



Eurydice *Brief*

Tackling Early Leaving from Education and Training

Eurydice Brief

Tackling Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe

This Eurydice Brief provides a summary of the joint Eurydice/Cedefop report *Tackling Early Leaving from Education and Training in Europe: Strategies, Policies and Measures*, which has a focus on general education at school level. The original report, published in November 2014, was prepared at a time of growing policy attention at both national and European levels. It is based on the key policy messages laid down in the final report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving under the auspices of the European Commission, entitled *Reducing Early School Leaving: Key Messages and Policy support* (European Commission, 2013). This Brief focuses on the areas within general education on which policy-makers can have the most direct influence. Short case studies provide examples of comprehensive, evidence-based policies to combat early leaving and support student learning.

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ISBN 978-92-9201-770-5 (printed version)
ISBN 978-92-9201-771-2 (PDF)

doi:10.2797/732615 (printed version)
doi:10.2797/259399 (PDF)

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The importance of tackling ELET

Tackling ELET has positive outcomes for the individual as well as society in terms of employment prospects, better health and lower public and social costs.

Early leaving from education and training (ELET) is a serious issue in many EU countries and has attracted the attention of many researchers, policy-makers and educators. Although the situation varies between countries and the underlying reasons for leaving early differ from student to student, the process leading up to it has a number of common elements.

Research shows that leaving education early leads to reduced opportunities in the labour market and an increased likelihood of unemployment, socio-economic disadvantage, health problems, as well as reduced participation in political, social and cultural activities. Furthermore, these negative consequences have an impact on the offspring of early leavers and thus the problem may be perpetuated.

On the other hand, abundant research indicates that a higher level of education can lead to a series of positive outcomes for the individual as well as for society. The benefits of young people staying longer in school are: improved employment prospects, higher salaries, better health, less crime, improved social cohesion, lower public and social costs, and higher productivity and growth.

Dealing with the underlying causes of early leaving and developing ways to overcome them has become a central issue in Europe. One of the twofold headline targets for education in the Europe 2020 strategy is to reduce the rates of ELET below 10 % by 2020. In June 2011, education ministers agreed on a 'framework for coherent, comprehensive, and evidence-based policies' to tackle early leaving. Since then a working group bringing together policy-makers and practitioners from across Europe has looked at examples of good practice across Europe and has promoted an exchange of experiences on this issue. Education authorities are striving to address not only student related factors such as the diverse needs of today's student population but also long-standing system related factors such as access and quality of early childhood education and care, grade retention, school segregation, flexibility and permeability of education systems.

Definition of early leavers from education and training

For the purpose of data collection and monitoring at EU level, the EU-Labour Force Survey (Eurostat, 2013) defines early leavers as young people aged 18 to 24 who have completed lower secondary education at most, and are not currently involved in further education or training.

In this Eurydice Brief, the term 'early leaving from education and training' refers to all young people who cease attending any type of education or training institution before completing the upper secondary level (ISCED 3).

The report presents recent developments in the design and implementation of evidence-based and comprehensive policies to combat early leaving and support student learning. It covers all EU Member States, plus Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Turkey. The reference year for all national policy data is 2013/14. Some of the most recent strategies for early leaving, adopted by the end of 2014, are also mentioned here.

What are the main factors leading to tackling early leaving?

Socio-economic factors exert a stronger influence on students' decisions to leave early than gender or having a migrant/minority background.

Leaving education and training early is a complex issue and the causes vary from student to student. Family and/or migrant background, personal, gender and socio-economic circumstances as well as factors related to the education and training system are but a few of the elements implicated in the process leading students to leave education and training early.

As far as gender is concerned, recent statistics from Eurostat (EU-LFS, 2014) show that there is a higher proportion of boys (13.6 %) amongst early leavers from general education than girls (10.2 %). However, evidence shows that the higher the socio-economic status of students, the less apparent is the difference in the rates of early leaving between the genders.

Similarly, statistics also show that foreign-born students are more likely to leave education and training early (22.6 % vs. 11 % of native born students). Indeed, students with a migrant background generally face greater challenges in accessing and participating in education than those born in the country of residence. This is due largely to language and/or cultural barriers, socio-economic segregation and limited access to adequate learner support. However, as with gender, students' socio-economic situation appears to exert a stronger influence on the likelihood of them leaving education and training early than having a migrant background.

Participation in high quality ECEC, well-managed, flexible transitions between levels and types of education, and from school to work, can all have a positive impact on reducing ELET.

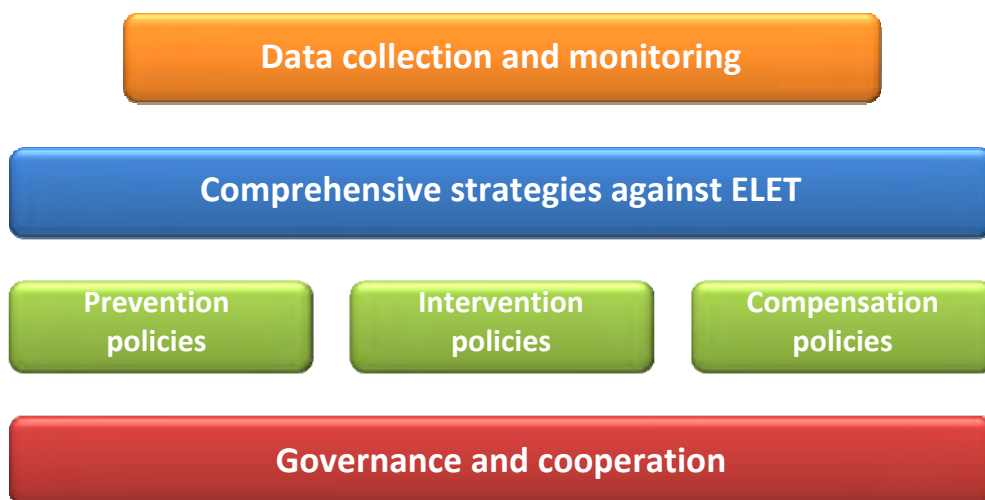
There are also a number of factors relating to the education system that influence early leaving rates. The negative aspects include grade retention, the socio-economic segregation of schools and early tracking based on academic selection. However, there are also positive factors that can lower the risk of early leaving, such as participation in high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) and well-managed transition processes from primary to secondary level, from lower to upper secondary level, and from school to work. Flexible pathways in upper secondary education can also have a positive effect in preventing or reducing early leaving.

What can policy-makers do to reduce the number of early leavers?

The starting point for tackling ELET should be a regular and extensive collection of data on early leavers.

One of the main areas that can be addressed by policy-makers to prevent or reduce the occurrence of early leaving from education and training is to implement effective **data collection and monitoring** (see Figure 1). There is general agreement that valid and up-to-date data on early leavers can help to develop focused policies. Different tools can be used to gather this data, for example, national student registers or student databases, which can be used by different levels of public authority to assess the scope of the problem. Quantitative and qualitative studies or surveys are tools that can contribute to a better understanding of the reasons for early leaving and how they may be linked.

Figure 1: Main policy areas related to tackling ELET



Efforts to tackle early leaving should be based on a comprehensive strategy incorporating a balanced approach towards prevention, intervention and compensation.

Combating ELET can only be effective as a coordinated strategy across authority levels and policy areas. The importance of developing a **comprehensive strategy** was recognised in June 2011 by the Education Council in its Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving. The Council highlighted the need for targeted and effective evidence-based policies based on national circumstances.

Definition of a comprehensive strategy (Council Recommendation, 28 June 2011)

'Comprehensive strategies on early school leaving comprise a mix of policies, coordination across different policy sectors and the integration of measures supporting the reduction of early school leaving into all relevant policies aimed at children and young people. In addition to education policies that promote high-quality school systems, these are principally social policy and support services, employment, youth, family, and integration policies. Horizontal coordination between different actors and vertical coordination through different levels of government are equally important. Strategies on early school leaving should comprise prevention, intervention and compensation elements. Member States should select the detailed components of their strategies according to their own circumstances and contexts.'

In order to be effective, the Council Recommendation thus suggests that comprehensive strategies to combat early leaving should include three types of policies:

- **Prevention policies**, which aim to tackle the root problems that may eventually result in early leaving.
- **Intervention policies**, which aim to combat any emerging difficulties experienced by students, by improving the quality of education and training and providing targeted support.
- **Compensation policies**, which create new opportunities for those who have left education and training prematurely to gain qualifications.

Education and career guidance, which encompasses all three areas, prevention, intervention and compensation, is a measure that receives special attention here as it is identified by a large majority of European countries as being crucial for addressing early leaving.

Reducing early leaving requires horizontal cooperation between the relevant policy areas, as well as vertical cooperation between stakeholders at national, regional, local and school levels.

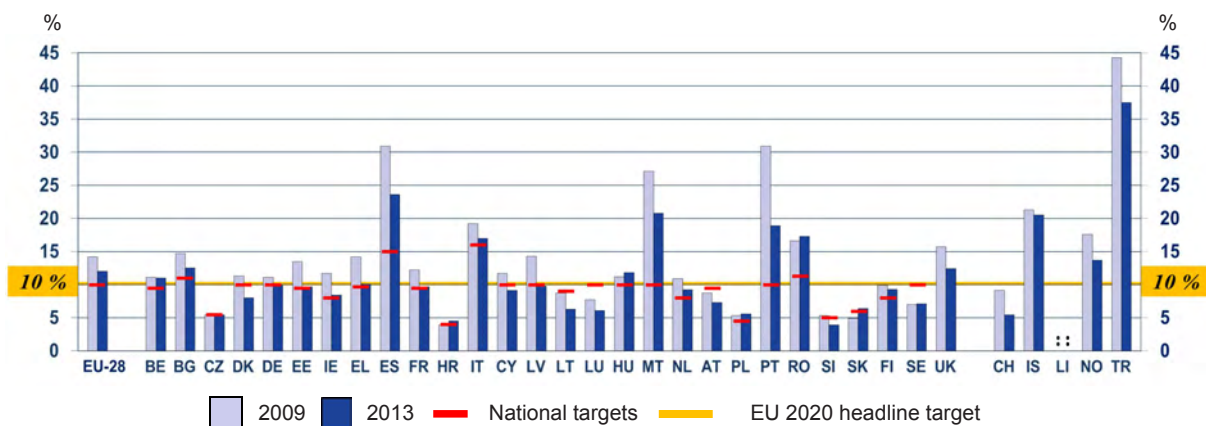
Finally, reducing early leaving requires a long-term policy approach with sustained political and financial commitment from all key stakeholders. Strong **governance** arrangements are needed to manage the relationships across the relevant policy areas and agencies ('horizontal cooperation') as well as between the various levels of government – national, regional, local and school level ('vertical cooperation'). The ability to work with private and non-governmental bodies such as employers and trade unions (**cross-sector cooperation**) is also essential.

Data collection and monitoring

A lot of progress has been achieved in recent years in European countries in reducing the rate of early leavers.

The most recent Eurostat data shows that in the majority of European countries the rate of early leavers has decreased over recent years; and with a current EU-average of 12 %, countries are collectively heading towards the 10 % benchmark goal by 2020 if the current trend continues (see Figure 2). More than half of the countries examined have reached the EU headline target, and around a third of all countries have reached their own national targets, often set at a more ambitious level than the headline target. Some countries such as Spain, Malta and Portugal, despite having rates above 10 %, have made significant improvements over the last few years.

Figure 2: Percentage of early leavers from education and training, 2009-2013, and national targets as compared with the EU headline target



Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS [edat_lfse_14], (data extracted October 2014).

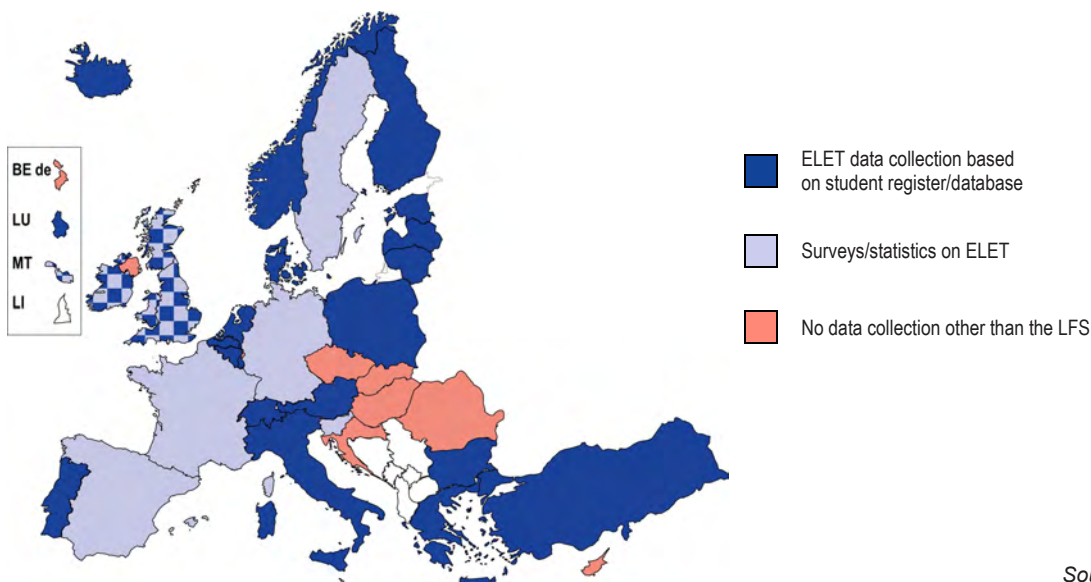
Country specific notes: See full report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 24).

Most countries have established national definitions of ELET and developed corresponding data collections.

Most countries have taken up the policy debate on early leaving at national level and have their own definitions and data collections, in addition to the data gathered for the EU-Labour Force Survey (see Figure 3). The exceptions are Belgium (German-speaking Community), the Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland).

In compiling their national data collections on early leavers, countries are mainly using student registers or databases. Although these may not have been developed with the specific objective of measuring early leaving, they may be used to monitor absenteeism and thereby provide an early warning system to alert schools and authorities when to intervene and help individuals at risk of early leaving. They can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of policies in addressing the causes of early leaving.

Figure 3: Sources used for producing national data on early leaving (other than Eurostat LFS), 2013/14



Source: Eurydice.

Country specific notes: See full report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 28).

Case study: National data collection on ELET in the Netherlands

All students at publicly funded (general) secondary or secondary vocational schools are registered in BRON (the Basic Records Database for Education) with unique number and other personal and school-related information – including age, gender, the locality of the student, ethnic origin, education/school type and school history –, which can be linked to socio-economic data for each region, city and neighbourhood. Young people who are registered on the BRON system as being of compulsory school age but not attending education or training and not holding a basic qualification are classified as early school leavers. Aggregate data is available at national, regional and local levels and for each individual school and training institution on a monthly basis. Since 2009, all schools are obliged by law to register school absenteeism via the Digital Absence Portal (*Digitaal verzuimloket*).



Combining quantitative and qualitative data on ELET can ensure that policy development is better informed.

Finally, although many countries produce statistical data on early leavers, relatively few gather qualitative information that can help in understanding the reasons why students leave education and training early and what they do afterwards. France, Malta and the United Kingdom (Scotland) are amongst the few countries that routinely conduct surveys of students after they have left education and training prematurely. Collecting feedback from the students affected, or from the other stakeholders involved, can provide an important source of information for current and future policies related to early leaving.

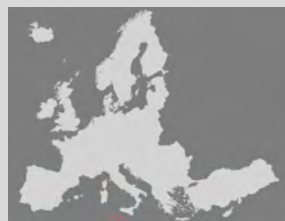
Strategies to combat ELET

A third of European countries have put in place a national strategy for reducing ELET.

Across Europe, eight countries/regions have comprehensive national strategies in place that aim to reduce early leaving from education or training. This is the case in Belgium (Flemish Community), Bulgaria, Spain, Malta, the Netherlands and Austria, as well as in France and Hungary where the strategies were recently adopted. A national strategy is still being adopted in Romania.

Policies have also been developed in other countries which all contain some of the key characteristics included in the European definition, such as a focus on monitoring early leaving; prevention, intervention and compensation measures; as well as cross-sector cooperation.

Case study: Maltese Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving



The 'Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving' adopted in 2014 aims to facilitate focused actions that will support students in making the best of their school years, from early childhood to the end of compulsory school and beyond. Actions of this comprehensive strategy include providing free childcare, making community schools possible, developing e-Learning content to better respond to student learning needs, funding a school-based approach to reducing early leaving, strengthening the transition process across educational pathways, reviewing and consolidating career guidance across levels, harnessing and strengthening parental support to combat early leaving, and supporting teachers in dealing with the challenges associated with the prevention of early leaving.

Some countries report facing challenges in implementing effectively strategies. They report difficulties in ensuring collaboration between different policy areas and stakeholders and, in particular, encouraging schools to link with outside bodies or agencies. In addition, adapting strategies to the different socio-economic circumstances or to the disparities in early leaving rates between regions or localities within the country has been problematic. Furthermore, creating sustainable structures that can guarantee the continuity of actions when the term of the strategy comes to an end has been demanding.

All European countries have developed policies and measures to combat early leaving, especially in the areas of ECEC, flexibility and permeability of educational pathways and education and career guidance.

While not all European countries have a national strategy, they all have policies and measures to combat early leaving, which, in many cases, give equal weight to the three types of measure mentioned in the Recommendation i.e. prevention, intervention and compensation.

The areas where most countries have adopted policies/measures that contribute to preventing early leaving are improving access to and the quality of ECEC, and increasing the flexibility and permeability of educational pathways. As mentioned above, actions in both areas are essential if countries are to be successful in reducing the numbers of early leavers. Education and career guidance is another area that has been reported by the majority of countries as an essential measure to combat early leaving.

Raising teachers' awareness of the problem of early leaving and encouraging the development of the skills needed to prevent it is one of the crucial policy areas that needs further development throughout Europe.

In contrast, only a few countries/regions have policies in place that aim to tackle early leaving by reducing grade retention (Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), the Czech Republic, France, Latvia, Austria, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia), or policies to counteract segregation in schools (Belgium (French Community), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Malta and Romania). Not all European countries are equally concerned by these issues. Regarding grade retention, for example, PISA 2012 data reveal significant variations between countries in the rates of students who have repeated at least one school year. However, both grade retention and school segregation represent two of the main obstacles to progress in preventing early leaving and should therefore receive appropriate attention in all countries where they could be problematic. Similarly, less than a third of all countries/regions (Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Spain, Luxembourg, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland and Norway) mention that the subject of early leaving is part of initial teacher education or continuing professional development policies. However, one of the determining factors in reducing early leaving is improving teachers' skills, particularly their ability to identify individual students' learning needs, create a positive learning environment and promote inclusion. Likewise, the awareness of school heads and their commitment to addressing the problem of early leaving is essential if improvements are to be made in this area.

Case study: Reducing grade retention in Austria

Since 2013 (full implementation by 2017) teaching and exams in upper secondary schools are modularised on a semester basis. Students have to pass all modules, but they are allowed to move on to the next grade even if they fail two – under special circumstances three – of the modules. They then receive additional teaching support to help them pass the outstanding modules. Since under the new module system pupils are not forced to repeat a whole year, this also benefits pupils with learning difficulties in particular subjects, as they can stay with their class and are therefore not separated from their friendship groups.



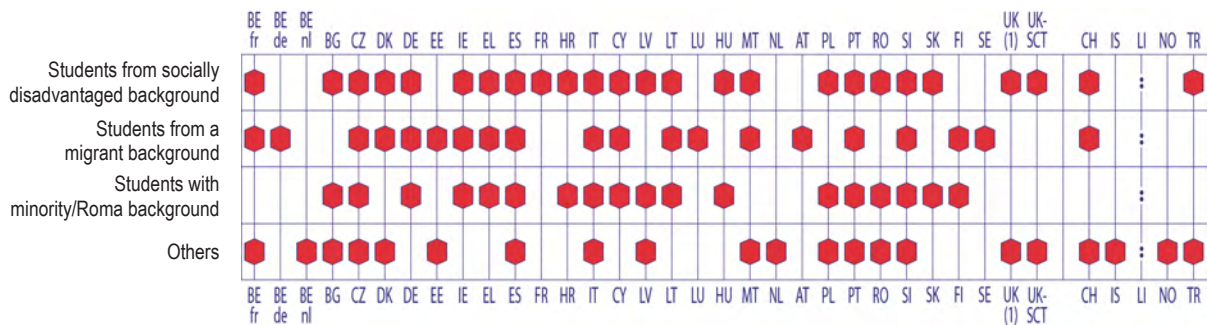
Case study: Training of teachers on issues related to early leaving in Luxembourg



During the 2013/14 school year, the Institute of Continuing Education of the MENFP's (Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training) offered three different continuing professional development courses dealing explicitly with demotivation and student dropout. These courses were available to all teachers in the country.

All countries also have policies/measures targeting groups at high risk of early leaving, including disadvantaged students, those from a migrant or minority (especially Roma) background and students with special educational needs (see Figure 4). Even though some of these policies were intended to improve attainment levels generally rather than being specifically developed to tackle early leaving, they are in line with the Recommendations of the Education Council on early leaving.

Figure 4: Targeting groups at high risk of leaving education and training early, 2013/14



Source: Eurydice.

UK (1) = UK-ENG/WLS/NIR

Country specific notes: See full report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 64).

Case study: Targeted support to combat early leaving amongst students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Poland



In order to support young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and reduce their risk of early leaving, financial support is available through a school allowance. This is provided on an ad hoc basis and may be granted to students in temporary difficulty (e.g. as a result of family emergencies such as the death of a parent or a fire in the home). The allowance may take the form of money to cover education including school-related materials.

Case study: Targeted support to combat early leaving amongst Roma students in Spain

The *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* is implementing a national programme called 'When I grow up I would like to be'. It aims to raise awareness of the value of education among Roma students and families and involves public authorities in the fight against inequality in education. For the campaign, a photo-van travelled across Spain taking pictures of the 'dreams' of Roma girls and boys (e.g. being a doctor or a teacher) and their parents. The key messages of the campaign were: 'whatever your dream might be, finish secondary education' and 'Roma with Education is Roma with a future'.



Education and career guidance – a key measure to combat early leaving?

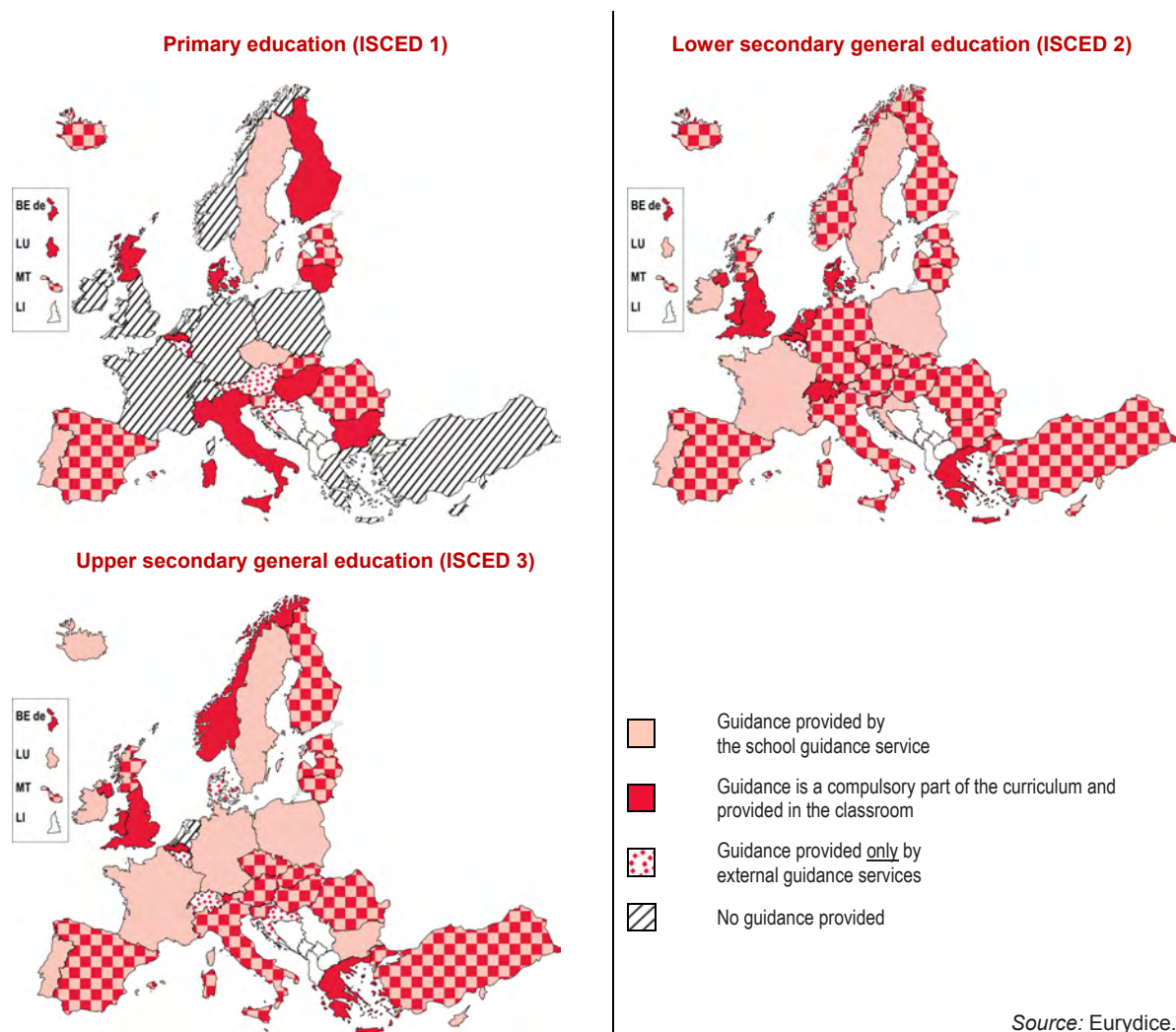
The main focuses of education and career guidance in tackling early leaving are providing support for students, supplying information about their education and career opportunities, and helping them develop their decision-making skills.

Education and career guidance – considered here as the practice of supporting students in their choice of education and career path – has been identified by the large majority of European countries as one of the key measures in addressing early leaving. In most countries, guidance is an important element in prevention, intervention and compensation.

The main objective of education and career guidance is to provide students with support, inform them about the possibilities open to them, and develop the skills they need to make decisions about their future education and work.

Education and career guidance is traditionally delivered through school-based guidance services, which often deal with individuals who are in need of support or who may already be at risk of leaving education and training early. However, a great number of countries are now including guidance in the broader curriculum (see Figure 5) making it accessible to all students and enabling it to be used as a prevention measure. Together these forms of provision make guidance a more effective tool for addressing the causes of early leaving.

Figure 5: Provision of education and career guidance in primary and general secondary education (ISCED 1, 2 and 3), 2013/14



Country specific notes: See full report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 86).

Where education and career guidance is included in the curriculum, three main approaches are used in the classroom: it may be taught as a separate subject; integrated within one or more subjects (e.g. social sciences, entrepreneurship or citizenship education); or distributed throughout the curriculum as a cross-curricular topic. European countries report that they promote a broad approach to education and career guidance combining different forms of provision and using a wide range of individual and group methods.

Finally, schools in most countries provide guidance through extra-curricular activities, in cooperation with local partners such as external guidance services and employers.

Case study: Guidance as both a separate and integrated topic in Germany

At lower secondary level, an introduction to the world of work is a compulsory component of each course of education and is provided either as a separate subject such as *Arbeitslehre* (in pre-vocational studies) or as part of other subjects or subject areas. If *Arbeitslehre* is a separate subject, it can be either compulsory or optional, depending on the *Land*.



Case study: Guidance as a cross-curricular topic in Estonia

The National Curricula for primary and secondary (general) education include the cross-curricular topic 'Lifelong Learning and Career Planning' which seeks to ensure that students are better prepared for their entry into the labour market, to make decisions independently, to fill different roles in life and to take part in lifelong learning. Students are encouraged to value learning as a lifelong activity and as a means to develop their career; they are also encouraged to learn how to assess their skills, interests and knowledge in relation to work and study opportunities and to apply these skills in their decision-making process.



Case study: Guidance programmes involving extra-curricular activities in Finland

Students in basic education undertake work experience that is intended to help them in their choice of further education or profession as well as to recognise the value of and appreciate the opportunities working life brings. Students should also have an opportunity to evaluate their learning and work experiences. Periods of work experience may be implemented as follows: 1-2 days of familiarisation with the work of school staff (year 7); 1-3 days outside school, for example, at a parent's workplace (year 8); 10 days outside school, maximum 6 hours per day (year 9).



The type of staff responsible for guidance provision is directly related to the way guidance is organised in schools. Where guidance is an integral part of the curriculum, it is mainly delivered by teachers. Where it is provided by school-based services, guidance specialists such as guidance counsellors, psychologists or social workers are usually in charge. The great majority of European countries report that it is non-specialised teachers who play the most significant role in the provision of guidance, irrespective of how it is delivered.

Teachers providing education and career guidance report a need for professional development in this area, in particular in dealing with students at high risk of early leaving.

Accordingly, a number of countries/regions report a lack of high quality guidance provision⁽¹⁾. This is confirmed by findings from the OECD's TALIS survey showing that around 42 % of European teachers need professional development in student career guidance and counselling. Moreover, only a third of countries report that the staff responsible for guidance receive training during their initial education in the skills needed to deal with the groups at risk of early leaving⁽²⁾. In order to guarantee high quality guidance services for this particular at-risk group, schools could further investigate the need for appropriate professional training opportunities.

Finally, in most European countries, education and career guidance also plays an important role for those who have already left education and wish to re-enter the system. As a compensation measure, guidance is delivered mainly through second-chance education programmes or at the point when students re-enter mainstream education. It is also offered by specialist guidance services, through youth guarantees, and in some cases it is embedded in projects.

⁽¹⁾ Bulgaria, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, the United Kingdom (England) and Turkey

⁽²⁾ Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland and Iceland

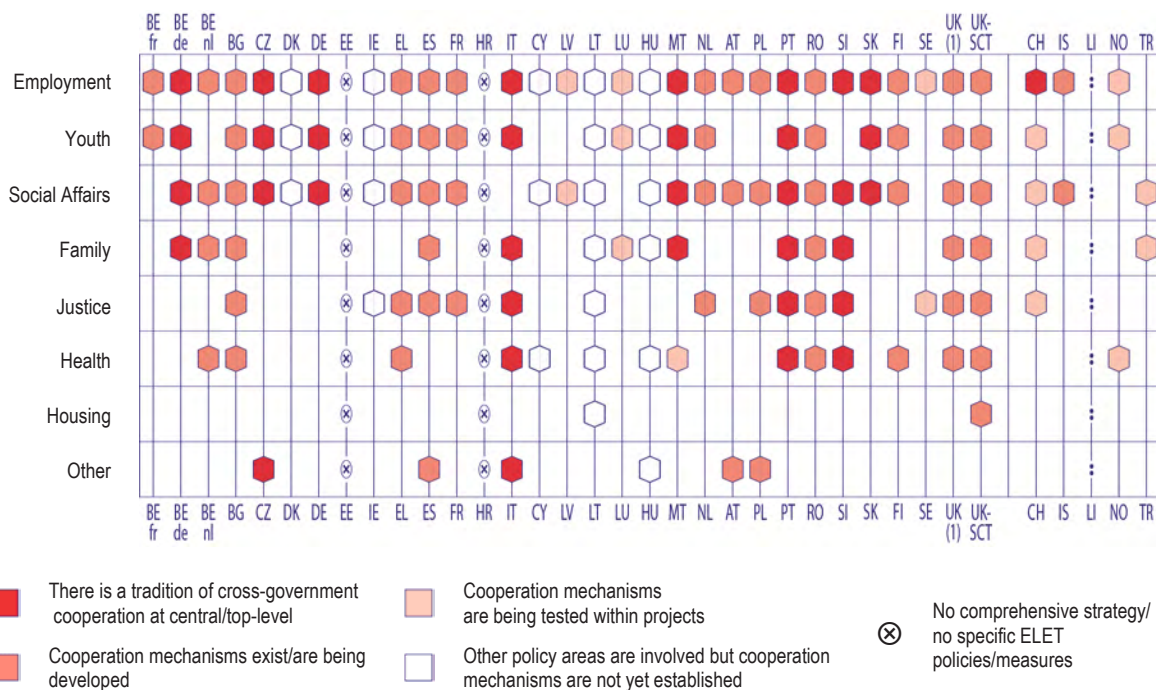
Governance and cross-sector cooperation

Cross-government and cross-sector cooperation are a prerequisite for tackling ELET effectively.

Enhanced cooperation at all levels is a fundamental condition for effective national strategies, policies and measures to combat early leaving. As the 2011 Council Recommendation indicates, comprehensive strategies on early school leaving must comprise a mix of prevention, intervention and compensation initiatives, which need to straddle different policy areas. These measures should be integrated into all relevant policies aimed at children and young people; therefore cross-government cooperation is essential.

Cooperation on policies and measures related to early leaving between the various ministries/departments or between the different policy areas is already part of the institutional set-up in many countries (see Figure 6). In some others, cooperation is less systematic. The level and extent of this kind of cooperation depends a lot on countries' political and institutional structures.

Figure 6: Cross-government cooperation on ELET: policy areas working with education at central/top-level, 2013/14



Source: Eurydice.

UK (1) = UK-ENG/WLS/NIR

Country specific notes: See full report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 68).

Formalising cooperation, for example, by means of a coordinating body, is a way to enhance synergies across government departments and between different levels of authority, schools and other stakeholders. Coordinating bodies could strengthen the commitment to reducing early leaving, improve the process of monitoring and evaluation as well as identify areas for further work. Although only four countries/regions have established a formal coordinating body as part of their comprehensive strategy for tackling early leaving (Belgium (Flemish Community), Spain, Malta and the Netherlands), the initial positive outcomes of their work could serve as an example for other countries.

Case study: Coordinating body for tackling early leaving in Belgium (Flemish Community)

A thematic working group was established for the development of the 'Action Plan on Early School Leaving', in which many stakeholders such as policy-makers, social partners, educational umbrella organisations, labour market organisations, etc. were involved. Moreover, a cross-sector steering group meets at least once a year to implement the action plan.



At the local level, multi-agency partnerships can ensure that students receive the holistic support they need.

Multi-agency partnerships can facilitate effective coordination among local stakeholders who work together to address the individual needs of students at risk of early leaving; they can therefore provide holistic support to these young people. In many countries various professionals are involved at school and community level. The question that remains to be answered is to what extent these agencies work together: do they provide a joined-up service or do they have a fragmented approach, with professionals only responding to students' if their needs fall within their own area of expertise. Experiences from Belgium (German-speaking Community), Ireland, Malta and the Netherlands, for example, show that the constitution of multi-disciplinary teams committed to joint case management can be effective for meeting students' full range of needs.

Case study: Institutionalised partnership practice against early leaving in Ireland

The whole-school guidance plan provides an overarching framework for student support, including special educational needs and mental health. The student support team is the core element of the student support system in schools and meets on a weekly or fortnightly basis to discuss individual cases and decide the best way forward. This may involve providing in-school support for the young person or deciding that external help is needed.



Effective cross-government and cross-sector cooperation requires clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the various stakeholders. Although monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of cooperation can help to clarify these issues and support collaboration, this currently only happens in a systematic way in the Netherlands, Finland, the United Kingdom (Scotland) and Switzerland. The findings in these countries/regions show that a lot of time and effort needs to go into developing knowledge and understanding of the partners (e.g. of their institutional culture and language, their practices, etc.) as well as into building trust to overcome barriers to cooperation. This process is a prerequisite if a sense of shared ownership is to be developed.

Concluding remarks

This Eurydice Brief confirms that early leaving represents a complex challenge at individual, national and European levels. Young people who leave education and training early are often both socially and economically disadvantaged compared to those who stay on and gain the necessary qualifications to help them succeed in life.

To address this situation, it is vital to recognise that while early leaving is, on the surface, an issue for education and training systems, its underlying causes are embedded in wider social and political contexts. Early leaving is fundamentally shaped by countries' broader policies for the economy, employment, social affairs, integration of migrants, housing, health, and so on. Improvements in educational attainment and employment levels of young people therefore also rely on improvements

in the socio-economic climate – on higher economic growth, measures to combat poverty and improve health, and the effective integration of immigrants and minorities into society. Only a comprehensive approach to tackling early leaving can therefore be effective and sustainable.

Positive developments – with significant variations across countries – can be noted in the progress made across all European countries in reducing the proportion of early leavers. In several countries, reducing ELET has become and remains a prominent priority in the policy agenda, leading to the development of more targeted policies. All countries have in place a wide range of policies and measures for tackling early leaving, even the ones with very low early leaving rates. It is obvious, however, that some things can be further improved. In some countries, large disparities still exist between the early leaving rates of migrant and non-migrant students, as well as between male and female students. While neither of these are determining factors for early leaving they are still important and must be seen in the light of students' socio-economic status which has a much stronger impact. Moreover, high levels of grade retention and low participation rates in ECEC coincide with high proportions of early leavers in a few countries (Spain, Portugal and Turkey), and this is one reason why these issues remain a general concern.

In addition to the issues identified and analysed here, countries have reported several others that may have had an impact on their rates of early leavers, such as the implementation and generalisation of VET programmes in secondary education; the identification of schools needing priority intervention; the extension of compulsory schooling; and the creation of a national expectation that young people should finish school. These issues, which could not all be analysed in detail in this Brief, deserve further investigation.

Last but not least, the funding of policies and measures for tackling early leaving plays a crucial role. The availability of additional funding is not a prerequisite for strategic action to address early leaving. However, it can act as a lever, for instance to provide adequate support for schools with a high concentration of people at risk of ELET, and targeted support for specific groups at risk. In the Netherlands, schools receive performance-related funding for contributing to the reduction of early leaving. This issue should also be further explored in future debates on strategies, policies and measures to tackle early leaving in Europe.

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