This point reveals an absurdity of the system. It is incredible that we have, at one side, many professionals trying to keep pupils in the system, aiming at preventing early school leaving (it is a EU headline target!). And yet, at the other side, in a number of countries, we have high levels of suspension and expulsion. Two parts

of the system are engaging in diametrically opposing strategic approaches. We need to work towards system level alternatives for suspension and exclusion.

Suspension rates themselves are predictive of drop-out rates (T. Lee, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2011).

An English study by Rennison et al., (2005) found that young people in the NEET [Not in Education, Employment or Training] group were over three times more likely previously to have been excluded from school than young people overall.

In Polish national research (CBOS 2006), being put outside the classroom was a sanction experienced by 15% of students, with 53% observing this as occurring for others.

The Irish post-primary figure of 5% for suspension, applied to the total population of 332,407 students equates to well over 16,000 students suspended from post-primary schools in 2005/6 (ERC/NEWB 2010).

A multidisciplinary team plays a key role in devising alternative strategies to suspension in this example from a Russian school: The school does not practice expulsion or suspension of students. Instead, the psychological support service team regularly conducts preventive meetings and conversations with students who have discipline or study problems. Each school has a Preventive Council aimed at dealing with 'problem' students...Use of preventive measures as an alternative to expulsion shows that the school staff aims to keep as many students at risk of early leaving at school as possible (Kozlovskiy, Khokhlova & Veits 2010).

A longitudinal study by Markussen et al (2011) following a sample of 9,749 Norwegian students over a five-year period, out of compulsory education and through upper secondary education, reveals that: "The higher the students scored on an index measuring deviant behavior, the higher their probability of early leaving as compared to completing". And: "Students with high scores on an index measuring seriously deviant behavior were in fact less likely to leave early than students with low scores on this index. This last finding is explained by the extra resources, support and attention these students are provided with, making it less probable for them to leave".

Significantly, an overall reduction in suspensions through Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has also been observed in the US (Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf 2008), thereby indicating a direct benefit for early school leaving prevention.

<u>Language dimension to disruptive behaviour/suspension needs to be addressed</u>

Rates of language impairment reach 24% to 65% in samples of children identified as exhibiting disruptive behaviours (Benasich, Curtiss, & Tallal, 1993),and 59% to 80% of preschool- and school-age children identified as exhibiting disruptive

behaviours also exhibit language delays (Beitchman, Nair, Clegg, Ferguson, & Patel, 1996; Brinton & Fujiki, 1993; Stevenson, Richman, & Graham, 1985).

4. Anticipating territoriality

Local rivalries across municipalities and schools can be an obstacle to sharing of good practice, especially in a recession – to claim resources and credit for gains.

Tensions between schools and community, including community professionals, are also an obstacle to sharing of good practice.

Physical location of community service needs to be in a neutral community space (Downes & Maunsell 2007).

If possible, no more than two agencies will be involved to limit fragmentation and provide shared goals focus. Agencies should be restructured for greater focus (Downes 2013b).

5. Avoiding undifferentiated categorizing

It is important to go beyond simple categorizing of students: there is not '1 early school leaving problem'; the problem is linked to a behaviour with a vast range of underlying motivations and factors.

A '1 size fits all' solution for generic categories does not exist, but there can be better models than others for key aspects.

It's also important to go beyond simple categorizing of parents: Parental engagement for early school leaving prevention involves a range of strategic approaches and models rather than a single intervention approach. A differentiated strategic approach to engaging parents for preventing early school leaving of their children needs to operate at the family support (chronic need, indicated prevention) level and at parental involvement (groups-selected prevention and universal) levels.

The developmental needs and interests of parents with younger children (e.g., language development, attachment, nonverbal emotional therapy) ared different from the needs of parents with older children. Developmental needs and interests of parents can also be different based on their own age differences. Gender differences can play ar role for parental involvement and lifelong learning classes. Some groups of parents have specific needs, such as single parents and parents with chronic needs such as intergenerational drug abuse. These points are obvious, but often forgotten.

> **6. National and regional central driving committees for early school leaving prevention**

An area/regional focus is needed.

Norway, Markussen et al (2011) demonstrated a statistically significant variation in the probability of early leaving and non-completion, as compared to completion, due to both county and study program. Students from Hedmark County had a higher probability both of early leaving and not completing, as compared to completing, than students in Buskerud (reference group), all else being equal. Moreover, students from the counties Oslo, Vestfold, and Akershus had a higher probability of early leaving than students from Buskerud.

This Estonian example illustrates the need for regional actors to focus on early school leaving prevention: Kello et al.'s (2011) student-centred research on the effects of language change in instruction from Russian to Estonian which places less academic Russian-speaking students in more difficulty. Kello's (2009) focus groups with Russian-speaking students in Narva, Estonia highlighted that 'students whose language skills are poorer are left aside or leave completely' , so that early school leaving is a foreseeable consequence of language reforms for the less academic Russian-speaking students in Estonia and Latvia (Downes 2003).

A strategic systemic approach to early school leaving prevention. Structural indicators.

Structural Indicators have to be decided, with Yes/No answers for system transparency (see UN Right to Health).

- ¬ Core structural indicators for early school leaving prevention, shared by all Member States nationally and regionally, such as
  - central driving committee for early school leaving prevention yes/no,
  - alternatives to suspension across all schools, yes/no,
  - professional development for teachers' conflict resolution skills, yes/no, emotional supports available for students in need, yes/no
- ¬ Specific/thematic country specific structural indicators, linked to local needs, distinctive features of national systems
- ¬ Holistic structural indicators, all relevant ones that Member States nationally and regionally recognize are important and will address in the future if successful case for additional funding is made. These allow for recognition of gaps in current services for early school leaving prevention (e.g., for family support, outreach and mental health)

This is a set of outcome indicators from interventions of multidisciplinary teams:

- ¬ at an individual level
  - improved school attendance (outreach dimension and improved school climate)
  - improved student motivation and performance due to improved class climate
  - improved student concentration as trauma related issues being supported
  - improved behaviour in class
  - decreased anxiety and depression and improved mental health, including academic performance
  - improved sleep patterns influencing improved concentration and academic performance
  - decrease in substance abuse influencing improved concentration and academic performance
  - reduction and elimination of suspension and expulsion
  - decrease in school bullying bringing improved school attendance, improved motivation for learning in school, less personal anxiety
  - improved self-image, self-esteem, self-efficacy for learning: overcoming fatalism as a risk factor for early school leaving, substance abuse, other risk behaviours
  - increased language development in younger children
- ¬ at family level
  - increased engagement of previously marginalized families with support services
  - increased engagement of previously marginalized families with the school
  - improved communication between child and parents
- ¬ at the school system level
  - decreased use of suspensions
  - increased use of alternatives to suspension
  - improved school and classroom climate
  - decrease in bullying in class and school
  - professional development of teachers' conflict resolution skills and social class and ethnicity diversity awareness
  - increased tolerance of diversity and confidence for minority groups in the school institutional culture

> # Need for focus on
> # emotional, relational issues
> # at system level

Key questions for your national/regional strategy: a strategic systemic appraoch to overcome gaps

1. At which level(s) of prevention is your strategy working – UNIVERSAL, SELECTED, INDICATED? (E.G. Stockholm ABC is general parent programme ages 3-12, is universal level and not selected or indicated) At which levels of prevention is your strategy NOT working?

2. Is there collaboration with key target group members (i.e., involvement in design, strategy, decision-making, leadership roles, employment of them) or merely information to be consumed by them?

3. At which level of system change is your strategy working?
   ¬ Individual only
   ¬ School system
   ¬ Family system
   ¬ Community system (e.g., Gijon festivals)
   ¬ Links between some of these?

   Which of these system levels are NOT being targeted in your national/regional/municipal strategy and need to be?

4. Is the focus in your national/regional strategy holistic for parental engagement and including:
   ¬ Practical and emotional outreach family support
   ¬ Mental health issues (plus drug, alcohol support focus)
   ¬ Education issues for parents
   ¬ Language education issues for parents
   ¬ Support for parents in educating children
   ¬ Parent peer supports

5. Is there clear responsibility at local levels for which agency takes the lead on key issues or is there diffusion of responsibility? Are there integrated teams or fragmented multiple agencies?

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Early school leaving in Lithuania: current situation and policies

Saulius Zybartas

Saulius Zybartas holds a doctoral degree in social sciences (education) and a master's degree in mathematics. His international experience includes participation in a number of professional development programmes and research internship in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Scotland, the USA, Poland, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Latvia. He has been involved in a number of international projects, such as 'Strategic Choices for Education Reform' by the World Bank Institute and 'Using Indicators in Planning Basic Edcuation Methodological Aspects and Technical Tools' by UNESCO Institute for Educational Planning.

Recently, Saulius works as the director of the Department of General Education and Vocational Training at the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science. His previous working experience includes teaching mathematics and computer science at secondary education and at university level as an associate professor. He worked as a researcher at the Institute of Pedagogy, a deputy director at the Educaiton Development Center, the head of the International Relations Office and the Project Management Office at Vilnius Pedagogical University, the director of the Teachers' Competence Center and the National Examination Center.

The presentation by Mr Zybartas is divided in two parts:

- ¬ A reference to the wider framework: the EU recommendations of 2012
- ¬ A look at the Lithuanian situation: statistics, plans, programmes

A number of concepts are cleary defined:

- ¬ Early school leavers

Early school leavers aged 18–24 with lower secondary or lower education and not in education 4 weeks prior to the research

¬ Dropping out

Leaving school because of different reasons. All forms of leaving before acquiring general or equal to general education. Leaving studies without a diploma.

¬ VET dropouts

Those having started VET programs but not completed with a qualification are considered as VET dropouts.

¬ School children not in education

Children of compulsory age for education (7-16 years old), not in programs of primary and lower secondary education.

EU recommendations

The problem is sensitive. A secondary education certificate has become a minimum condition for the labour market. Youngsters who leave school prematurely lack skills needed at the labour market. The higher the share of early school leavers in a country, the higher the probability that this will hinder the development of the country.

By the time of the publication of the EU recommendations in 2012, Lithuania was still negotiating the priorities for the Presidency of the Council of the EU. It has been agreed that early school leaving would be a priority, to be tackled in various meetings:

¬ A conference on school leadership: how might the work of the school principal affect the number of early school leavers?
¬ A conference on inclusive vocational training, addressing three major aspects:
  • How can VET address early school leaving?
  • How to define good measures for preventing drop-out?
  • How to make VET more attractive for young people and how to increase the prestige of VET?
¬ The meeting of the directors general for education in December 2013
¬ A meeting on how VET can help in addressing migration issues (Tbilizi)

The fact that early school leaving is recognized to be very important during the Presidency implies a number of challenges and sensitive issues for Lithuania vis-à-vis the more general EU recommendations:

¬ A common strategy has to be defined. Systemic changes can only be implemented if initiatives are integrated in one single policy. Percentages for Lithuania are quite good, but there is certainly room for improvement.

- ¬ Policy has to be evidence based. We have to collect information on the percentages of early school leaving in Lithuania, and analyze the data.
- ¬ Measures for prevention and early intervention have to be taken at national, institutional and individual level.
- ¬ The inclusiveness and attractiveness of VET have to be addressed. VET must become a possibility for requiring professional qualifications.

Early school leaving in Lithuania

The situation in Lithuania regarding early school leaving (6.5 %) looks rather optimistic compared to the EU average. The Europe 2020 Strategy aims at reducing the number of early school leavers to 10 % by 2020.

The graphs show that Lithuania has 6.5 % of early school leavers, compared to the EU average of 12.8 %. Men drop out rather than women, children with a migrant background have higher drop-out rates. This problem is acute in Lithuania too.

Early school leavers aged 18-24 in Europe:
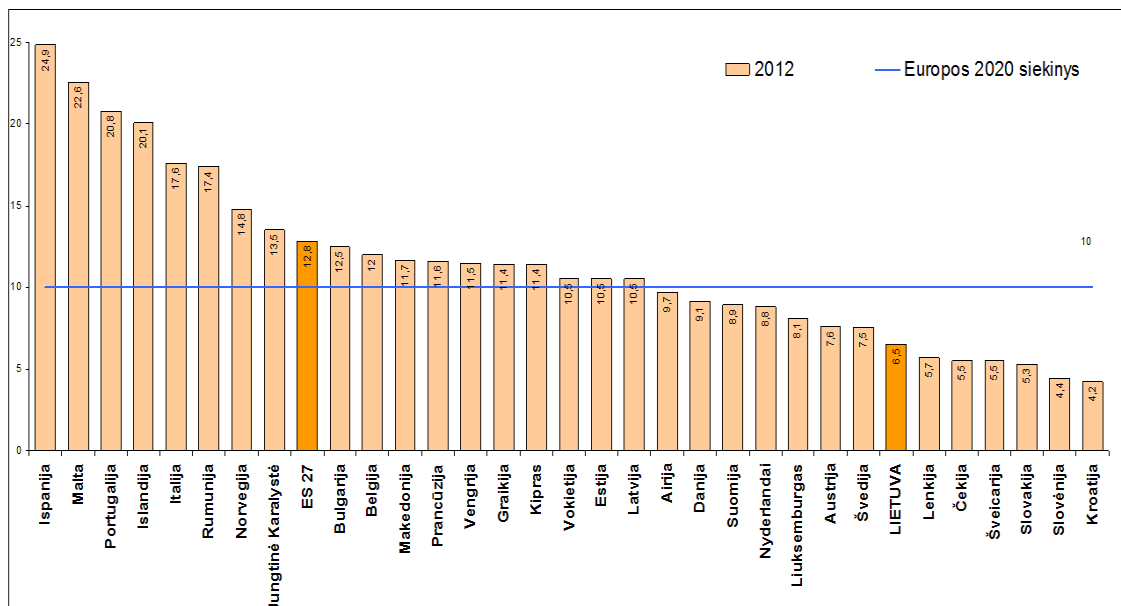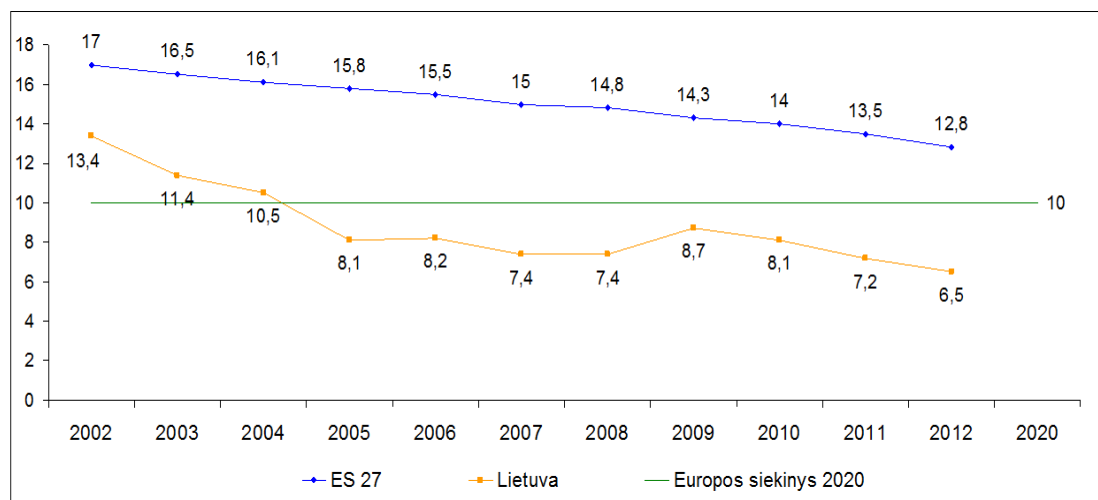
If we compare drop-out rates for the cities and drop-out rates for rural areas, we notice a huge difference. Drop-out rates for men in rural areas are very high. Addressing this high percentage is a priority for Lithuania.

City	Males	4,7	Country	Males	14,3
	Females	2,6		Females	8,7

Apart from these figures there is a huge difference not only between cities and rural areas, but also among schools, both in general and vocational education.

Early school leaving from VET in Lithuania

Official statistical data evidence that during one school year around 15-16 % of students drop out from VET programmes. Data show a wide variation in dropout rates amongst different VET institutions, varying from 5 to 30 % per annum.

A survey of VET institutions showed that

- ¬ Major reasons for students to drop out from VET are of financial (economic) nature: moving abroad or seeking a job in Lithuania.
- ¬ Important personal reasons influence students' decision to discontinue their education: lack of learning motivation and weak previous preparation at general education institutions.
- ¬ A tendency is observed that sometimes employers with unqualified works salary 'tempt' students to discontinue VET.

Early school leaving outcomes

The most obvious impact of early school leaving is unemployment of young people. In 2011, in the EU, 54,8 % of early school leavers were unemployed, but around 70 % intended to get a job. People without proper education lost their jobs during the crisis.

In Lithuania

- ¬ one third of early school leavers are employed,
- ¬ one third are not employed but with the intention to get a job,
- ¬ the rest is not in employment and not intending to get a job.

In 2012 youth aged 15–24 and unemployed:

- ¬ in the EU: 22,8 %
- ¬ in Lithuania: 26,4 %

How to prevent early school leaving?

Directions to reduce the numbers of early school leavers concertrate on three types of mechanisms:

- ¬ Preventive mechanisms enabling youth to use their learning potential and successfully integrate at school.
- ¬ Intervention mechanisms. Prevention of dropping out: reacting to first signs and offering support to youth at risk.
- ¬ Compensation mechanisms. To help those who dropped out, offering ways of returning to education and acquiring a qualification.

NEMIS is a prepared and implemented information system for drop-outs and children not in education. Information is collected on their number, the reasons, and the educational support offered.

Measures to reduce drop-out from VET

The measures to reduce drop-out from VET include:

- ¬ Social, educational and psychological support, work with parents
- ¬ Material support, incentives
- ¬ Flexible scheduling for working students and students having children
- ¬ Improvement of learning environment, investments into training basis
- ¬ Student adaptation programmes for newcomers
- ¬ Career education, meetings with employers and successful graduates to prove that it is worth to have a qualification.

The 16th government of the Republic of Lithuania programme

Key provisions of the 16th government include:

- ¬ Increasing accessibility of early education and better quality
- ¬ Decisions regarding school network are made on the basis of quality of services provided by school and the importance of the school in the local society
- ¬ Orientation towards high quality secondary education and better accessibility to education for all
- ¬ VET attractiveness to the youth and usefulness for the country and society

¬ Better image of VET

The following actions are linked to the implementation of the 16th government programme:

¬ Action plan for strengthening of lower-secondary schools and progymnasiums
¬ Yellow buses programme for 2013–2017
¬ Action plan for increasing access to inclusive education
¬ Prevention programmes for safe school
¬ Children and youth socialization action plan
¬ Vocational education and training development action plan

The following investments are planned for 2014-2020: Prevention and reducing of drop-outs number and securing of equal conditions to gain high-quality pre-primary, primary, basic and upper-secondary education (investment priority 9.2). The concrete objective is to decrease the number of early drop-outs and the number of students who haven't finished the general education programme (9.2.2).

In search for a good school

Gražvydas Kazakevičius

Gražvydas Kazakevičius has been engaged in education for 27 years. He started as a teacher of history and became a headmaster at the age of 27. He was specifically keen on the introduction of novelties. His subsequent posts were with the Administration of Vilnius City Municipality as the Director of the Department for Culture, Education and Sports; with the Ministry of Education and Science; and since 2006 Director of the National Agency for School Evaluation. His geography of internships cover Hungary, France, Slovenia, Israel and the United Kingdom. He lectures and publishes articles on school evaluation and development.

When we are thinking of measures to prevent early school leaving, it might be useful to agree on common national guidelines for a good school, presuming that pupils would not leave a 'good school'. The concept of a good school could lead to the development of a comprehensive debate on what a good school is. We could, for instance, try to find an answer to the question 'How many pupils take part in the school activity planning?' Research shows that, in Lithuania, 40 % of the pupils are absolutely not included in school planning. Similar results have been concluded in other countries, for instance in Germany.

The aim of the research is to come up with a concept of a good school that is challenging and at the same time encouraging schools to think about whether they are a good school or not. A concept of a good school is a tool which empowers and encourages school communities to discuss and to act, i.e. find their own ways to improve their school activities and move towards a genuinely good school.

In order to sum up features of a good school, an expert working group has overviewed the international situation, as well as the situation in Lithuania.

The first stage in the work was the research stage: which concepts of a good school are prevailing across countries? The second stage has been executed by a working group of experts, working towards a generalization and systematization of various concepts, and developing an own model of a good school.

Lithunia already has a national concept of education quality, but so far no common agreement on what a good school is.

In the Lithuaninan concept of educational quality, quality assurance consists of three basic functions or activities:

- Quality concept building
- Quality improvement
- Quality assessment

The working group of experts overviewed earlier concepts of a good school in the independent Lithuania.

- The national school concept (1988): focus on person's dignity, individuality, morality, national identity and citizenship.

- The concept of a good school in the Introduction to Framework Programmes of General Education Schools (1994): emphasis on the role of the community and school-life and on the importance of an independent, self-conscious and comprehensively educated personality.

Two dimensions have been analyzed during the research:

- The dimension of the education process
  The content of education can take two directions: it can be a traditional knowledge-providing school, functioning in a controlled environment, or a constantly changing school that is learning and responding to the needs of pupils and society.
- The dimension of the school management ideology
  There are two management ideologies. On the one hand, there is an independent school which is thus able to learn fast and improve. On the other hand, there is a school whose activity is regulated and constantly controlled.

The most conspicuous directions of thought, discovered in the Lithuanian and foreign scientific literature, strategic documents and foreign practice, cover school management ideology and education matters. There is a clear movement towards independence and transition to a complex environment can be seen.

Key players have been interviewed by a set of two kinds of questions

- related to the current situation

- related to the wanted situation

Results of the research showed that expectations of players in the educational process match the tendencies provided for in the theoretical model and identify the same direction towards improvement.

The concept of a good school covers more and more features of the changing, adapting and learning school, featured in the fourth square of the matrix. In the scheme below, the arrow indicates the wanted direction for a good school: towards a rapidly adapting and changing school.
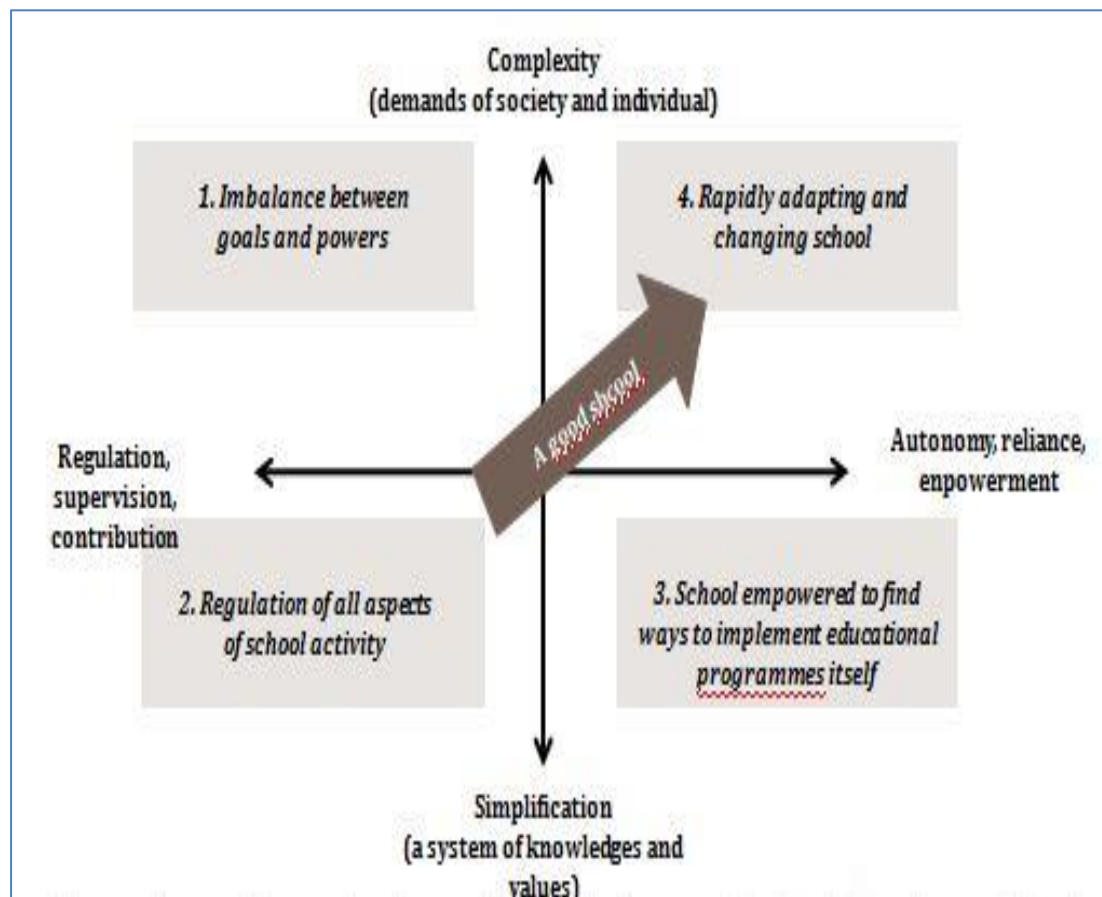

The current understanding of a good school seems to oversimplify the concept by stressing only academic achievement. However, research shows that the success of education lies in pupils' progress and achievements not only in academic, but also in personal and social terms. According to Balevičienė (2012) three key elements can describe a good (successful) school:

- ¬ common, agreed upon and recognized values and objectives based on these values;
- ¬ abilities to attain the objectives;
- ¬ and skilfulness in executing activities.

The following image shows which are, according to the research, the features of a good school:
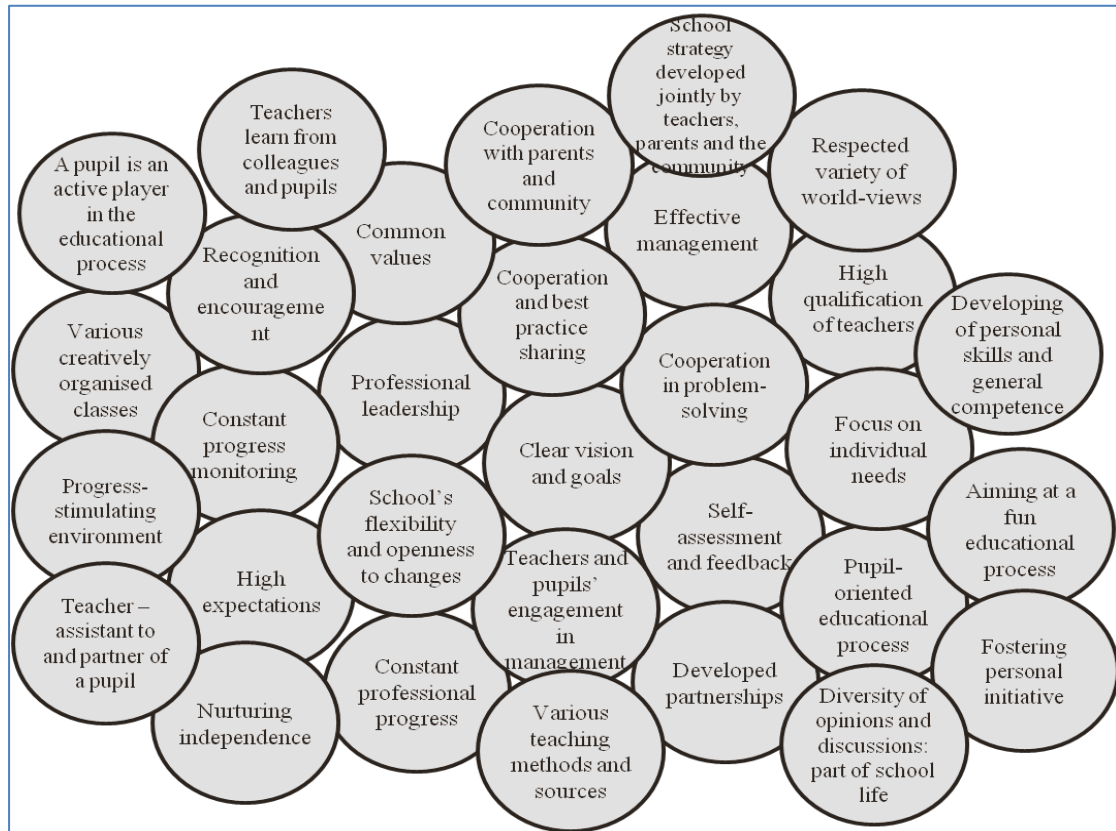
The Working Group of Experts has also gained an in-depth understanding of foreign concepts of a good school and their structuring.

Two examples:

¬ New Zealand's model of a good school
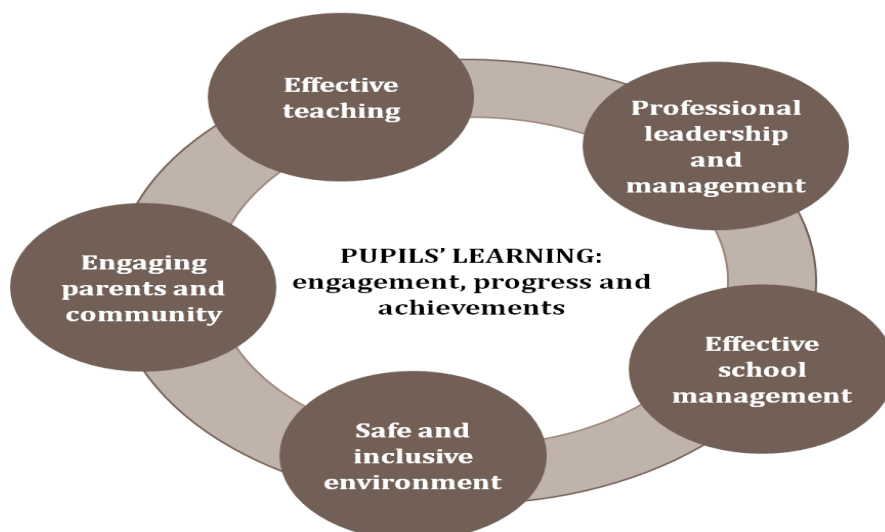
¬ The Scottisch model of a good school
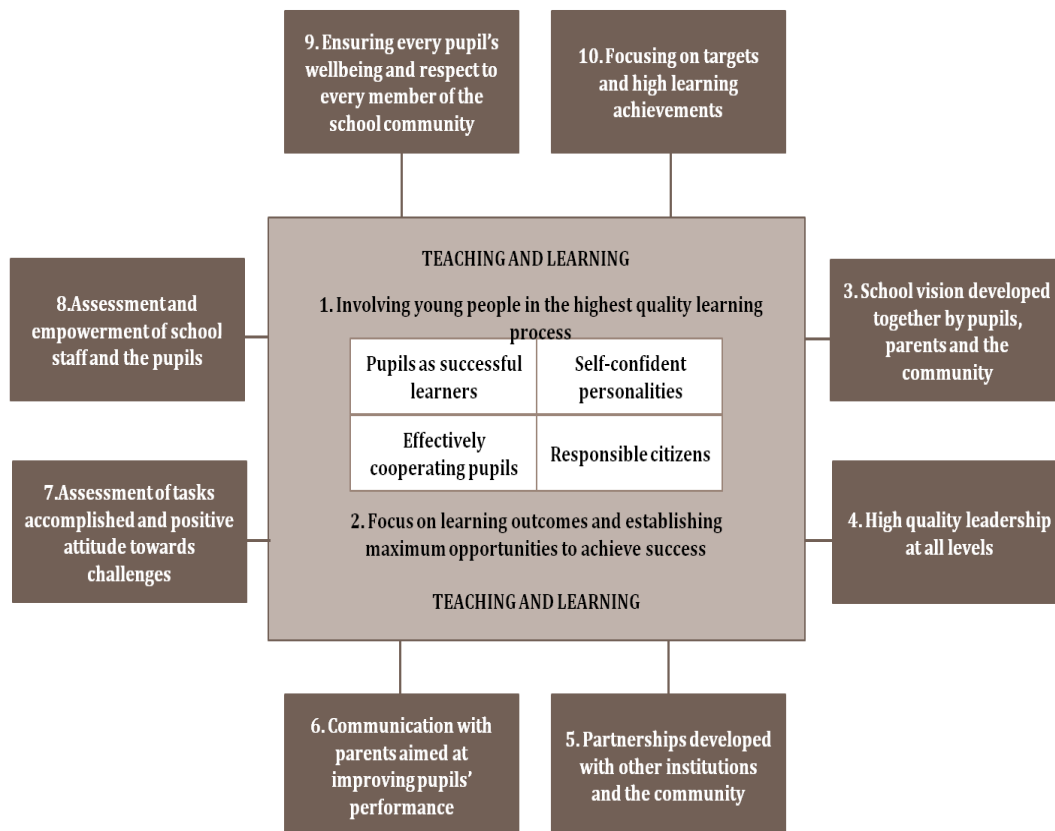
Furthermore, experts analyzed the futuristic approach to school: what will education be like in the future? There will be an evolution in the field of new skills and of new learning methods, as demonstrated in the scheme below:
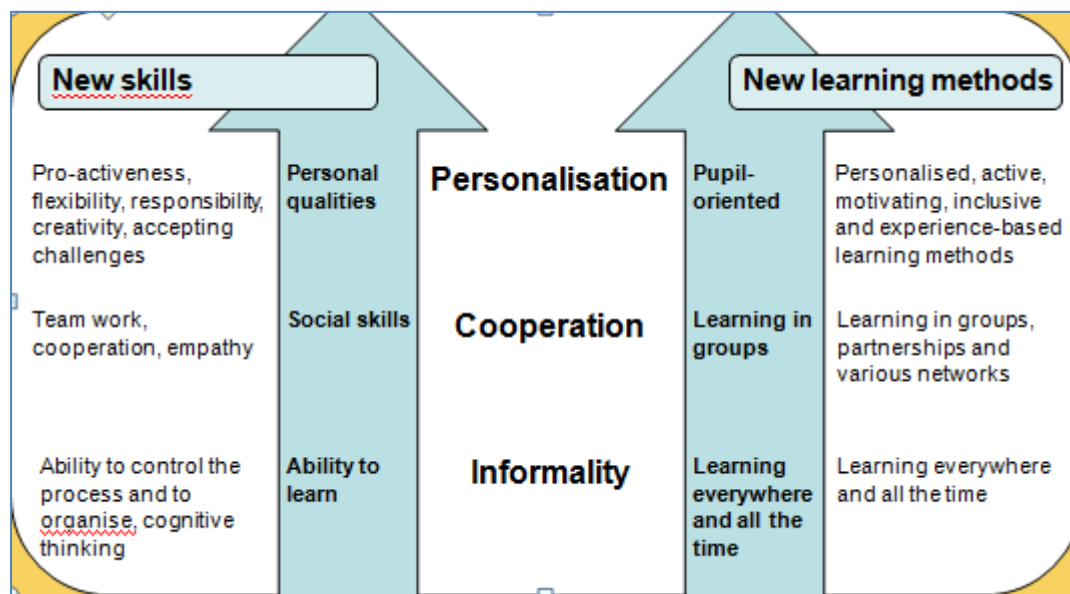
A good school is the kind of school which seeks to ensure <u>meaningful</u> activity, <u>discoveries</u> and successful learning and functions based on agreements with the <u>community.</u>

It is significant in the following scheme that the top box balances both the pupil's experience and the learning outcomes. The expert group believes that the metaphore of the scales is key: it is crucial to strike a good balance between pupil's experience and learning outcomes: maturity, achievement and success, which should be the end result of the learning process.   A pupil must be insured with the opportunity of catching up when he lags behind. A school has to insure this caring environment, it is the school's mission. Everything else, what is not in the top box (environment, teaching and staff) are only preconditions to establish this balance beween pupil's experience and learning outcomes.
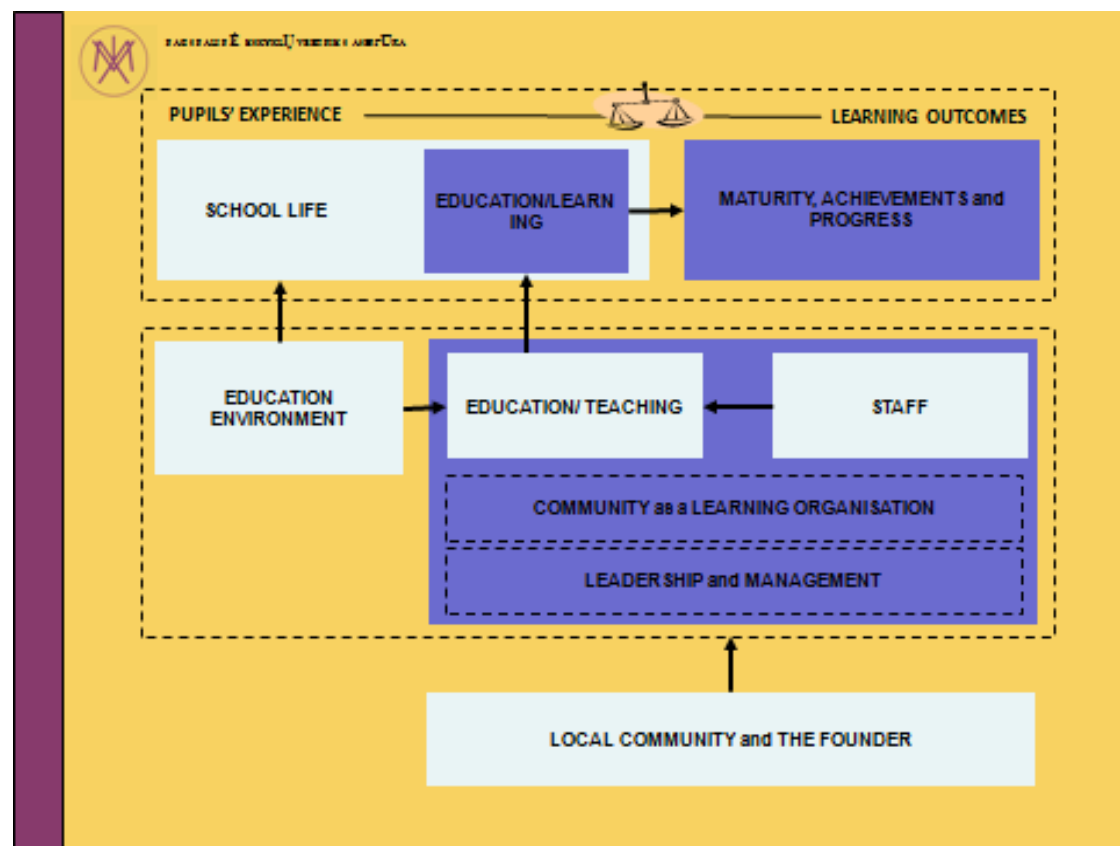
The following boxes show an overview of the features of a good school, described according to nine main areas:

AREA	DESCRIPTION
Personality development	Personality maturity; Learning achievements; Learning progress
Active participation in school life	How pupils feel at school; Sense of belonging to a community; Self-government; Activities, events, adventures
Dialogue-based and analysing education/learning	Interesting and developing; Open and experience-based; Personalised and self-governing; Contextual/relevant
Education and teaching assisting the process of learning	Purposeful; Diverse for a diversity of pupils; Flexible; Establishing partnerships
Staff: diverse personalities	Positivity; Professional skills; Personal development; Balanced team

AREA	DESCRIPTION
Learning community	Learning with and from others; Focused; Responding; Stimulating learning; Openness of the organisation to the world;
Leadership and empowering management	Clear, unifying and inspiring vision; Culture of dialogue and agreements; Shared leadership; Efficient administration; Creativity and will to act
Dynamic and open educational environment	Classes without borders; Learning-stimulating environment; Pupils' contribution in developing the environment; Virtual environment
Committed local community and the founder	/Developing strategies; Encouraging; Supporting and confident

The description of a good school should not be too strict. There is no need for a fixed framework of what a good school is. The State, at national level, tries to describe a broad concept, which can take many shapes, but is oriented at one single goal: maturity, achievement and progress of pupils.

At this moment, the concept of a good school is becoming more and more public and being further discussed from various angles.

School visit
Gabijos Gymnasium

Director Mrs Vilija Klimavičienė welcomed the participants of the conference at the Gabijos Gymnasium.

The gymnasium was established by Vilnius City Municipality in 1986 as a secondary school. In 1993 it was entitled Gabija. Gabija is a modern, continually learning community, open for positive changes and innovations, cherishing its members and fostering their constant need for knowledge and best use of potentials in life.

The mission of the school is to educate independent, open to changes citizens, as well as honest, smart and creative individuals.

There are three schools under one roof: primary, secondary and gymnasium. Every year about one and a half thousand pupils attend the school. The school works in two shifts.

The school participates in different kinds of both state and international projects. Almost every teacher has participated in different projects. There have been several teachers and students exchanges.

Reducing Early School Leaving

Annalisa Cannoni

Annalisa Cannoni is responsible for Early School Leaving Policies in the Directorate-General for Education and Culture , Directorate B (Life Long Learning: policy and programmes), Unit 1 (School Education, Comenius) of the European Commission.

The European Commission shares the key messages of the report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School leaving.

Context

Reducing early school leaving to 10 % by 2020 is one of the headline targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Early school leaving is the result of personal, social, economic, education or family-related reasons. The most disadvantaged groups in society are most affected.

The rate of early school leaving shows shortcomings of the education system in providing necessary support for all; there is insufficient individualized and targeted support, lack of inclusive education and flexible educational pathways.

The recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving (28 June 2011) invites Member States to

- identify the main resaons for early school leaving
- ensure that comprehensive strategies are in place by 2012
- include groups at increased risk
- address Early School Leaving both in genearl education and in VET
- involve other policy sectors.

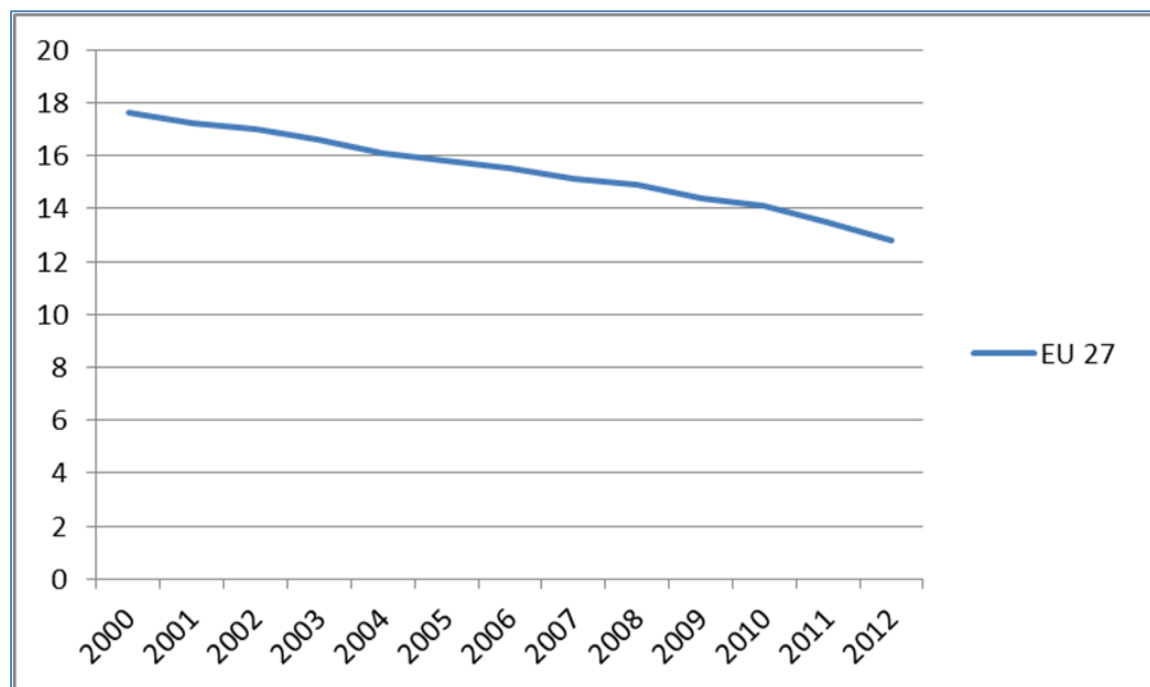The recommendation invites the European Commission to

- monitor developments
- support policy development
- facilitate exchange of experience and good practice
- ensure that EU funding supports strategies
- report on progress.

This graph illustrates the situation in 2012:
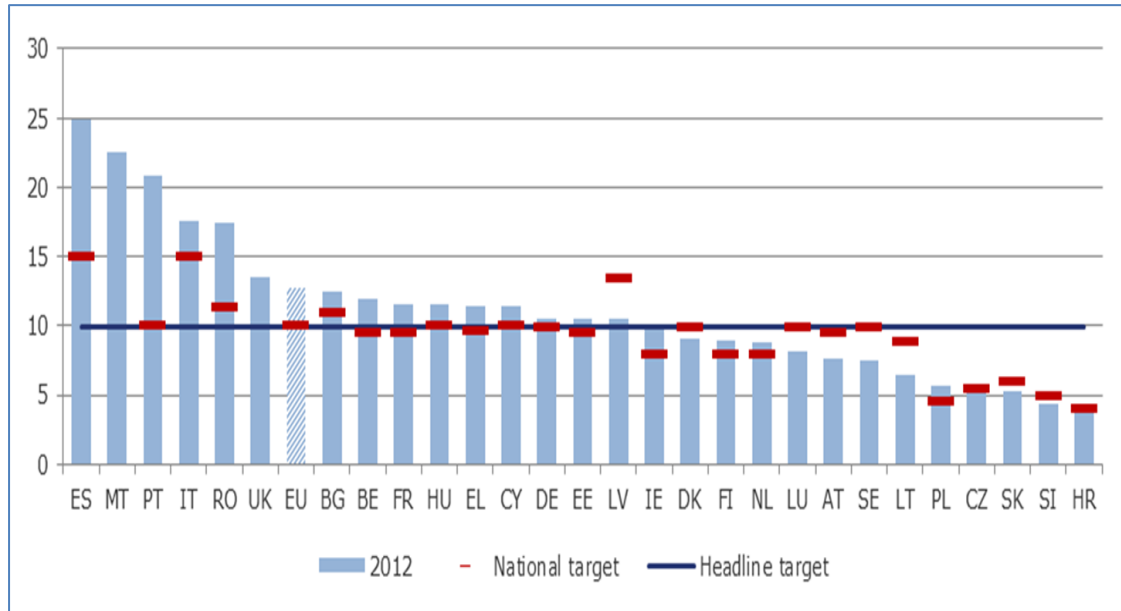
The following graph illustrates the trend from 2000:

The Thematic Working Group on early school leaving

Basic facts

The Thematic Working Group on early school leaving is active from December 2011. Members come from 27 Member States, plus Norway, Turkey and Iceland. National and EU stakeholders are involved. The activities include:

- ¬ 7 meetings in Brussels
- ¬ One conference with stakeholders in March 2012
- ¬ One peer review in March 2013
- ¬ 2 peer learning activities (one in the Netherlands, one in France)
- ¬ Studies on second chance education, cross-sectoral cooperation, cost-benefit analysis and motivation
- ¬ Mapping exercises on data collection, early warning systems, cost-benefit studies on policies to reduce early school leaving

The report

Structure of the report:

- ¬ Key policy messages
- ¬ Introduction
- ¬ Early school leaving in Europe (definition, situation, costs)
- ¬ Conditions for successful policies against early school leaving (governance and cross-sectoral cooperation)
- ¬ Evidence-based policies against early school leaving
- ¬ Prevention, Intervention, Compensation (measures and policies at different levels)
- ¬ Brief conclusion.

Prevention measures include

- ¬ Access to good quality early childhood education and care
- ¬ Relevant and engaging curriculum
- ¬ Avoiding early tracking and class repetition
- ¬ Integration of migrants and minorities
- ¬ Smooth transition between educational levels
- ¬ Well-developed VET system
- ¬ Open access to upper secondary education
- ¬ Involve young people in decision making
- ¬ Teacher education
- ¬ Guidance

Intervention measures include

- ¬ Effective and evidence-based early warning systems
- ¬ Focus on individual needs
- ¬ Whole school approaches

- Extra-curricula and out-of-school activities
- Systemic support frameworks
- Developing staff capacities
- Strong school leadership
- Empowering families and parents
- Involving local communities

Compensation measures include

- Accessibility and relevance of second chance education
- Making a difference
- Commitment and governance
- Stimulating physical learning environment
- Personalized approach
- Flexibility
- Teacher involvement and support
- Links to mainstream education

The key messages

> **Ensure long-term political and financial commitment to reducing ESL and keep it high on the political agenda.**

> **Put children and young people at the centre of all policies aimed at reducing ESL. Ensure their voice is taken into account when developing and implementing such policies.**

> **Develop and implement a sustainable national strategy to reduce ESL, addressing all levels of education and training and encompassing the right mixture of preventative, intervention and compensation measures.**

> **Invest in the knowledge base of ESL, through regular and timely collection of reliable and accurate data and information. Ensure that data and information on ESL is accessible and used effectively in policy development. Ensure monitoring and evaluation of measures steers policy development.**

Ensure policy development and implementation is based on strong, long-term cooperation between national, regional and local authorities and stakeholders and between different policies, for example through establishing a coordinating body or organisation.

Remove obstacles within the school education system that may hinder young people in completing upper secondary education. Ensure smooth transition between different levels of education, the accessibility and availability of high quality education (including early childhood education and care), and the provision of high quality VET.

Support schools to develop conducive and supportive learning environments focusing on the needs of the individual pupils. Promote a curriculum that is relevant and engaging. Promote multi-professional teams in schools to address early school leaving.

Support cooperation between schools, local communities, parents and pupils in school development and in initiatives to reduce ESL. Promote strong commitment of all stakeholders at local levels, including local employers and businesses, to reduce ESL.

Promote the understanding of ESL in initial education and continuous professional development of school staff and especially teachers. Support them in their efforts to provide differentiated learning support for pupils in an inclusive and individualised way.

Strengthen guidance and counselling systems to ensure that young people are aware of the different study options and employment prospects available to them.

Reinforce accessibility to second chance schemes for all young people. Make second chance schemes distinctive and ensure they provide a positive learning experience. Support teachers in second chance in their specific role and needs.

Next steps

The report of the Thematic Working Group will be disseminated. Discussions within a new Thematic Working Group will continue. There will be ar report from the European Commission on the implementation of the Recommendation and on the policy development in the Member States.

Issues which need further reflection include:

- ¬ VET and early school leaving
- ¬ Targeted support for children with migrant/minority background
- ¬ Involvement of parents
- ¬ Support of teachers.

Early School Leavers and labour markets: the Portuguese case in a European context

David Justino

David Justino was appointed in June 2013 as President of the National Council of Education in Portugal.

He is currently Associate Professor in Sociology at Nova University of Lisbon and he is serving as Social Affairs Advisor to the President of the Republic.

He holds a PhD in Sociology, a PG in Historical Economics and Sociology and a BA in Economics.

David Justino has been lecturing since 1976 as Assistant or Guest Professor in different Portuguese Universities. In 1992 he became a permanent Associate Professor at Nova University of Lisbon where he is senior researcher in Sociology. He was the Education Sciences PhD Programme Director at UNL. He was awarded in 1987 with the Gulbenkian Prize for Technology and Science in the field of Social Sciences.

For three years he served as Member of the Parliament in the Assembly of the Republic and from 2002 to 2004 he was Minister of Education.

Prof. David Justino has published in the field of Historical Sociology, particularly in the field of Education.

Assumptions about early school leaving

Early school leaving can be seen both as educational and social problem, but not necessarily a social deviation phenomenon.

The majority of cases of early school leavers are preceded of cumulative school failure, but this failure is sometimes an anticipation and a non-explicit decision of future drop-out: pupils are at school, but are not really attentive, not really

concentrated on learning, because they are already concentrated on the moment they will leave education.

In some cases, early school leaving can be seen as a rational choice between one more year of cumulative school failure and an opportunity to enter the Labour Market and obtain an income, even if it is the case of unskilled labour and a low remunerated job. The long term return of education is always superior to the short term return; the choice is sometimes rational in the short term, but irrational in the long term. What support this difference is the social value of education and the social perception of the return of education. This is an important aspect of the problem of early school leaving.

The case of Portugal

The case of Portugal is interesting, because it has one of the highest rates of early school leavers in Europe; it comes at a third place, after Spain and Malta.

Source: Eurostat (LFS).

… but, at the same time, Portugal has one of the highest returns of education, for men and for women. This is an apparent paradox. In terms of the gain to one extra year of education, Portugal comes at a fourth place, after Ireland, the United Kingdom and West Germany.
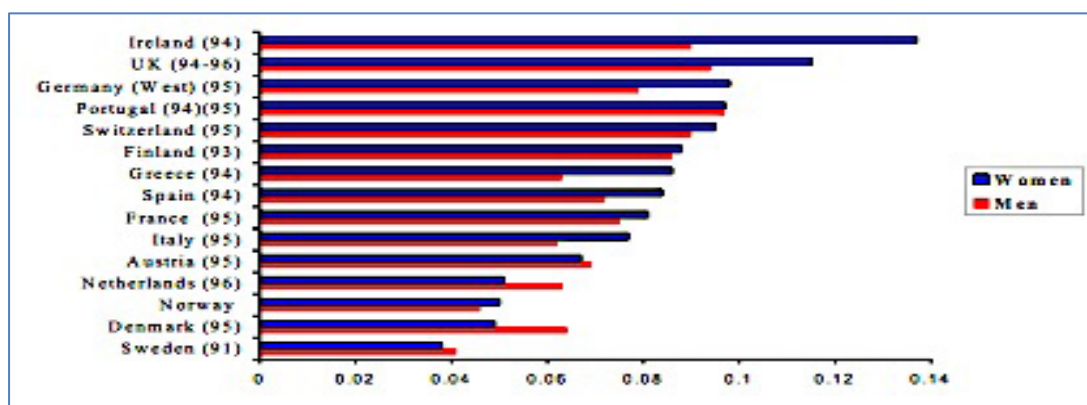
It is crucial to try to understand the reasons explaining this paradox.

In order to do so, different factors are considered: family background, school, community context, education system, as well as capabilities, dispositions and aspirations and the interaction between those factors play a role, in the confrontation with the opportunities and expectations from the Labour Market.
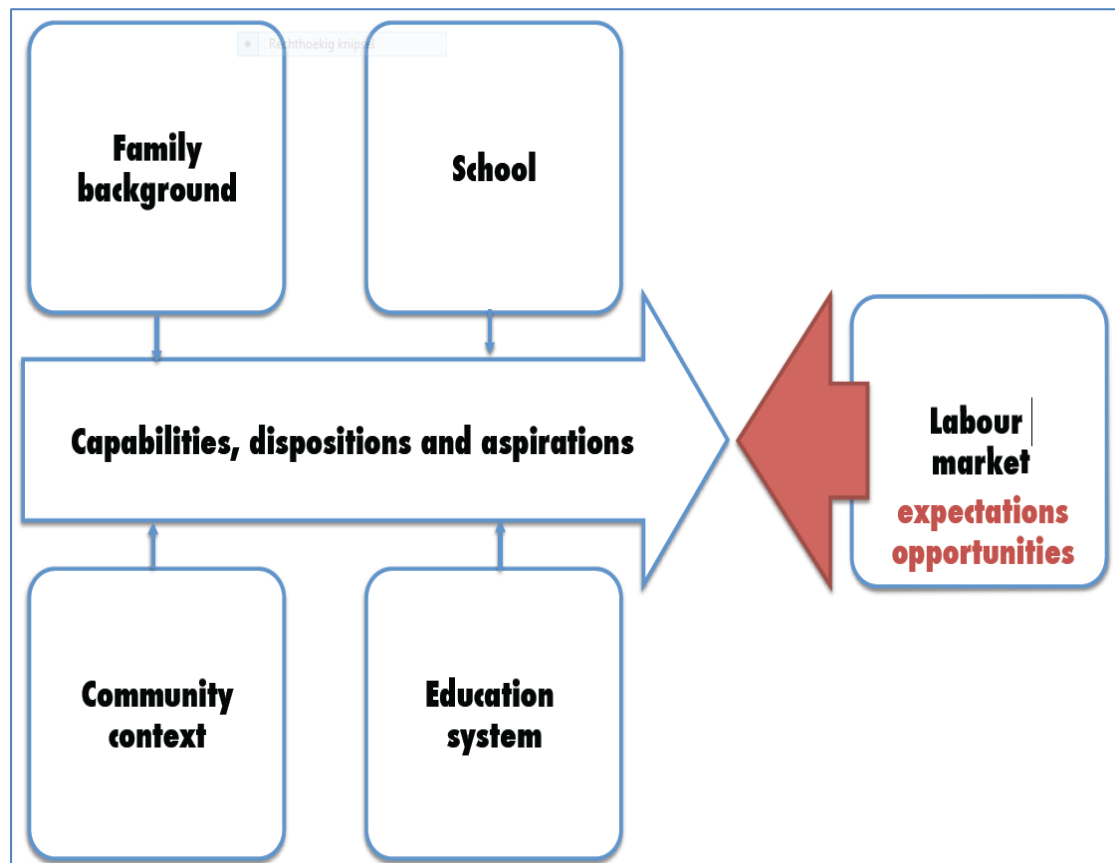
In research, there is agreement on the importance of family background. The community context is sometimes decisive, mainly in minority groups and in rural areas. The education system can be decisive depending on its more inclusive or more selective character.

The present analysis focuses **on the role of the expectations and opportunities at the Labour Market,** and their influence on scholarization in Portugal and in the European Union.

The following graph illustrates the evolution of the number of early school leavers and unemployment rates in Portugal from 1992 until 2012 (data from Eurostat and from CENSUS). According to the CENSUS data, about 63 % of the pupils left school early in 1991. In 2012, the percentage is close to 20 %. This is a sustainable decrease. Indirect indicators tell us that today, the rate is even under 20 %.

One of the ways to try to understand the problem is to compare the evolution of the early school leaving rates with the evolution of the unemployment rates. We see an almost symetric evolution: when there are high rates of unemployment in the Labour Market, pupils stay at school longer. In the Portuguese case, this relation is very sensitive.

If policy makers state that education policies and measures have good results, they only look at the blue curve. If we also look at the red curve, rising unemployment seems to be the price we have to pay for higher scholarization.
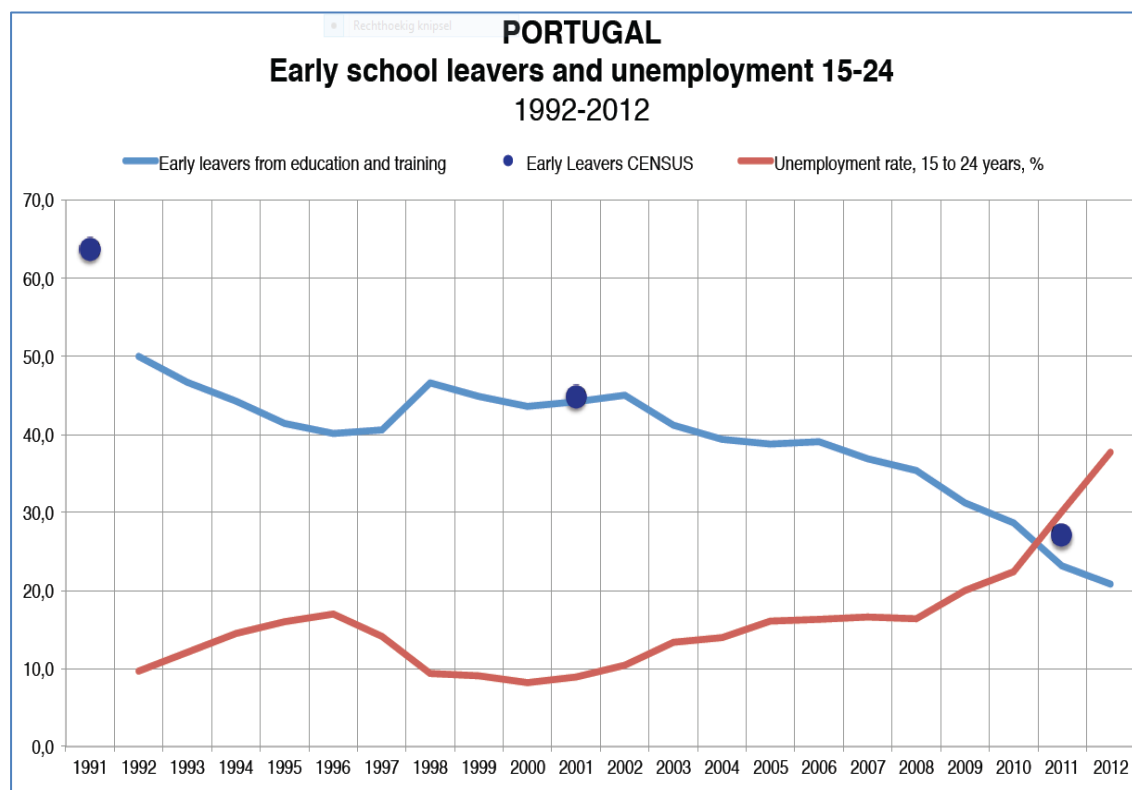
Looking at the distribution of early school leaving in 1991, we see an important concentration in the North of Portugal. This is one of the most dynamic regions, producing textile and shoes and connected to external markets. Traditionnally, in this region, young people enter the Labour Market at the age of 14 – 16 years. There is a close relation with the family approach: most of the enterprises are family enterprises, based at home or close to the home.

Ten years later, in 2001, the situation has changed: the number of early school leavers in the North of Portugal has considerably decreased. In 2011, there is no longer more early school leaving in the North, except for a small concentration in rural areas.

If we see some high rates of Early School Leaving in the South, this can be explained by the influence of the tourist sector, attracting unskilled, low salaried, mostly part time workers, as it is also the case in Malta.
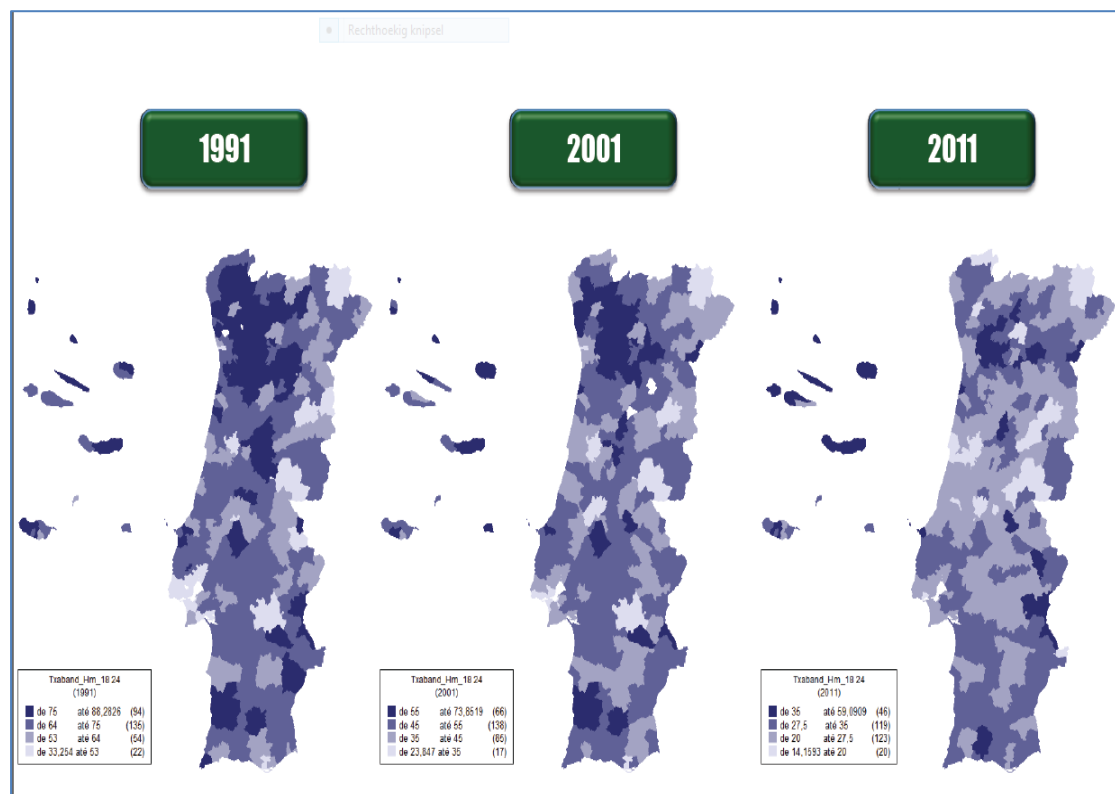
The blue curve in the graph below is the evolution of early school leaving percentages: Portugal has fallen from about 50 % to no more than 20 %. The red line (standard adjustment) shows that the is a high sensitivity between the Labour Market and Early School Leaving in Portugal.
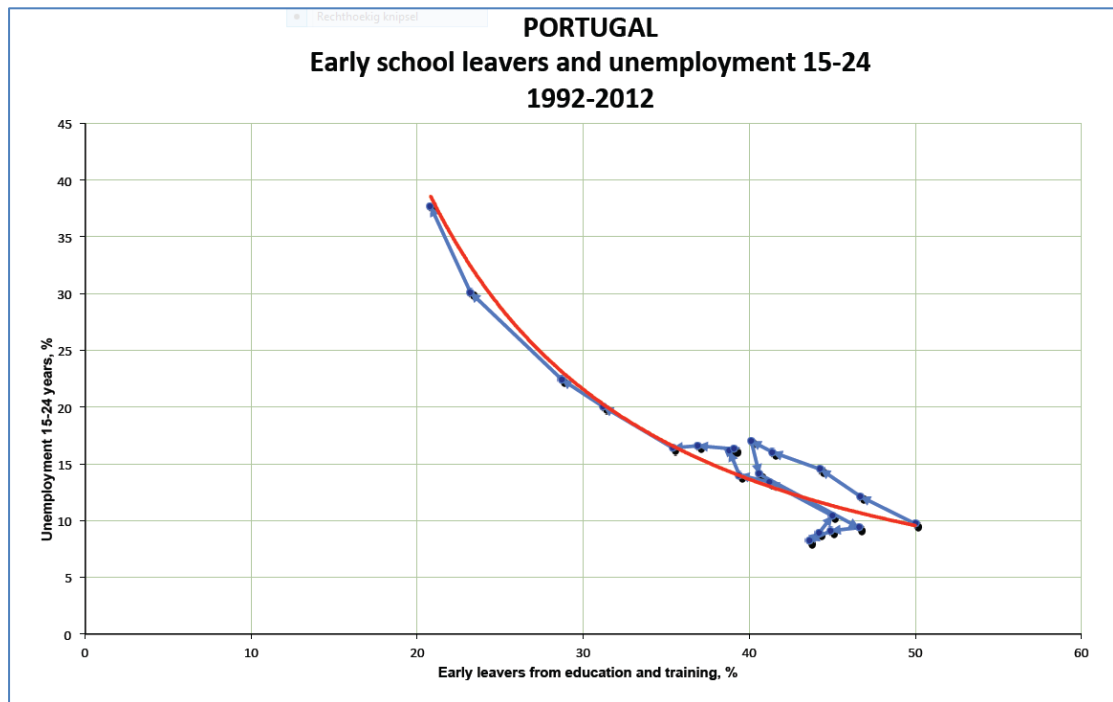
The European context

Spain

The graph shows that, in Spain, there is no relationship between unemployment and early school leaving rates. About 20 years ago, Spain was closer to the EU standard; nowadays, Spain is a country with one of the highest early school leaving rates. Other factors, out of the Labour Market, are explaining the rates of early school leavers.

SPAIN
**Early school leavers and unemployment 15-24
1992-2012**
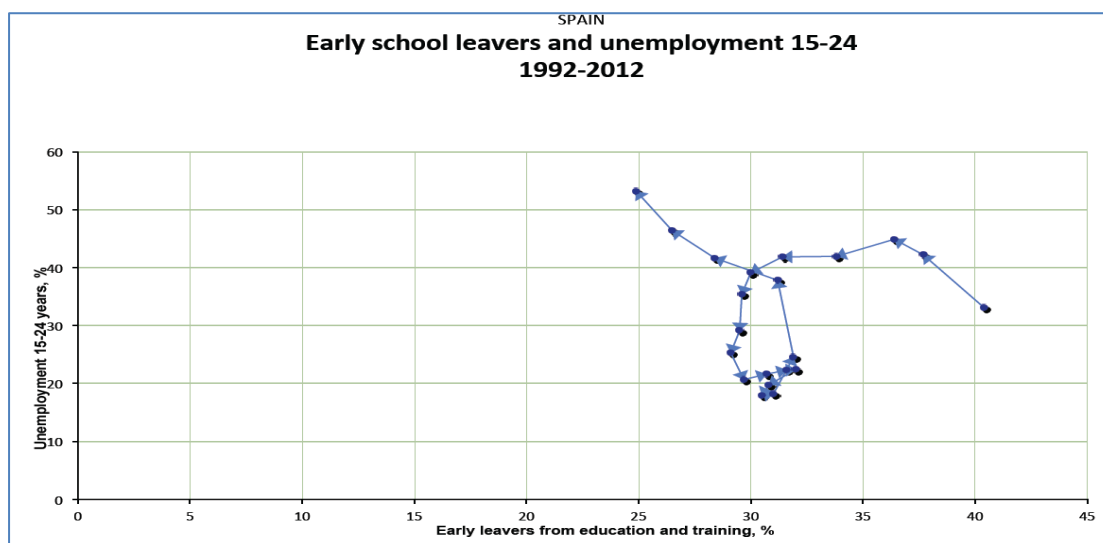
Italy

In Italy, the tendency is different, but the relationship between rates of early school leaving and unemployment is more important. We see a growing unemployment, but the increase of early school leavers rates is not at the same scale. Once a certain rate has been reached, it becomes more difficult to reduce the number of early school leavers, the decrease is becoming slower.
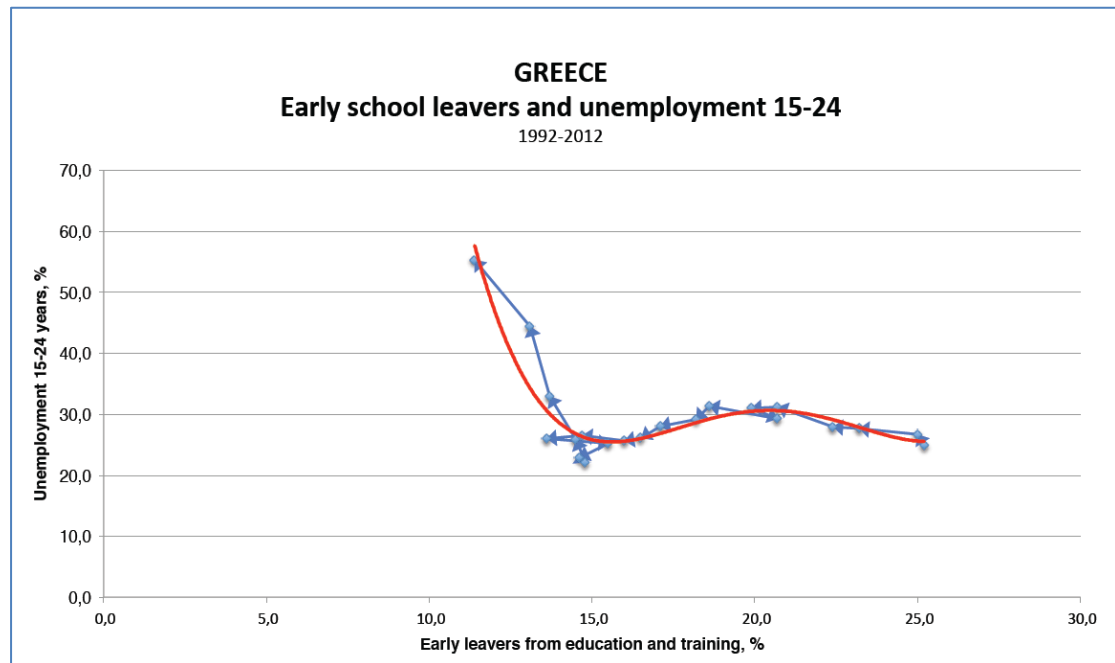
**ITALY
Early school leavers and unemployment 15-24**
1992-2012
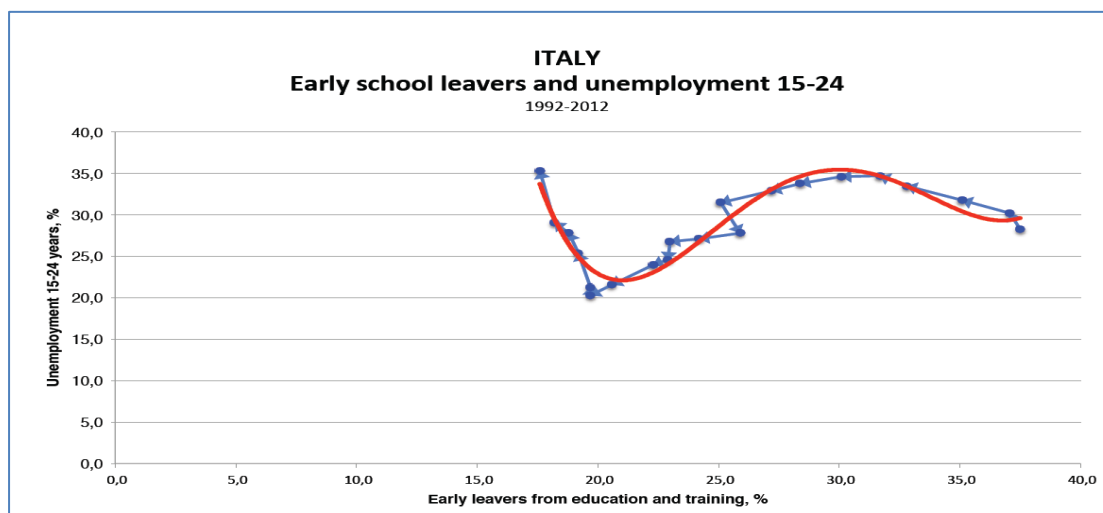
Greece

The graph for Greece shows that, in a way, a country is more likely to have lower early school leaving rates when this country has a high rate of unemployment.

GREECE
**Early school leavers and unemployment 15-24**
1992-2012

Denmark

In Denmark, there is no relationship between the rates of early school leaving, which are very low, and the unemployment rates. This can be explained by the fact that education is more valued than in the countries of the South.

DENMARK
Early school leavers and unemployment 15-24
1992-2012
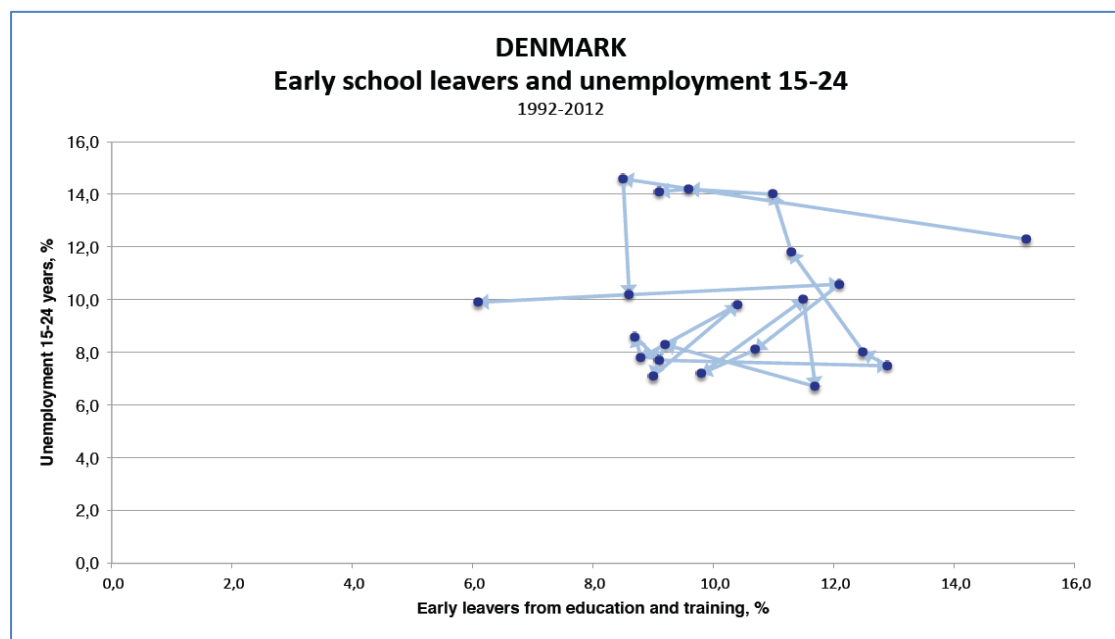
Belgium

In Belgium, there is no clear tendency in the correlation.

BELGIUM
Early school leavers and unemployment 15-24
1992-2012
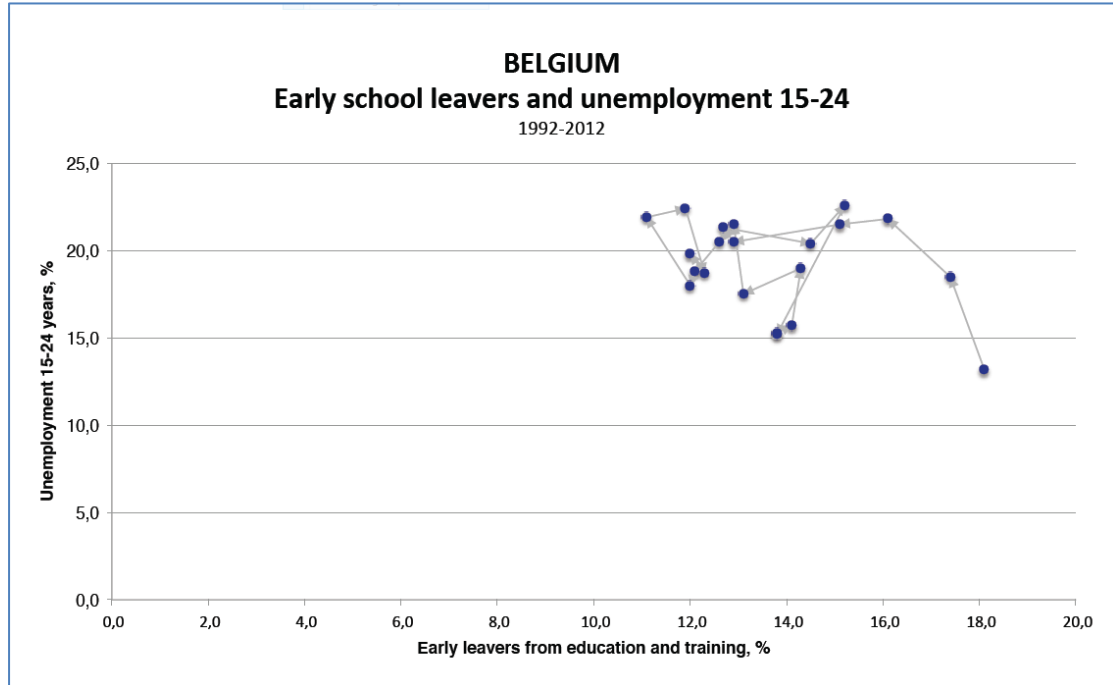
Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the sensitivity between early school leaving and Labour Market is higher, with a cycle pattern in the evolution.

NETHERLANDS
Early school leavers and unemployment 15-24
1992-2012

$y = 0,1977x^2 - 5,0781x + 38,562$
$R^2 = 0,40631$
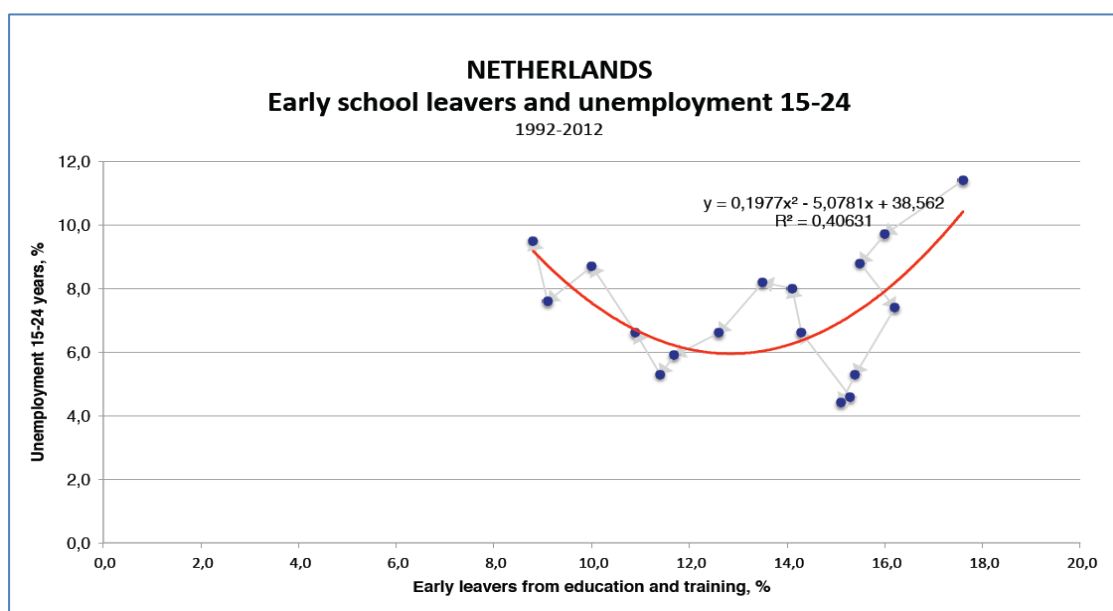
European Union

In the European Union, finally, it appears that the target of 10 % by 2020 will possibly be reached. The EU is reducing it early school leavers rates. At the same time, the EU is showing high rates of youth unemployment.

If the EU will reach the target, this will be mainly thanks to the contribution of the countries of the South, which had very high rates, whilst other EU countries are already under the target level now.
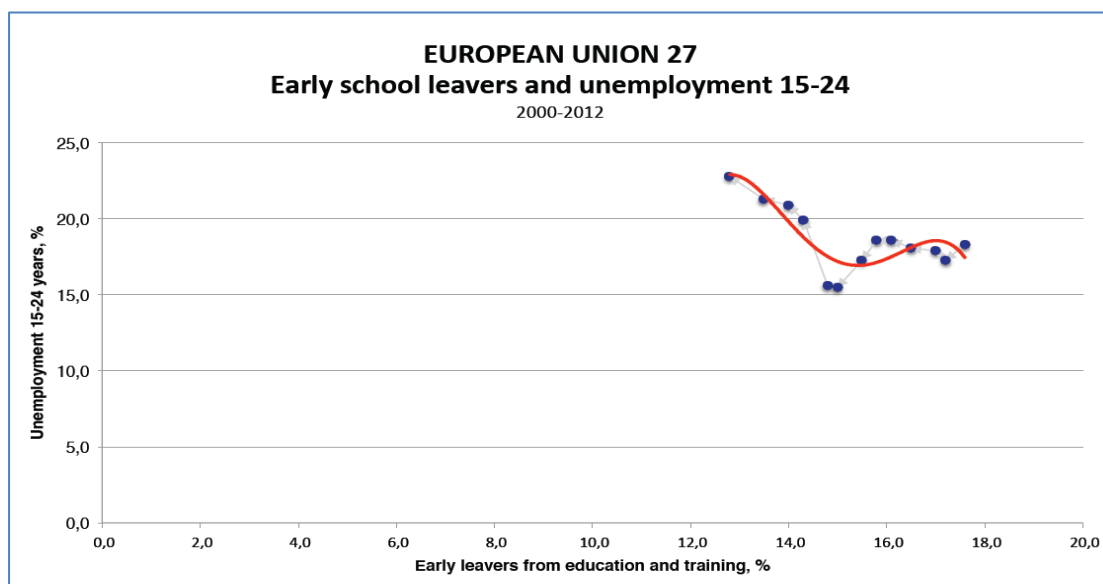
Concluding remarks

Early school leaving is a complex phenomenon that demands a multifactorial approach. Diverse factors are affecting early school leaving.

Different societies tend to combine diversely the main factors, suggesting different strategies from public policies. The way different factors are combined, can explain different early school leaving rates in different countries. The same measures are not possible all over Europe.

We can polarize the diverse factors into two main views of the problem, into two main groups of factors:

- The social background appraoch valuating family, school and community targets. Most policy makers in the EU are targeting these aspects.
- The social expectations and opportunities mainly generated by the Labour Market. It is crucial also to consider this approach.

Both views are complementary, but the second tends to be easier and make policy measures more efficient, regulating transition processes from school to work. The pupil is at the center of the debate on early school leaving. Of course, the pupil's background is crucial. Unfortunately, the social background can only be changed slowly, depending on the macro-economic situation. It is easier, and more efficient, to take measures at the supply side. It's important to mobilize the pupils for targets in the future, and not to concentrate exclusively on their family and community background.

Other evolutions have and will have impact on early school leaving.

- The new generation of mothers and fathers is more scholarized; the number of years of scholarization is about duplicated in 25 years. This will be an important factor in reducing early school leaving.
- Investing in VET and in dual systems can be another way of keeping pupils longer in the school system. It is a crucial precondition though, that pupils acquire the right skills to enter the labour market.
- There will be more mobility, also on the Labour Market. It will be important for pupils to be able to acquire general skills so that they can choose and adapt to a changing situation. At this moment, we don't know which kind of workers will be required later: there is the need for open profiles, with people able to think and to reflect rather than to act. Pupils will need the power to adapt in their future lives.
- The crisis can offer an opportunity to invest in more and better education at tertiary level, not about very skilled or professionalized profiles, but empowering pupils with a large basis of cultural sensitivity about the Labour Market.

Workshop presentations

The workshops offer an opportunity for questioning and interactive reflection among education councils.

The aims of the workshops are

- ¬ Understanding the integration of common European benchmarks into the policy practice. Presentations of cases and debate.
- ¬ Reflection and collaboration on the main levers to influence policies. Input for the conclusions and the final statements of the conference.

The workshops are designed according to the following discussion grid:

1. Profile of early school leavers

What are the main characteristics in the profile of youngster at risk to leave school early/unqualified?

- ¬ Characteristics linked to the profile of the individual e.g. special needs, socio-economic status, cultural background, language proficiency …
- ¬ Characteristics linked to education system inefficiencies e.g. tracking versus mainstreaming, inadequate choices, grade retention, …
- ¬ Characteristics linked to inefficiencies in the labour market and welfare system e.g. introduction in first job, capacities to maintain a job, lack of coaching, …
- ¬ Others?

2. Identification of relevant levers in ESL policies

What are the main levers to use and measures to take to build an effective approach for early school leaving? The cases presented in the workshop can be inspiring for this exercise.

	Prevention	Intervention	Compensation
Pupils			
School			
Systemic level			

3. What are underlying critical factors to evolve from a project approach to a structural and systemic policy ?

TRAIT D'UNION, A SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMME ADAPTED TO STUDENTS

Martine Poirier, with the support of Laurier Fortin and Danyka Therriault

Martine Poirier, Ph. D., Sherbrooke Université, Quebec, is coordinator of 'Trait d'Union', a programme for the prevention of early school leaving in secondary education.[8]

Introduction

The drop-out rate (after five years in high school) in 2012 is 20.1 % in public schools and 23.2 % in Eastern Townships. This is the situation when the *Trait d'Union* programme was started. Existing prevention programmes were infective due to deficiencies in their design and evaluation plan. The *Trait d'Union* solution consists in using intervention strategies adapted to students' characteristics, taking into account all possible risk factors.
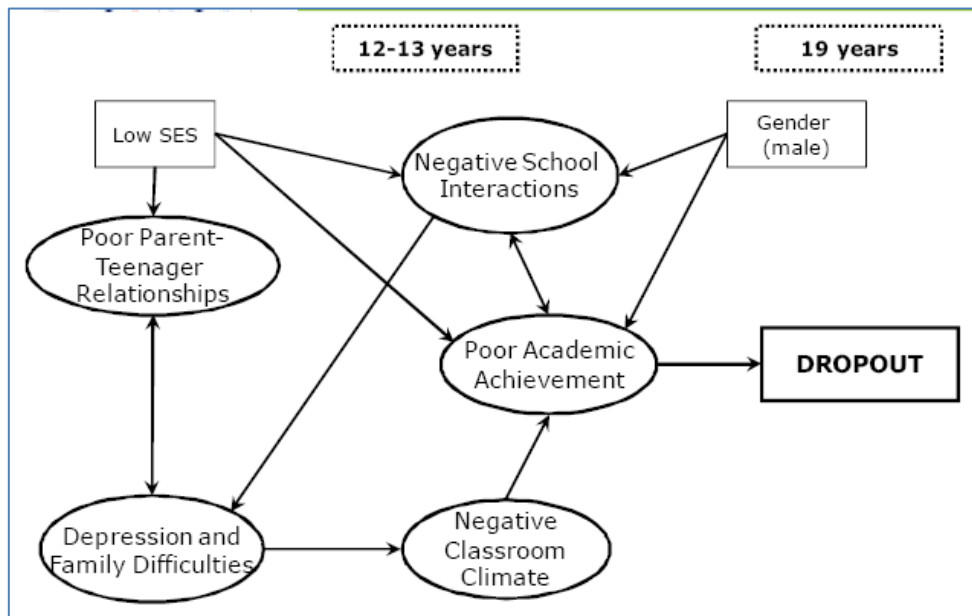
Theoretical model

The theoretical model upon which the programme is based, is a multidimensial model of school drop-out.

In this model, it is clear that the only factor directly linked to drop-out is the poor academic achievement; this factor, however, is influenced by multiple other factors.
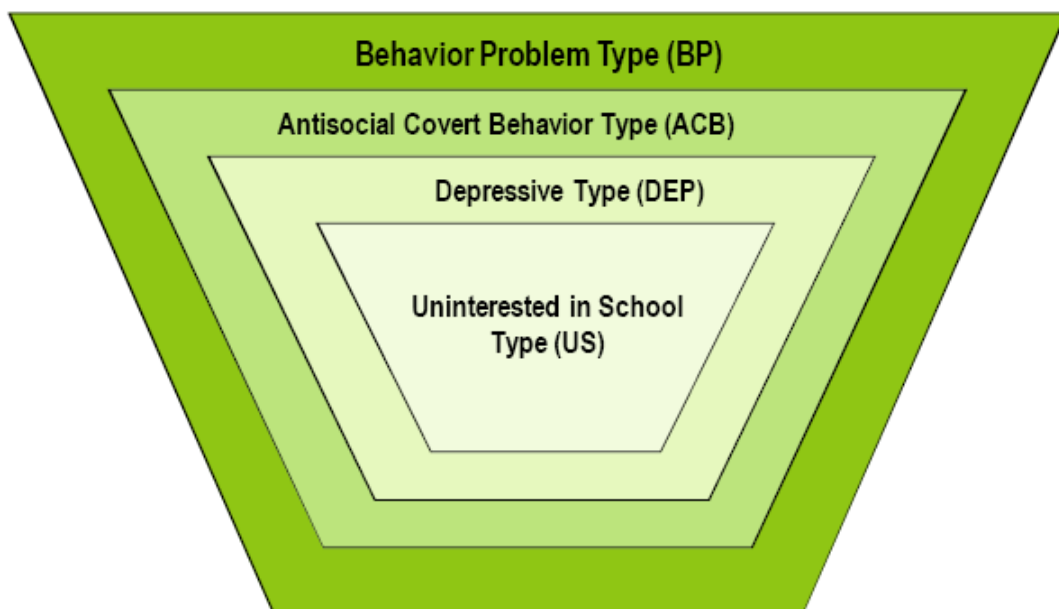
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[8] The school prevention dropout program Trait d'Union can be downloaded for free on the website of the 'Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec' (CTREQ) at the following address: http://www.ctreq.qc.ca/realisation/traitdunion/

Typology of students at risk of dropping out of school

The typology is developed based on the theoretical model supra.

For each type, a number of characteristics are listed, in the personal field, the family field and the classroom field.

The programme addresses all four types of students.

The US type (uninterested in school type)

This type of student shows the lowest drop-out risk.

Characteristics:

- ¬ Personal
  - Very good academic performance
  - Perceived positively by teachers
  - Depressive symptoms are slightly higher than those of the control group
  - Lack of motivation in the class, bored in school
- ¬ Family
  - Good family functioning, but with little emotional support
- ¬ Classroom
  - Perceive little order and organization in the class

The DEP type (depressive type)

This study measured depressive symptoms, not the presence of depressive disorders.

Characteristics:

- ¬ Personal
  - Good academic performance (average grades)
  - Perceived very positively by teachers
  - Very high levels of depressive symptoms (high levels of suicidal thought)
- ¬ Family
  - Highest levels of family problems
- ¬ Classroom
  - Perceive little order and organization in the class

The ACB type (anti-social covert behaviour type)

Characteristics:

- ¬ Personal
  - Good academic performance (slightly below the average)
  - Perceived positively by teachers
  - Covert antisocial behaviour
  - High levels of depressive symptoms (borderline of clinical range)
- ¬ Family
  - Many familial problems
- ¬ Classroom
  - Perceive little order and organization in the class

The BP type (behaviour problems type)

This is the type of students everybody thinks about when talking about students at risk of early school leaving.

This study measured behaviour problems, not the presence of behaviour disorders.

Characteristics:

- ¬ Personal
  - Very low academic performance
  - Perceived by teachers as having many behaviour problems
  - Highest levels of delinquency
  - High levels of depressive symptoms
- ¬ Family
  - Many familial problems, expecially with expression, organization and emotional support
- ¬ Classroom
  - Perceive little order and organization in the class

The programme

Philosophy

The philosophy of the programme is based on the establishment of a significant relationship between the student and the mentor. The multidimensional programme is proactive and positive, and implies school auxiliary resources.

Goals

The goals are very broad, because students are at risk for different reasons. Related to the specific student's profile, goals are selected.

The base for all the goals is at the center: establish a significant relationship with an adult. Everybody will have to work towards this goal.

The 'Trait' component

School drop-out indicators are regularly verified with the **Trait Monitoring Sheet**, integrated in the ICT-system of the school.

This information is shared with the student, his parents and educators.

The 'Union' component

This is the most important component of the programme. The student and the mentor meet once every two weeks. The frequency of the meetings may increase if the student's situation deteriorates. Each meeting takes ideally 30 to 45 minutes, and at least 20 minutes: time is necessary for establishing a good relationship with the student. Meetings can take place in a formal (classroom, office,…) or in an informal (student café, gym, …) setting, during classroom or study moments or during free time.

Information about the meetings is recorded in the **Union Monitoring Sheet**.

UNION MONITORING SHEET					
Student: Simon	Monitor: Joëlle				
CONTACT DESCRIPTION (specify a single contact by column)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Date	Nov. 23	Dec. 14	Dec. 16	Jan. 12	Jan. 26
Lenght	20	25	20	10	15
WITH? (check those present at the contact)					
Trait d'Union student	✔	✔		✔	✔
Parent			✔		
Other teacher					✔
Other school educator (describe) : _____					
Other (describe) : _____					
WHAT (check all that apply)					
Develop the **monitor-student relationship**	✔	✔			
Improve student **relationship** with other adults of the school					
Improve student **academic achievement** (school success, participation in class, school work, exams, organisation...)					✔
Decrease student **absenteeism** and school tardiness					
Improve student **behavior at school** (decrease suspensions, detention, behavior referrals, etc.)				✔	✔
Foster student **self-knowledge**, his interests and strengths					
Develop student awareness of his **career plans** (discussions, remind the importance of having a degree, internship, reference...)					
Support student with **personal problems** solving (listen, objectify, provide solutions, lead to a professional)					
Support student with **friends** or **partner** problems solving (listen, objectify, provide solutions, lead to a professional)					
Support student with **familial** problems solving (listen, objectify, provide solutions, lead to a professional)					
Make a **return** with the student on the goal and strategies					
Other (describe) : _____ Explain the program _____			✔		

Target students

The target group consists of students at risk for school drop-out. In order to identify those students, all students are asked, in October, to complete the 'School Drop-out Screening Software' (SDSS). Students are prioritized on the basis of the severity of their school drop-out risk (SDSS as well as other indicators). Not every student at riks can have a mentor. Before the programme is started, the student interests are verified.

Mentor

A mentor can be a teacher or any other adult interested in school success and persistence of students. A number of attitudes are required:

- ¬ Persistence
- ¬ The belief that all students have capacities and that they can succeed according to their potential
- ¬ Willingness to work closely with significant people in the student's life
- ¬ Good communication and problem-solving skills
- ¬ Rigor, consistency and adhering to the intervention.

Coordinator

The coordinator is a professional of auxiliary school services who wants to take responsibility for leading and promoting the project.

He coordinates the student evaluation with the SDSS and the choice of the *Trait d'Union* students. He supervises the pairings between students and mentors. He prepares, supervises and trains the mentors; he supports them in the case of challenging situations. He manages issues related to the programme with the school principal.

Training and supervision

Before the implementation, the programme is presented. This training consists of 1h30 of theoretical training, 1h30 of practical training, and 1h00 of ongoing training. During the implementation, supervision is provided in order to support competency and commitment and to ensure fidelity: 3 individual supervisions (20 minutes per student) and 3 group supervisions (75 minutes).

Evaluation

A pilote evaluation took place after the first year of the programme. What can be observed now, after five years?

These are the samples for the school years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011:

In 2009-2010, 4 schools have been addressed, involving 137 mentors (120 teachers and 18 professionals such as psycho-educators and psychologists) and 333 students from grade 7 to grade 10 (183 boys, 150 girls).

In 2010-2011, 4 schools have been addressed, involving 107 mentors (91 teachers and 14 professionals) and 224 students from grade 7 to grade 11 (130 boys, 94 girls).

Satisfaction questionnaires have been developed for students (6 items on a 10-point Likert scale and 5 items yes/no) and for mentors (31 items on a 10-point Likert scale). During the summer break, the tools have been improved according to comments by the mentors.

An overall improvement of the tools, the collaboration with the partners, the participation and satisfaction of the students, and the competency of the mentors was demonstrated.

Outcomes

The following graph shows that school drop-out risk decreased for the students of the intervention group, whilst there has been an increase for students of the non-intervention group. However, at the end, the students of the intervention group were still more at risk.
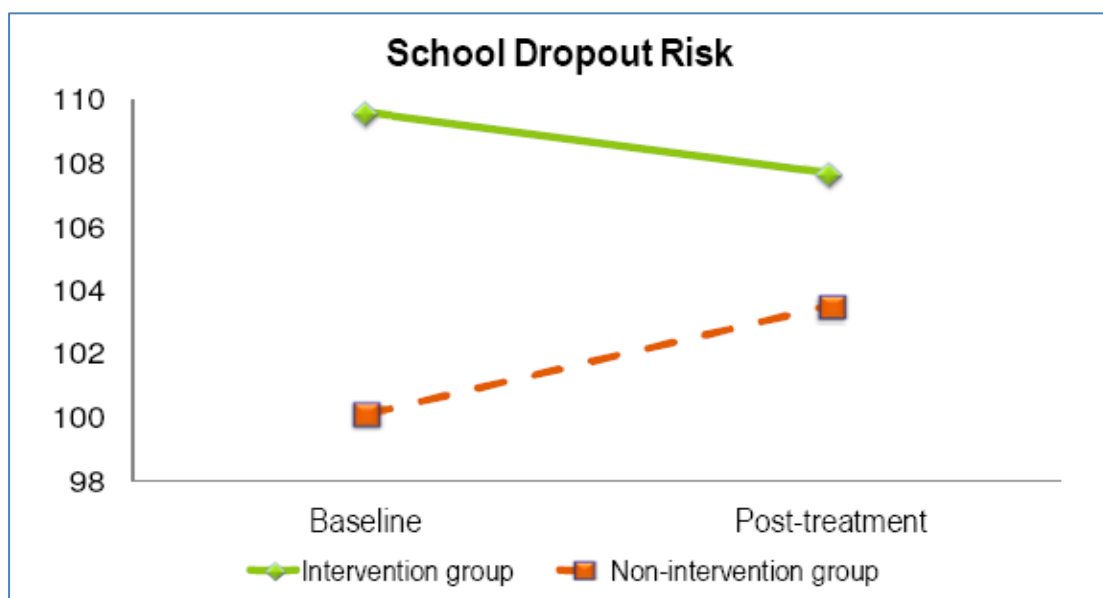
The next graph shows that the academic achievement of the non-intervention group remains higher. However, whilst the students from the intervention group scored below 60 % in the beginning, they scored higher than 60 % after the intervention and during the follow-up.
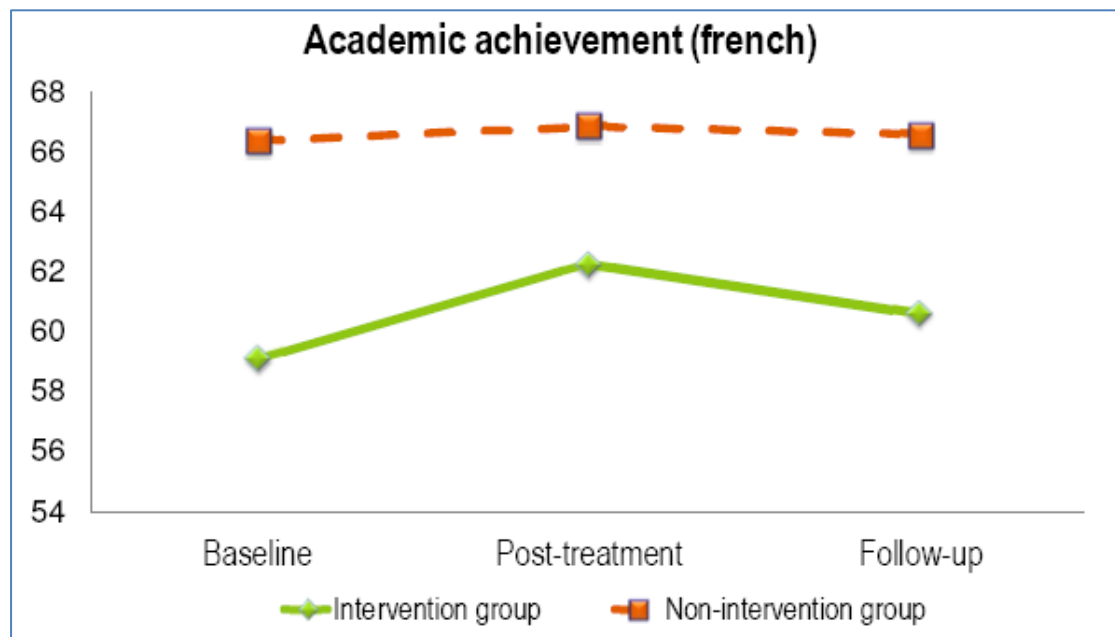
In terms of classroom environment, there is a significant increase for students from the intervention group:

At the baseline, *Trait d'Union* students presented a higher risk than control students, but their risk level was equal post treatment for school factors (perception of school experience)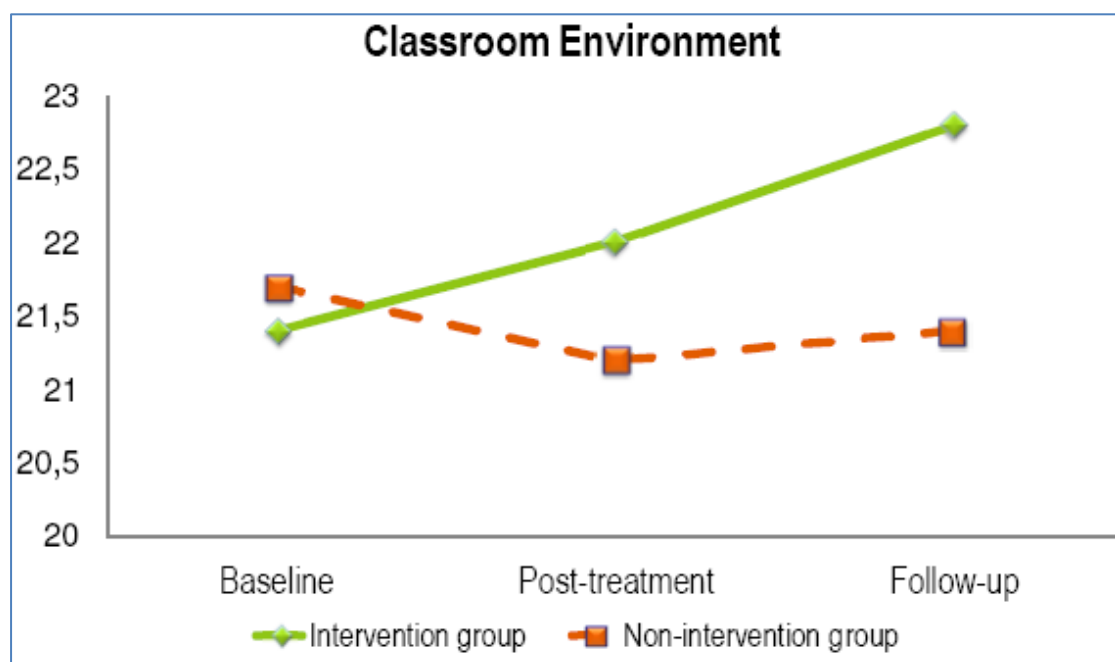, for family factors (parental involvement, family functioning) and personal factors (anxiety/depression, withdrawal/depression, attention problems, aggressive behaviour and social problems).

In brief, participation at the *Trait d'Union* programme contributed to a decrease in many student risk factors. It promotes the students' school persistence and their academic success.

Conclusion

Some quotes by Trait d'Union students:

"Thank you for opening my eyes and making me understand how school is important."

"The program helped me to come to school each day, to each class."

"It is so interesting to see how my mentor is interested in me. I am not only one more student."

"I worked hard on myself with my mentor. Thanks, it changed my life."

"Thank you for helping me get through high school."

THE LONG WAY FROM A STRATEGY ON EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING TO SUSTAINABLE CHANGES IN SCHOOLS

Andrea Fraundorfer

Andrea Fraundorfer is head of the unit for tackling early school leaving in the department for psychology and educational counseling at the Ministry for Education, Arts & Culture (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur; Verhinderung frühzeitigen Schul- und Ausbildungsabbruchs; Begabungs- und Begabtenförderung).

bm:uk Bundesministerium für
Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur

The presentation is divided into two parts:

  ¬ Part I: Current situation in Austria
  ¬ Part II: The long road to making schools a better place for
       students at risk

Current situation in Austria

Terminology revisited: Reflecting and overcoming the individual deficit perspective for the benefit of a broader perspective

Early school leaving refers toyoung people leaving education and training before the completion of upper secondary school or vocational training with a certificate.

If we want to tackle early school leaving not only focusing on the person and his certificate, we need to shift to the broader approach of school failure. **School Failure** corresponds to a broader and systemic perspective (OECD: "Equity and Quality in Education. Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools", 2012, p. 18):

> "From a systematic perspective, school failure occurs when an education system fails to provide fair and inclusive education services that lead to enriching student learning. At the school level, school failure can be defined as the incapacity of a school to provide fair and inclusive education and an adequate environment for students to achieve outcomes worthy of their effort and ability. From an individual perspective, school failure can be defined as the failure of a student to obtain a minimum level of knowledge and skills, which can at the extreme level lead to dropping out of school."

It is crucial to consider as well the level of the pupil, the school, the system.

Another word to address a group of young people is **NEET:** young people, not in education, employment and training. This perspective combines labour market &

educational monitoring. And there are other terms: are drop-outs not rather to be called pushed outs? The education system in Austria is rather exclusive and includes features that push out young people.

Data on Early School Leaving in Austria
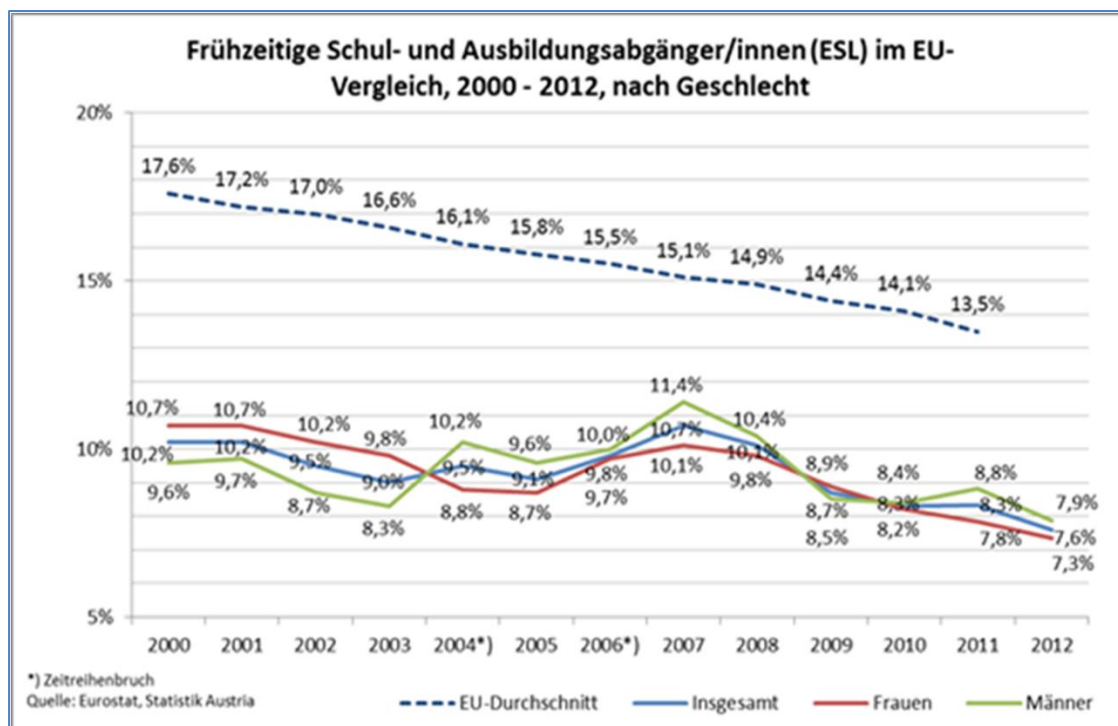
The Early School Leaving rate in Austria in 2012 is 7,6 %, with a 7,9 % for boys and a 7.3 % for girls. This percentage is quite good, but then again not so good, given the fact that Austria is a wealthy country with a well functioning economy.

It is also important to raise the question whether having acquired a certificate corresponds to having acquired competences. The numbers below show that there is a gap between both, and raised the discours on 'poverty in certificates and competences' (In German: Zertifikats- und Kampetenzarmut = 'Bildungsarmut', Juttal Allmendiner/Stephan Leibfried).

	ESL 2012	Students at risk – PISA / literacy
Share p.a.	7,6 %	27,5 %
Number of students	7.000	25.000

Source: Mario Steiner, IHS, 2013

How to tackle this gap? What are the underlying causes? In the **strategic framework to prevent early school leaving and reduce drop-out rates in education and training**, measures are being taken in Austria at the school level and at steering level, in the field of prevention, intervention and compensation.

Quality measures in the school system:

- ¬ Nationwide introduction of the New Secondary School, which tries to implement new innovative ways of learning and teaching, and improved career guidance systems
- ¬ Extension of all-day supervision
- ¬ Strengthening of qualidy management (School Quality in General Education and the Quality Initiative in Vocational Education)
- ¬ Development of schools and teaching
- ¬ Individualization as a pedagogic paradigm
- ¬ Reduction of class sizes

Measures at the steering level:

- ¬ Interministerial and interprofessional cooperation
- ¬ Networking and coordination of measures
- ¬ Awareness-raising among all actors and stakeholders
- ¬ Professionalization (teachers, advisors)
- ¬ Research-based stearing
- ¬ Monitoring of the implementation of the strategy

Examples of measures in the field of prevention:

- ¬ The realization of consistent individualization (within the framework of the School Quality in General Education and the Quality Initiative in Vocational Education)
- ¬ Reduction of the number of those repeating a school year via a course system at Secondary Stage II
- ¬ Measures taken within the framework of the IBOBB campaign (Information, advice and guidance for education and careers)
- ¬ Language support (first and second language)
- ¬ Location-specific support concepts, early warning systems and remedial teaching
- ¬ Pilot schemes for school social work

Examples of measures in the field of intervention:

- ¬ Intervention via school counsellors and school psychologists (need for more resources)
- ¬ Case management within the framework of coaching for young people and apprentices
- ¬ Measures within ESF projects
- ¬ Transitional stage for pupils at intermediate and higher vocational schools
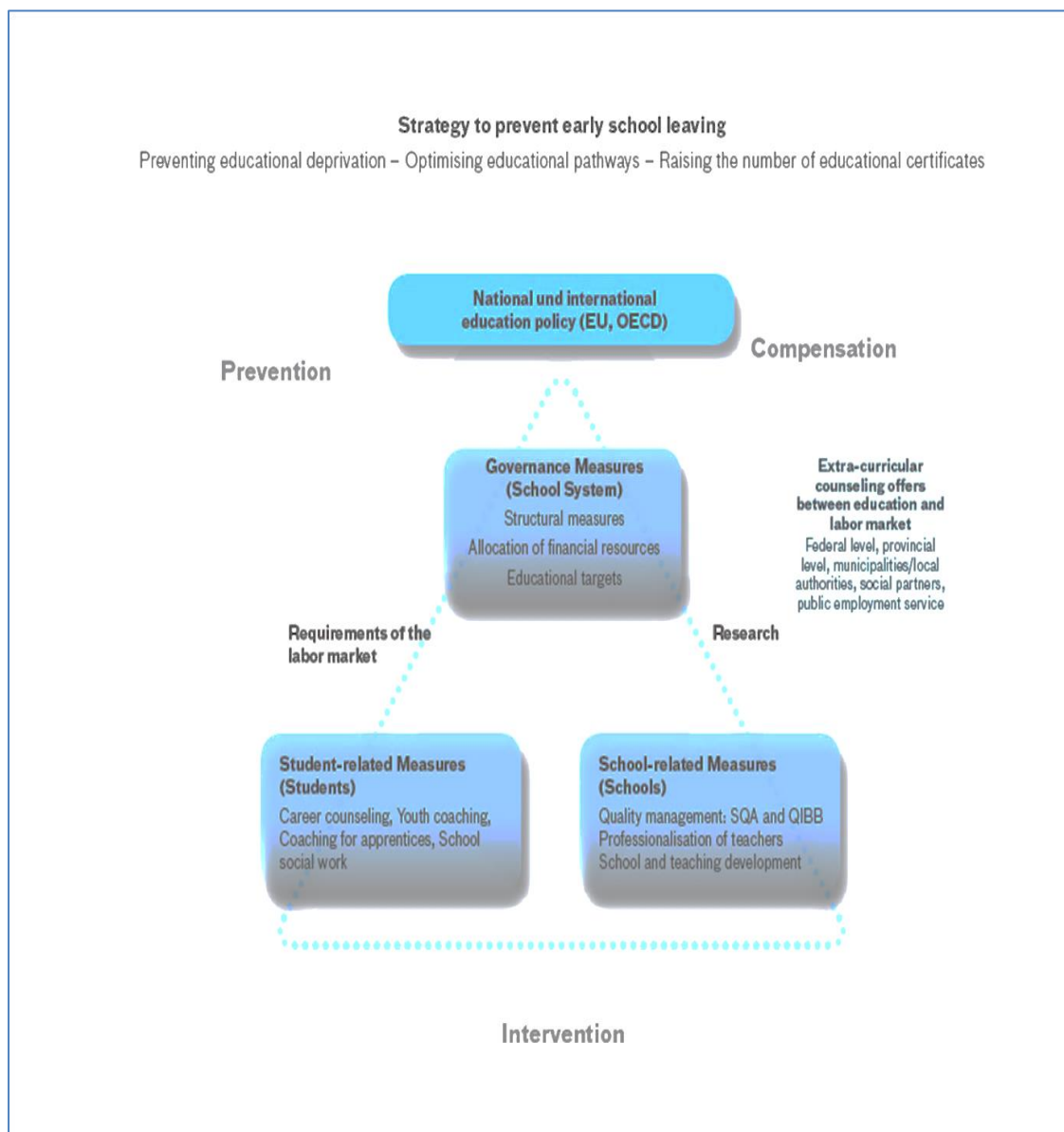- ¬ The Integrated Vocational Training programme (IBA)

    ¬   Staged plan to ensure school attendance and combat absenteeism

Examples of measures in the field of compensation:

    ¬   Adult education initiative: basic education and taking the school leaving examination later in life
    ¬   The training guarantee of the federal government and supra-company training
    ¬   Production schools (linked closely to companies)
    ¬   The Pilot schem 'Du kannst was' (= 'You've got abilities') – vocational qualifications via the recognition of competences acquired in informal and non-formal settings

The following triangle visualizes the strategy to prevent early school leaving:

Strategy to prevent early school leaving
Preventing educational deprivation – Optimising educational pathways – Raising the number of educational certificates

National und international education policy (EU, OECD)

Prevention   Compensation

Governance Measures (School System)
Structural measures
Allocation of financial resources
Educational targets

Extra-curricular counseling offers between education and labor market
Federal level, provincial level, municipalities/local authorities, social partners, public employment service

Requirements of the labor market   Research

Student-related Measures (Students)
Career counseling, Youth coaching, Coaching for apprentices, School social work

School-related Measures (Schools)
Quality management: SQA and QIBB
Professionalisation of teachers
School and teaching development

Intervention

Youth Coaching – a targeted measure to deal with students at risk

The Youth Coaching is a jointly-run project between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMASK) and the Ministry of Education, funded by BMASK. The concept has been developed by the Federal Social Service ("Bundessozialamt"); different organizations provide Youth Coaching in schools and counselling centres.

Pilot projects run in Vienna and Styria (C'mon 14, move on); a former measure "Clearing" was designed for students with special needs.

Youth Coaching offers counselling on educational and vocational pathways for students at risk and helps them make self-determined career decisions, with NEET's as one of the target groups. All students are entitled to support, not only NEET's.

Individual support and assistance is provided until integration into (initial vocational) training or the labour market.

How does Youth Coaching Work? Teachers identify students at risk in their class, from the 9th grade on. Those students work with a youth coach. There are about 400 youth coaches nationwide. The stage model consists of four consecutive stages and is based on a case management appraoch with face to face meetings.

Stage 1 takes about 3 service hours and includes getting to know each other, general information on Youth Coaching, determining whether further support form Youth Coaching is needed, referral to other institutions where appropriate.

Stage 2 takes approximately 8 service hours within three months. It includes a clarification of the situation and agreement on the objectives, vocational guidance and support in decision making, targeted placement and professional statement.

Stage 3 takes approximately 30 service hours within 12 months. It includes agreement on objectives, intensive support through case management, analysis of strengths and weaknesses, profile of personal skills and aptitudes. A report includes a personal development plan.

This leads to retention or reintroduction into the educational system, transition into the vocational training system of the labour market. Further assistance is provided for young people with disabilities and/or former special education needs through youth employment assistance where required.

The new measure for 2014 '**Fit for training'** supports the most disadvantaged youth identified by youth coaches. It is a targeted follow-up measure for youngsters who fail in apprenticeships and training, etc., provided by the Federal Social Service and funded by Ministry of Social Affairs. It foresees one-year intensive customized training and empowerment, compensation for missing skills & poor competences, tailor-made "after-maturing" (dt. „Nachreifung") with a focus on migrant youth with low SES and NEET.

The long road to making schools a better place for students at risk

What are the challenges faced when trying to put the strategy into practice? Related to the problem of early school leaving, a number of challenges can be identified, at structural/systemic level and at pedagogical level. The list below is not exhaustive.

Challenges at system level

Is it good to draw a bigger picture in education? There is a tension between education and formation on the one hand and competences, qualifications and employability on the other hand.

The system is selective, and might reinforce the existing inequalities. Knowledge is missing about the interrelation between socio-economic status and early school leaving, and about concrete ways of breaking the cycle.

How to bring different sectors into alignment? Governance is fragmented, as well as responsibilities and funding. Funding is often short term.

How to make schools accountable without controlling the staff and the budget? How to realize the paradigm shift? Does school autonomy need to be extended? With clear aims? And more responsibility for head teachers?

Challenges at school level

When implementing and monitoring quality initiatives, there is a tension between the focus on outcomes and customized, personalized learning.

Competence gaps have to be identified and instruction has to be improved. Is there enough knowledge about the different pathways for effective learning and teaching?

How to implement the whole school approaches to early school leaving?

How to deal with linguistic diversity and late migrant arrivers?

How to change professional attitudes and patterns?

What about the accountability of teachers and schools?

Different professionals have to cooperate more and better.

Additional resources and staff are needed (index-based funding?).

There is need for conducive, supportive learning environments.

Gap between (research) findings and school practice

Everybody seems to know what to do to bring change, but, in Austria, the school structures make sure that change is happening very slowly. In order to brigde the gap between the (research) findings and the practice, a number of critical factors are identified:

- Appropriate and early support is crucial, with a focus on early childhood education and care. In Austria, there is only one compulsory year of Kindergarten.
- Diagnostic competences of teachers are important and have to be enhanced. However, teacher training is Austria already seems to be overburdened.
- Classroom atmosphere, school culture and school leadership matter.
- Teachers' attitudes and learning approaches are critical.
- Support for teachers and students is crucial (social work, counseling, support structures, burn-out prevention for teachers). In Austria, the teaching workforce is relatively old, and often suffers from burn-out.
- Positive discrimination for disadvantaged students and index-based funding for disadvantaged schools is needed. This is not the case yet in Austria.
- Improvements in teaching and learning environments and a broad scope of different teaching and learning methods.

The whole-school approaches and quality initiatives in schools

The 'whole-school approach' and quality initiatives are an attempt to put the findings above into the classroom practice. The school quality circle (PLAN – DO – CHECK –ACT) is vital. Schools start with an analysis of the current situation: the number of early school leavers and the possible causes. Objectives to tackle early school leaving are defined, as well as indicators of success. Short-term and long-term measures are taken, such as differentiated instruction, additional language support, remedial programmes, case management and counselling, parental involvment, tutoring and mentoring, transitional year,..

After the evaluation of success and failure, the objectives and measures are rephrased and redefined. This quality circle is combined with early detection and

targeted support.[9] Vocational schools in Austria are used to work with this quality circle; this is much less the case for general education.

Outlook

We can't turn schools around within a short period of time **but** we can initiate and support change in school culture and professional attitudes to combat early school leaving and to break the cycle of disadvantage.

There are no recipes for bringing about change **but** we can make schools and teachers sensitive to the mechanisms of disadvantage and the interrelation between SES and early school leaving through quality initiatives and professional development.

Early school leaving will continue at a certain level **but** we can reduce it to a minimum and keep the future (and educational systems) open for young people by means of joint and coordinated efforts, tailor-made programmes and a strong commitment on the part of the people in charge.

What we need for sustainable change is …

- ¬ to overcome the individual deficit perspective in favour of a wider social inequalities perspective which avoids 'blaming the victim' and takes into account the individual living circumstances of young people
- ¬ a social justice approach which avoids to blame the victim and a new paradigm in education that confronts and counteracts disadvantage and the marginalization of young people and reflects discriminatory school practices at all levels
- ¬ to improve awareness & responsibility at all levels.

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[9] www.stop-dropout.at

MEASURES TO TACKLE EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN FLANDERS

Koen Stassen

Koen Stassen (°1976) works for the Flemish Education Council since 2006. He is mainly responsible for policy advice on the transition between education and labour market: implementation of the qualifications framework, initial vocational education, dual system, associate degree, workplace learning, …. He is a member of the taskforce of the Flemish government that is responsible for tackling early school leaving. Before he started working for the Flemish Education Council, he worked as a research fellow for the Centre for Sociology of Education at the University of Leuven.

Early school leaving in Flanders

The context

Early School Leaving is high on the policy agenda in Flanders because of several reasons.

  ¬   The EU-level

One of the headline targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy is to reduce the number of early school leavers to maximum 10 % by 2020. In 2011, the EU issued Council Recommendations on policies to reduce Early School Leaving.

  ¬   The regional level (Flanders)

The target of the Flemish 'PACT 2020', agreed on by the governement and the social partners, is to reduce the number of early school leavers to maximum 4.3 %. Flemish policy makers received recommendations from the Vlor (the Flemish Education Council) representing the educational stakeholders and the SERV (the socio-economic Council) representing the socio-economic partners.

At the same time, there are several plans in Flanders related to the early school leaving challenge:

- There is a major plan for the reform of secundary education.
- The dual system, reformed in 2009, is now under review.
- The organization of adult education is under review.

- Several policy initatives address early school leaving from the perspective of guidance

¬ The federal level (Belgium)

At the federal level measures are taken to offer traineeships for early school leavers.

The data

The following chart illustrates the evolution of the early school leaving rates in Flanders, according to the EU LFS-indicator (Labour Force Survey). According to these data, Flanders is really doing well, with a percentage of 8,7 % of early school leavers, with however a considerable difference between the rates for male and for female early school leavers.
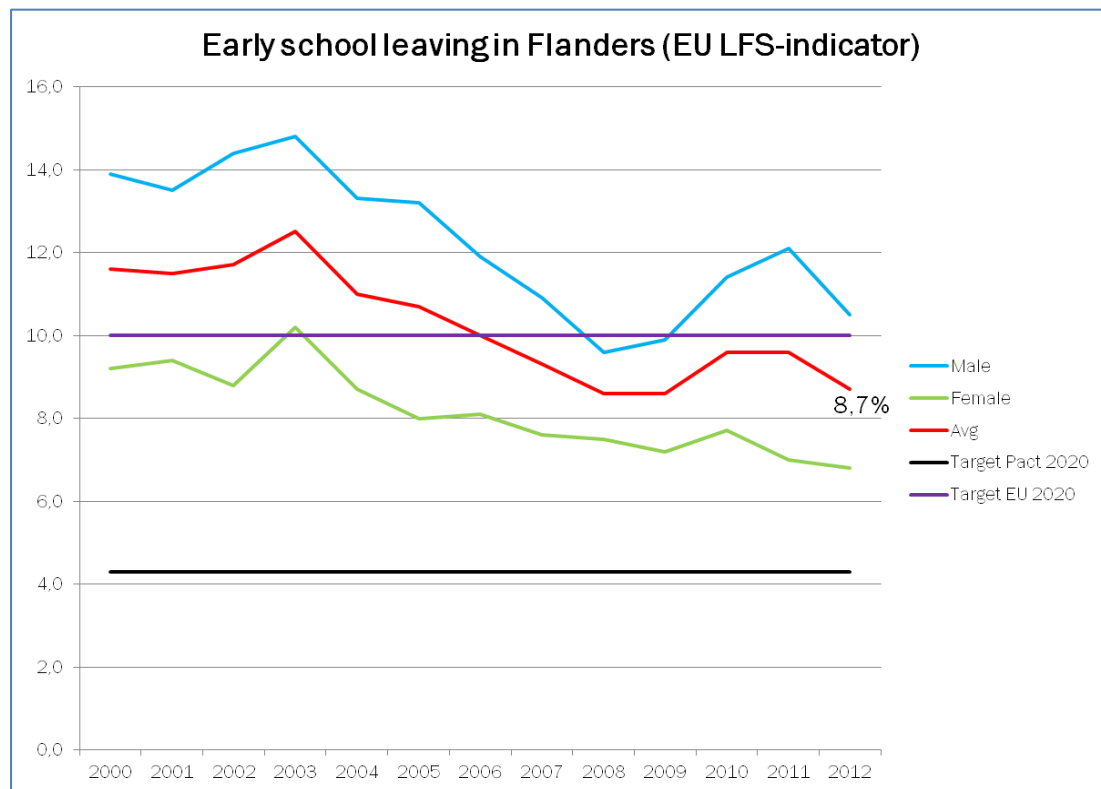
This LFS-indicator is a good basis for international comparison, but is mainly based on a sample. It does not allow any detailed analysis at the regional level, and there are questions about the reliability of the data.

This indicator is not used for monitoring at the Flemish regional level. For this kind of monitoring purposes, another indicator is used, based on population data administrated by the governement. This indicator is much more reliable and offers a completely different picture: the rate of early school leavers is up to no less than 11,1 %, with, for boys, even a percentage of 13,6 of early school leavers, as illustrated in the following chart:

Early school leaving in Flanders (population data)

N= 9.000

Legend: Male, Female, Avg, Target Pact 2020, Target EU 2020
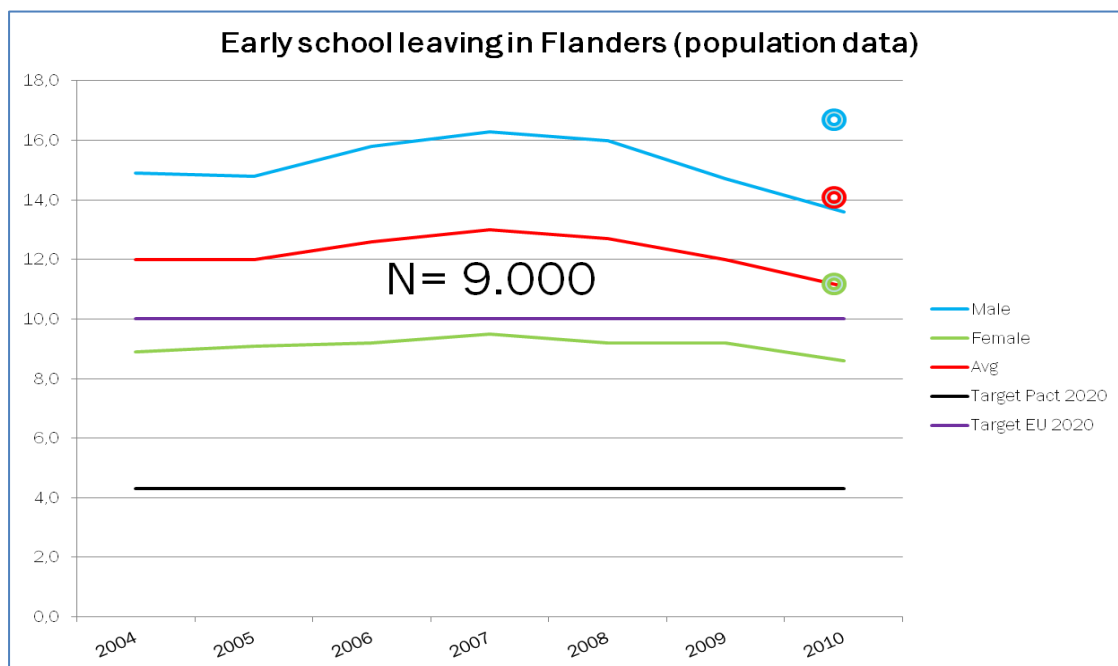
Recently, the definitions have been refined, and the indicator has been updated. Results are upsetting: the rate of early school leaving boys reaches more than 16 %, which is double of the rate based on the LFS-indicator, and very far from the ambitious PACT 2020 target of 4.2 %.

The following chart combines the results according to which data are used, population data or LSF data.

Early school leaving in Flanders: EU LFS vs Pop. data

Legend: EU LFS, Pop data, Target Pact 2020, Target EU 2020
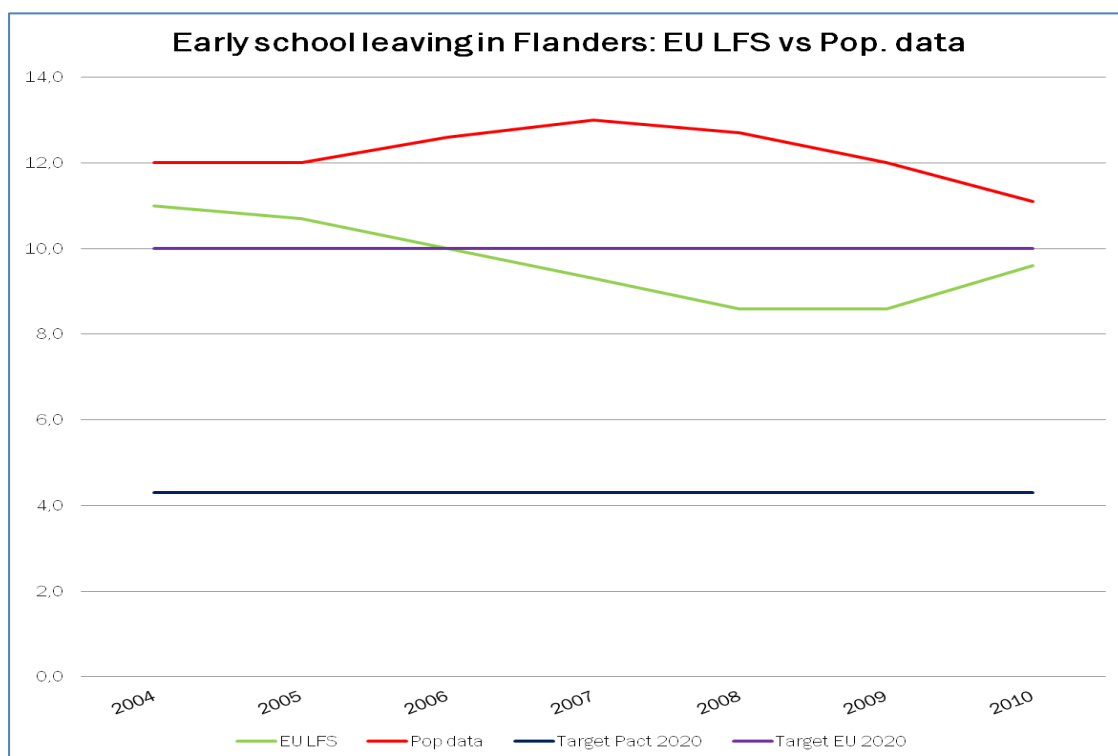
We see a difference in evolution. This can be explained by the fact that the green line (the LSF-indicator) is not only based on education, but also on the training part. Given the economic crisis, the rate of early school leavers is going down: people stay longer in education because there are less job opportunities. This drop of the percentage of early school leavers is probably temporary, as it is not sure at all whether these pupils will actually obtain a qualification.

The cities

In some countries, early school leaving appears to be a rather rural phenomenon. In Flanders however, Early School Leaving is a major problem in the cities, as illustrated by the next graph showing the percentages for Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent as well as for Flanders.
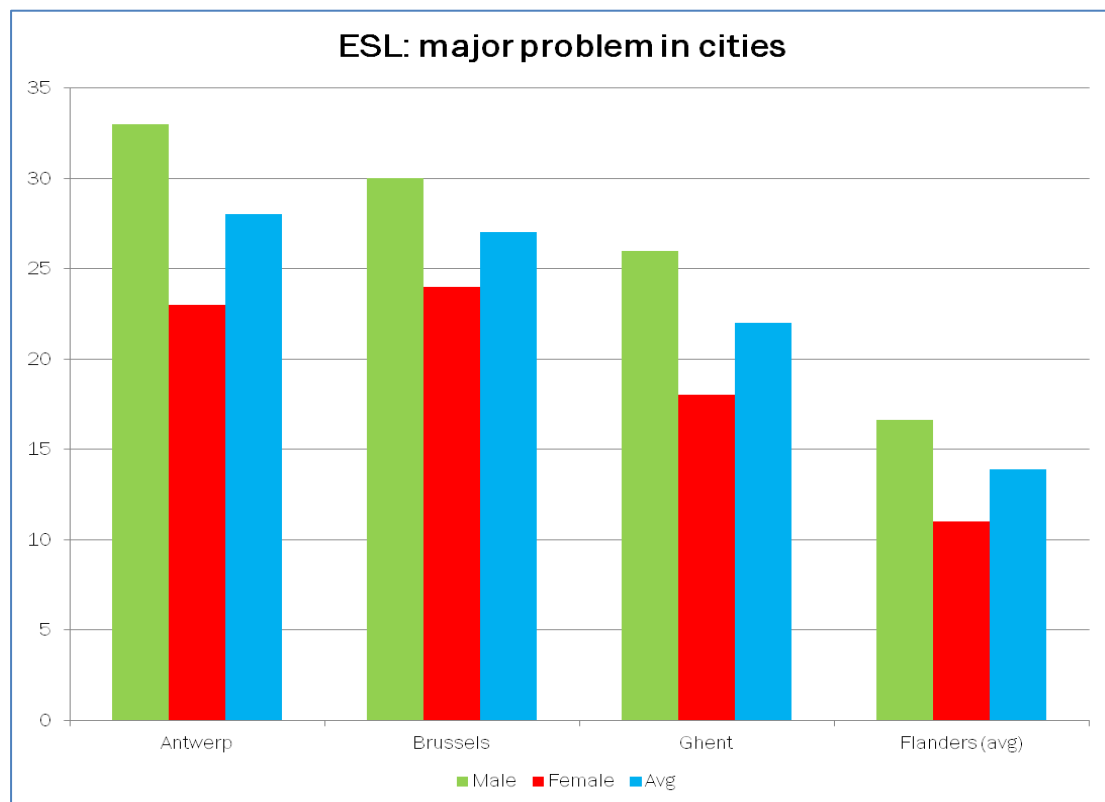
In Antwerp, for instance, one third of the boys leaves school without a qualification. Results even look worse if the data would be split up according to the different tracks in education: in VET the percentage goes up to 50 % for boys, in the big cities.

Contributing factors

Research in Flanders shows that, as it is the case also in other EU countries, early school leaving is a cumulative process, with different contributing factors, such as:
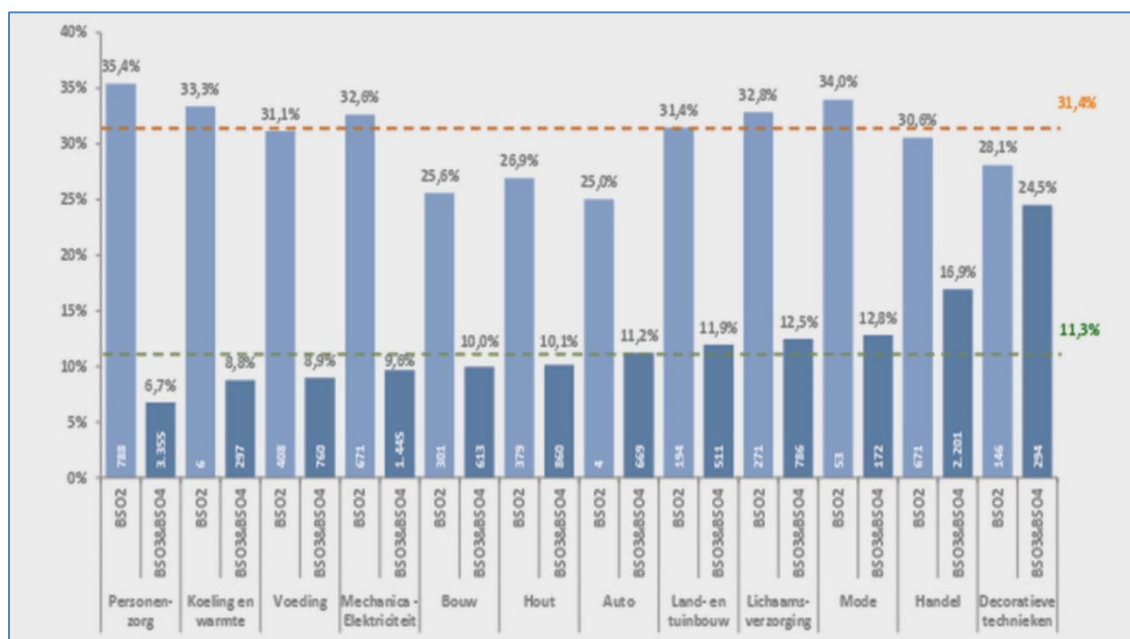
¬ Well-being

- ¬ Socio-economic background
- ¬ Ethnic background
- ¬ Gender
- ¬ Grade retention
- ¬ Pull-factors on labour market
- ¬ School absence
- ¬ Exclusion

Transition to the Labour Market

The following chart illustrates the impact of early school leaving on the transition to the Labour Market. It is based on reliable population data.

The percentages indicated are the percentages of young people that are in unemployment one year after leaving school. It includes no information on the quality of the job.

If we look at the pupils who are in the care programme ('personenzorg', the first column from the left), we see that 6,7 % of those who have a qualification in care don't have a job after one year. For those who did not obtain a qualification, the percentage is 35,4 %. Results are comparable for other programmes (electricity, construction, fashion, nutrition,..). These data show that a qualification does make a difference: on average, not having a qualification leads to 3 times more chances to be unemployed after one year.

The action plan on early school leaving

Given the context in Flanders as described above, integrated action and a coherent approach are needed at the Flemish level. Different ministers and ministries are involved in the action plan on early school leaving.

A task force has been put together with representatives of

- ¬ Ministries of education and labour
- ¬ Social partners
- ¬ Educational providers
- ¬ Advisory bodies (Vlor & SERV)
- ¬ Public training providers

The action plan is based on three main principles:

- ¬ The European framework is the basis for the structure of this action plan.
- ¬ Quick wins are combined with actions on the long run. The sustainability of the actions is crucial, the focus is not on projects and/or pilots.
- ¬ Every pupil has to reach a full qualification. The target is not the main driving force (although the 4,3 % is ambitious); the main principle is that every pupil has to reach a qualification.

Identification and monitoring

Scientific research on early school leaving in Flanders is good. In the field of monitoring at the Flemish level, steps forward are taken: for the first time, the results have been published, for the first time big cities have a very clear picture of the rates of drop-out. The publication of these data generated considerable press attention: big cities are triggered to invest in the fight against early school leaving.

However, more detailed data are needed at the regional level, as well as more data on the transition between education and the Labour Market, for instance on the quality of the jobs young people with no or low qualifications find when they enter.

The next step is to provide the schools with data on early school leaving. The ministry sends the data to the schools, so that they can decide whether to focus on early school leaving.

Measures in the action plan in the field of prevention, intervention and compensation

- ¬ Prevention

  - **Provide schools with data on early school leaving**. Data are not a goal in itself, but have to be integrated in the internal quality

assurance. It is important that schools know how to read and interpret the data in order to be able to take concrete action.

- **The school inspectorate** will focus on early school leaving. Schools in Flanders have a huge autonomy, also in deciding whether they focus on Early School Leaving or not.
- **Inform schools on early school leaving**. Awareness of the problem is crucial.
- **Flexible learning paths in secondary education.** In Flanders, schools have the legal possibility to offer flexible paths in secondary education but, in practice, it does not happen because of the impact it has on the school organization. Schools are reluctant to introduce flexible pathways, although this might be a solution of some pupils avoiding grade retention. It is important that good practices are communicated and that schools are supported when they implement flexible learning paths.
- **Improvement of the dual system.** In Flanders, the dual system has been introduced when the age of compulsory education raised from 14 until 18 years. It was created as a kind of emergency exit out of full time education, a way to keep less motivated pupils in the education system. It is thus completely different from the dual system in for instance Germany or Austria, which is a high quality positive option. In Flanders, the dual system is the lowest step in the education system, the last step before the drop-out. The dual system offers pupils the choice to have one or two days/week at school, and four or three days/week in the company. It is especially the work component that is problematic, in terms of availability of places as well as of the motivation and attitude of the pupils.
- **Obligation to integrate workbased learning in vocational tracks.** In practice, 95 % of the vocational schools have integrated workbased learning.
- **Cooperation with PES (VDAB) for vocational training.** Cooperation with the public employment services is very good, the VDAB provides guidance as well as training.
- **Sensibilization of employers to not hire students without a full qualification.** In Dutch, the word 'groenpluk' (free translation: green harvesting) indicates the fact that employers attract pupils who did not reach a qualification. This has to be avoided, because, although it might be a good solution in the short term, the career perspective of those youngsters is not good in the long term.
- **Implementation of a qualifications framework.** This is important from the perspective of lifelong learning and the recognition of prior learning.

¬ Intervention

- **Communicate good practices on tutoring / peer coaching**. Some of these good practices focus on the importance of role models for the motivation of youngsters.
- **Projects on transition education-labour market for specific groups.** These are targeted projects, for instance aiming at youngsters in special needs education, or in dual systems.

¬ Compensation
- **Promotion of adult education**
- **Cooperation between educational and public training providers**
- **Promotion of the recognition of prior learning**

Coordination

For all those measures enumerated above, no new law is required. The measures can simply be implemented, it is a question of sensibilization and of putting possibilities into practice.

In the field of coordination two initiatives are taken:

- ¬ The action plan will be monitored twice or three times per year.
- ¬ A scenario will be provided for regional cooperation between schools, guidance centres, public employment service and other relevant partners to tackle early school leaving. It is crucial that the pupils who drop out are not left alone, that the time between the dropout and the first job offer is as short as possible.

Personal reflections

The fact that there is an action plan, is already important. This is a way to acknowledge the importance of the challenge, to give schools trying to fight early school leaving the feeling that they don't stand alone.

For the Flemish Education Council, early school leaving is high on the agenda. Already in 2009, in the memorandum for the new government, the Vlor insisted on the need of measures combating early school leaving. According to the Council, some crucial elements are missing in the present action plan:

- ¬ We need guaranties from the government that guidance will be integrated in the early school leaving approach.
- ¬ We need structural support for time-out projects, as a way of keeping pupils on the track.

All relevant partners need to be and to stay involved. The plan was an initiative of several ministers, and of the social partners. But in the end, the minister of work did not sign the action plan. The social partners did sign, but engaged to almost nothing (accept for the sensibilization against 'groenpluk'). Early school leaving is still seen as an education problem, not as a societal problem. On the other hand, the target of 4,3 % was set by the social partners, without involving the education providers.

Education providers have a large autonomy: they can decide whether they focus on early school leaving or not. Schools will have to be motivated to try to avoid early school leaving. However, there is no carrot or stick. The action plan is budget neutral, so schools will not be rewarded or stimulated financially. And there is no possibility to punish schools not willing to undertake the needed action. School inspectorate can focus on school actions against early school leaving, but there is no legal ground to undertake action.

The action plan only takes indirect actions to improve the motivation of the pupils. However, the presentation by Paul Downes convinced that early school leaving is all about motivation. Shouldn't there be more direct action focusing on improving the motivation?

Public Employment Services offer to train pupils who are no longer motivated to go to school. This training is organized out of education. There is the risk that, given this context, the 'Bildung' part is neglected. This raises the question: do we want every pupil to be professionally qualified? Or do we want every pupil to have an education?

The ongoing reform plans can enhance the structural approach, but so far there are no real signs that the different reform plans will be integrated.

The Sirius round table, held at the Vlor in October 2013, highlighted the perspective of the children with a migrant background in the fight against early school leaving. This raises the question whether the best approach is general or targeted.

One of the underlying principles of the action plan is to focus on quick wins. It is not sure whether there are any quick wins at the moment. Is this quick win approach the right one, or should we rather plead for long term investments?

Finally, the elections in 2014 will be crucial for the direction of the current reform plans.

Early School Leaving Contributions from EUNEC members

In order to enrich the content of the conference and to better prepare the debate the EUNEC secretariat has asked its member councils who did not make a presentation during the conference, to send their national/regional contributions regarding early school leaving policies before the conference.

Cyprus Education Council

Elena Hadjikakou

Cyprus policy towards achieving the Europe 2020 strategy target for ESL

Introduction

Cyprus is working towards achieving the national target of the EU2020 strategy, for reducing the ESL rate to 10% by 2020. Achieving the target set in the strategy is a top priority for Cyprus.

To achieve these goals and address the ESL problem, Cyprus is working towards increasing the opportunities to keep young people in education and training. Particular emphasis is placed on prevention and early intervention programmes since leaving school early means lost opportunities for young people and loss of social and economic potential for each Member State, but also for the whole of the European Union.

For Cyprus prevention is of particular importance, since it is more effective and can provide better results. It is generally accepted and has been demonstrated by numerous studies, both in Cyprus and in other Member States , that early school leaving is mainly focused on specific groups of students and school population in specific areas and schools.

Cyprus figures on ESL

Starting form 2003 Cyprus had a drop-out rate of 17,3. According to the data available by CYSTAT (20/9/13) for the year 2012, the percentage of dropout rate was 11,4%. The data available by CYSTAT (20/9/13) for the 1st quarter of year 2013, was 10,9 and 7,9 for the 2nd quarter.

http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/labour_31main_en/labour_31main_en?OpenForm&sub=1&sel=2 (LABOUR FORCE SURVEY - MAIN RESULTS, 2nd QUARTER 2013)

The latest figures show a dramatic decrease in the ESL rate that can be accounted both to the successful implementation of a series of programmes during the last few years and to the departure of many immigrant citizens from the country due to the severe economic conditions on the island. Cyprus will pay particular attention to the results of the coming months in order to verify the latest figures.

In order to meet the national target of reducing the rate of early school leavers by 2020, a series of priority measures with aim to facilitate the integration of students at risk, increase the attractiveness of technical vocational education and training and increase participation in Higher Education have been introduced.

Policy and actions towards tackling ESL

To tackle the issue, Cyprus has developed a comprehensive strategy that includes measures for the key stages of prevention, intervention and compensation. In all three stages Cyprus has implemented specific actions during the recent years. The most important objectives of these measures include the following:

1. Restructuring the educational system and modernizing and upgrading the curriculum for all public schools (from Pre-primary to Upper Secondary Education)

The main objective is to improve the openness and relevance of the education and training systems through the introduction of a new curriculum that will focus on the development of new skills and key competences.

2. Facilitating the integration of students at risk to the school system

The measures referred hereafter envisage to facilitate school enrollment and school success as well as to effectively address any issues of antisocial and delinquent behavior factors that contribute to early school leaving phenomena. The quantitative target for these measures concerns the percentage of the total student population enrolled in an educational establishment belonging to a Zone of Educational Priority (ZEP), by raising the enrollment ratio to 15%.

3. Upgrading Vocational Education and Training

The measures presented here after aim to improve the quality and attractiveness of the education and training systems. They include actions other than the restructure of Upper Secondary and Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and are focused on expanding the quality of education and the opportunities presented to the students of Technical and Vocational Schools. The quantitative targets include raising the student population of Technical and Vocational Education.

4. Strengthening the links between vocational education, training and the labor market

All efforts are currently shifted in the creation of an intermediate level of education, between upper secondary and tertiary, which will offer to learners at affordable cost, education and training programs complementary to the ones offered by Private Colleges. The quantitative target is the operation of at least one Post Secondary Institute for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PSITVE) in all provinces by 2012 and the enrollment of the total of 196 students at the first year of their operation.

5. Expanding the modernizing the higher education system

In order to be able to increase the number of students attending Higher Education the Ministry of Education and Culture, other competent ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labor and Social Securities, High Education Institutions, businesses, local industries and the labor market are enhancing their cooperation towards the development of an action plan for reinforcing the links between Higher Education and the labor market. The quantitative targets include the increase at 20-22% of the students attending programs of study related to science and technology by 2020.

6. Promoting transnational mobility

This measure has a strong element on geographical mobility as well as the promotion of Lifelong Learning. The aim is to encourage all students and adults to actively participate in EU mobility programs for education, training or employment placements in enterprises abroad. The quantitative target is none other than the increase of the number of participants.

Conseil de l'Education et de la Formation (Belgium)

Jean-Pierre Malarme

Statistical data on ESL rate in Belgian Regions – 2012

ESL	Men	28.175	10.5 %
Flanders	Women	17.508	6.8 %
	Total	45.682	8.7 %

ESL	Men	11.954	24.1 %
Brussels	Women	8.517	16.3 %
	Total	20.470	20.1 %

ESL	Men	29.166	17.9 %
Wallonia	Women	18.827	11.7 %
	Total	47.993	14.8 %

Causes of early school leaving in 'Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles'

Pupils have specific and different needs. It will thus be necessary to be able to formulate, within a unified structure, different and adapted answers to the need of pupils at risk of early school leaving.

Action is needed at different levels: schools and their organization, school systems, family, youngsters. In fact, these are the four main domains in which factors can influence positively or negatively the risk of early school leaving:

- ¬ Society
- ¬ Family
- ¬ School
- ¬ Pupil

Consequences of early school leaving

Early school leaving has consequences at the level of the pupil: demotivation, loss of self-esteem, lack of perspective in the personal and social field. It is important to initiate actions that offer perspectives to the youngsters.

Early school leaving has consequences at the level of the teachers and the school. Teachers are demotivated, schools seem to be ineffective.

Early school leaving has consequences at the level of the economy in Europe: unemployment and all the costs related, shortages in qualified staff etc.

An analysis of the current practices to fight early school leaving in the 'Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles'

The decree of 8 January 2009 adapting the decree of 12 May 2004, related to the struggle against early school leaving, exclusion and violence at school, has created a dynamism of cooperation between youth services and education. The 'Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles' has initiated the so-called 'services d'accrochage scolaire'. The mission of these services is to give support to young early school leavers offering them social, educational and pedagogical help during the day and, if needed, support in their family environment. The help they receive will improve their learning conditions. The objective is to reintegrate each pupil, as soon as possible and under the best possible conditions, in a school structure or in a structure of formal learning.

The recommendations of the CEF

- ¬ Recommendations related to school structures, school organization, guidance
    1. Avoid grade retention, explore alternative solutions to help pupils in difficulties.
    2. Immediate remediation strategies are crucial; train teachers
    3. Provide modular, flexible pathways with clear transitions between different levels.
    4. Pay attention to problems related to exlusion from primary education; identify the problems at an early stage.
    5. Active cooperation between the three main actors of the educational community: school, family, pupil.
    6. Work on a warm school climate.
    7. Positive guidance.
    8. Support the 'services d'accrochage scolaire' and inform stakeholders about their mission.
- ¬ Recommendations related to the pupil
    1. Cooperation between schools, youth services and other support services.
    2. Inform pupils at risk about possibilities to obtain certifications.

Southern Education and Library Board (Northern Ireland)

Sharon Cousins

The development of a strategy in Northern Ireland

1. *Scoping study of young people not in Education, Employment and Training*

The Department for Employment and Learning completed a scoping study of those young people who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Northern Ireland. The study was commissioned following a debate held in the Northern Ireland Assembly in recognition of the issues faced by these young people and the implications of their disengagement for the economy and society as a whole.

The Study report was submitted to the Executive and it was agreed at its meeting on 22 July 2010 that a cross-Departmental mechanism should be put in place to develop a strategic approach to tackle the issue.

Report:

'A Scoping Study of those young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Northern Ireland.'

2. *Consultation on the strategy*

Based on the findings of the Scoping Study, the Department for Employment and Learning launched a public consultation on the strategy for young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) on 24 March 2011. (Consultation period – March – June 2011)

The strategy is designed to give young people new opportunities and new hope. It aims to tackle the issues surrounding those who are in the NEET category in a progressive, sustainable and realistic way. It is based on the premise that, whatever their background, aspirations or aptitudes, every young person should be given the opportunity to progress through adolescence fully equipped to play an active role in society and gain the skills they need to enter the labour market.

Consultation document:

'Pathways to success: Establishing an initial broad strategic direction and supporting cross -departmental actions to reduce the number of young people most at risk of remaining outside of education, employment or training (NEET).'

3. Launch of the strategy

Following the consultation period, the Department for Employment and Learning launched its strategy for NEETs: 'Pathways to Success' in May 2012. The strategy focuses on actions to prevent young people falling into the NEET category and on measures to re-engage those who have become NEETs. It also sets out key supporting measures to ensure that young people's needs are identified and matched with appropriate opportunities.

Strategy document:

'Pathways to Success: Preventing exclusion and promoting participation of young people.'

4. Delivering the strategy

The strategy is a key part of Northern Ireland's Delivering Social Change Framework, which is central to the Programme for Government (2011–15). Signature projects are currently underway to tackle poverty and improve children and young people's well-being and educational opportunities.

Overview of Signature Projects:

'Announcement on the delivering social change signature projects.'

All the documents are available at www.eunec.eu, in the members' section.

Statements

STATEMENTS ON EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

EUNEC formulated critical remarks and statements on the issue of early school leaving. EUNEC wants to disseminate these statements pro-actively to the European Commission, the European Parliament and relevant DG's. EUNEC also wants to promote action by its members at national/regional level. These statements can contribute to the national advisory opinions of education councils. They should lead to reflection and action by relevant stakeholders in the field of education and training, such as providers of education, teacher trade unions, social partners, students, parents and experts in the field of education and training.

1 Early school leaving can be the ending point of a complex educational, personal and societal development

A lack of qualifications penalizes life opportunities on the long term from different angles. One of the causes of a low level of qualifications is early school leaving.

Low qualification levels lead towards weaker job prospects and lower incomes over the whole life span. It results in taking up less learning opportunities and thus endangers the further personal and professional development. People meet more difficulties to participate and assume civic responsibilities in the modern society. Educational failure imposes also high costs to society. It limits the capacity for economic innovation and development, damages social cohesion and imposes additional costs on public budgets when dealing with the social consequences of school failure.

Early school leaving is a phenomenon that can be described from different perspectives. In these statements EUNEC considers early school leaving from a holistic perspective. The focus is on the effect of early school leaving (poor competence levels) and on the different processes related to learning difficulties and school defiance. Early school leaving is one amongst other manifestations of inadequate socialization processes and school failure. For most pupils it is part of many multilevel and multidimensional problems. Being at school without real learning outcomes is a worrying consequence of the same problem.

From an **education perspective** early school leaving is one aspect of a broader process of school failure. School failure can be defined as when a school system fails to provide services leading to successful student learning, or when a student is failing to advance to the next grade, and eventually becomes a dropout, both aspects being intrinsically linked (OECD, 2010). Other aspects of school failure are grade retention and lack of substantial

learning outcomes. Dead ends in learning pathways and early tracking linked to a lack of social esteem for vocational pathways harm motivation and commitment of students.

Early school leaving is an ending point of a process of pupils letting the school patterns go. This process is caused by a combination of

- ¬ accidents in a pupil's personal life and characteristics of his personality;
- ¬ push and pulls factors in the school system;
- ¬ features rooted in the social, economic and cultural background.

The concrete incident that causes early school leaving is the culmination point of more fundamental and longer lasting phenomena. This is certainly the case if the education system puts the accent on learning or personal deficits. Early school leaving is a process of dropping out from the point of view of the pupil; it is a process of pushing out from the perspective of the education system.

From **the labor market perspective** a student's choice to leave the school system, can be a rational choice for another career development, a choice for quick gains on the short term. This becomes more rational in the case the school system can no longer guarantee more or broader learning outcomes. The labor market can also offer new learning opportunities by breaking with a school approach and offering settings to learn on a non-formal and informal basis. A workplace based approach can be an alternative for formal professional development.

From **the perspective of the individual** early school leaving can be a rational choice or the ending of a process of loss of perspective. If the individual experiences a continuing chain of failure, of being not able to experience success and a deficit approach, he loses motivation and enthusiasm to learn and to grow. In some cases there is an overlap between early school leaving and special educational needs. For other students there is a deep socio-cultural rift between the culture at home and the school culture and language. In every case school leaving has severe psychological impact and it induces a culture of social deprivation (the perception to be a "loser").

From **the perspective of the society** early school leaving has roots in social deprivation and causes deprivation. It is linked to social problems and lack of perspectives in some isolated regions and/or the characteristics of major cities.

2   High quality and inclusive education is the best prevention

It is obvious that prevention of early school leaving and learning thresholds should be at the heart of every policy.

Prevention is a better option than to cure the deficits by intervention and compensation because it effects less the development and identity of the learner, his future chances. It is also more cost efficient from the point of the society. This is the fact from the perspective of the cost efficiency of

educational resources, from a macro-economic perspective of societal cost and from the perspective of the individual and his chances on participation in different aspects of the society.

Prevention is above all offering good quality education provisions to all learners. Mainstreaming and inclusion of all learners is a main strategic objective for schools and other educational provisions. Building inclusive education settings with high quality means that education systems have to overcome sterile structural debates and improve school climate, class climate, learning process. Raising the level of learning of all learners despite of their personal characteristics (special education needs), SES background and life path is at the heart of prevention of early school leaving. Prevention is also based on a wide scope of learning opportunities, including attractive and highly respected vocational education and training. As long as vocational pathways are seen as second choice and as of a lower prestige, pupils will lose interest, wellbeing, self-esteem and commitment necessary for effective learning.

Good quality education focuses on a strong and challenging curriculum appealing towards different talents of learners. But a major factor that keeps students on board at school is the perception of relevance and meaningfulness of the competences learned for the future life and different experiences of success.

For these reasons the curriculum construction is a balance between a development oriented approach and compelling aims. The following aspects are part of such curriculum development. A high level of proficiency in literacy/numeracy is the basis. But these functional approaches are not enough. To function in our society on a durable basis pupils need a mastery of the different fields in key competences. For EUNEC members 'Bildung' should be the outcome of all ambitious curriculum development. 'Bildung' is both content (reference framework) and process (pupils will discover for themselves what they consider to be of value). In that sense extracurricular activities in different sectors offer opportunities for a broad development of the pupil and stimulate multiple forms of intelligence and talents. Professional qualifications and learning by creating or manufacturing offer alternative and for some pupils very motivating strands to learn, to develop and to grow.

But a challenging curriculum is only one aspect of a quality strategy of education and of schools. The learning climate, the school organization and the interaction between teachers and learners should contribute to motivation and commitment of learners to their learning and development process. Reflection and self-steering competences need to be developed.

Schools and teachers should facilitate learning processes balancing between challenges and high expectations on the one hand and a realistic and feasible approach on the other hand.

3   Inclusion and intervention at a very early stage

Prevention in the sense of good education is not enough. The preventive action should be closely linked to a policy to pick up early signals of pupils in danger of disconnecting with school and/or learning and of early intervention. It is important to consider both the pull and the push mechanisms within the school to react adequately to these early warnings. Sometimes a policy to tackle early school leaving is too exclusively focused on the factors that initiate problems instead of focusing on the factors that enhance the (intrinsic) motivation of students. For EUNEC it is clear that schools should pay more attention to learning and improvement of learning rather than on the output as such. Learning environments based on the needs of the pupil might be a solution for students with special needs or students at risk. Different countries have realized improvement with stimuli for extracurricular activities and learning outside the school setting (e.g. work place based learning).

This approach should be systemic and coherent and involve all aspects of the school environment. This approach has to be focused on the school level but have an impact at the individual level of students at risk.

Therefore schools need to build strong guidance and counseling provisions. These provisions are aimed at the whole person of the pupil and support pupils to deal with social problems, emotional and mental health, learning and life choices (study, HE, labor market). Guidance should mediate between the pupil and his needs, the school system and the welfare services supporting the families. A strong guidance and intervention system is also relevant to combine and redefine learning pathways to relevant qualifications.

This counseling and intervention policy should be an obligation for the whole school team. It is not realistic to expect this competence level of every individual teacher. It is part of the human resources policy of the school to attract competent staff members to underpin this approach.

4   Compensatory policies

Once the school is left, it is necessary to tackle the consequences within a global concept of LLL policies. Every country needs second learning facilities to reconnect pupils with learning. This goes beyond learning at school. Because of a negative spiral of experiences of early school leavers, creating other learning facilities out of the traditional school context is necessary: work based learning, time-out settings, ICT related learning.

EUNEC insists on the need for compensatory policies that aim at different perspectives of education both to get a relevant qualification and to reach a relevant level of competence to function at a satisfactory level in social life. Durable social integration is based on numeracy, literacy and key competences such as entrepreneurial skills, reflection, learning to learn and to develop, flexibility.

5 How to realize these key policy lines?

5.1 A broad understanding of quality improvement and school accountability

Quality is more than competence levels, more than academic achievement levels. It should embrace the wellbeing of learners, their development, their inclusion and social promotion and emancipation and lead to a preventive mainstream education policy. The commitment of the school to early interventions and to keep learners on board should be valorized at the same level as academic achievement.

This quality concept should be considered as a mission statement that colors all aspects of school life including planning, didactic processes and evaluation, class organization and school climate, relationship and interaction between members of a school team and between teachers and pupils.

It is necessary to translate these strategic options into concepts of quality and of quality assurance. School quality in this approach is very related to school autonomy and the schools project. The school teams, the national quality assurance agencies (e.g. inspectorate) and the broader society need to invest in a broad common understanding of quality as a balance of high standards and developmental needs of children. It should be integrated in the models, reference frameworks and instruments used by national quality assurance agencies.

5.2 Teacher professionalism remains a key factor

There is hardly a policy debate on innovation in education that can ignore the competences of teachers as a crucial and undeniable factor of success. This is certainly the case for adequate policies on early school leaving and school failure. A warm and supportive relationship between teachers and pupils is identified as one of the most powerful instruments to keep students at risk on board. Teachers should have strong diagnostic competencies to identify thresholds in the learning process and development of a pupil. Dealing with cultural diversity and multiple identities is also a key competence.

Within the roles of the "teacher" it is better not to put all the pressure on one person but to develop a team oriented human resources policy. Competency profiles of teachers should define the role of teachers as part of school teams. Schools should dispose of the autonomy to define a specific HRM-policy that suits the school culture and the project of the school. In this regard investing in high quality school leadership is a necessity.

But innovative teachers practice requires professional autonomy. Teachers should share a common understanding of didactic and pedagogic approaches at school level. They need the space to adapt their acting to the specific environment, context and needs of pupils. Autonomy and shared responsibilities should become more balanced.

Investing in the reduction of early school leaving and the underlying concept

of inclusiveness and quality in schools requires strong teacher training (both initial and in service training). There is an urgent need to close the gap between educational research and school practice. Teachers should become more reflective practitioners.

5.3 Participatory policies

A common understanding of what is going on in the hampering development of youngsters is essential for prevention, early intervention and inclusive school policies. The sense giving of youngsters to what is happening in their lives offers solid starting points for every effective support.

Parents are the key persons in the child's life and they are privileged witnesses of problems of children. Their motivational role cannot be overestimated. Therefore an effective school policy should be based on a partnership between schools, pupils and parents and social actors. A common commitment is essential for success.

5.4 A common commitment to a sustainable social policy

Tackling early school leaving should be part of a multi-institutional and inter-institutional approach that puts the school in the center of a chain of public and social services. It is about a common approach between the society outside the school and the community within the school. Family and social services, community centers and labor market services are involved. An effective policy to reduce early school leaving calls for an active commitment of social partners. Employers should become more aware of their responsibility for sustainable employability of youngsters attracted to quick wins at the labor market.

But this collaboration should not hinder the pedagogic and developmental approach of schools. Schools are no community centers or labor market actors as such: the educational focus is the main one. Social or psychological assistance are subsequent to these missions. A good understanding of each other's professionalism is the basis for a sound collaboration.

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Rolandas Zuoza	Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Lithuania
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