

The logo for 'dreams' is centered in a white circle. The word 'dreams' is written in a lowercase, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a yellow horizontal bar with a purple circle on the left and a purple pill-shaped icon with a yellow star on the right. The background of the entire page is purple with abstract yellow and white shapes.

dreams\*

# INFORMATIVE PILLS

Resources for Families to Facilitate  
Diversity-based Transitions from  
Primary to Secondary School to prevent  
Early School Leaving (ESL)

The logo for the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, featuring the text 'With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union' and the European Union flag.

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## INFORMATIVE PILLS

### WHAT IS EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING?

Early school leaving (ESL) is broadly defined as the phenomenon of young people leaving formal education before they have successfully completed upper-secondary schooling.<sup>1</sup> The European Union defines early school leavers as people aged 18-24 who have only lower secondary education or less and are no longer in education or training.<sup>2</sup> However, early school leaving is broadly to be intended as the result of a process that runs through the student's life and education up to the point of leaving school.



### WHY DOES ESL HAPPEN?

There is no one single reason that leads students to drop out of school. Instead, there are multiple risk factors which interact with each other. Factors are linked to individual characteristics, family background, schools, education systems and wider social and economic conditions.<sup>3</sup>

The decision to leave initial education is influenced not only by potentially limited or non-attractive prospects of further education and the more appealing alternatives offered by the youth labour market, but also by the cumulative negative past experiences of a long trajectory through primary and secondary school. Consequently, the issue of early school leaving draws attention to every characteristic of the education

- 1 EUROPEAN AGENCY for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Early School Leaving and Learners with Disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs.
- 2 This definition was agreed by EU Education Ministers in the Council in 2003 (Council conclusions on "Reference levels of European Average Performance in Education and Training (Benchmarks)", May 2003.
- 3 EUROPEAN AGENCY for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Early School Leaving and Learners with Disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs.
- 4 <https://nesetweb.eu/en/about-us/policy-themes/early-school-leaving-participation-in-education-and-training/>

system that influences the quality and equity of educational trajectories up to secondary education.<sup>4</sup> These include, for example: the frequency and abruptness of transitions, personal or family problems, learning difficulties, or a fragile socio-economic situation. In addition, important elements are the way the education system is set up, school climate and teacher-pupil relations.

## WHAT DOES ESL LEAD TO?

Early school leaving is linked to unemployment, social exclusion, poverty and poor health. Individual early school leavers are more likely to be unemployed, to be in precarious and low-paid jobs, to draw on welfare and other social programmes throughout their lives, and to encounter difficulties in gaining a place in vocational training. They are much less likely to be “active citizens” and to become involved in lifelong learning.<sup>5</sup>



ESL is considered an important factor in terms of poorer outcomes for the individual and society. Those who do not complete upper-secondary education tend to come from groups that are marginalised in many other ways, and tend to go on to experience multiple disadvantages into adulthood. ESL is associated with a greater likelihood of being unemployed (Bäckman, Jakobsen, Lorentzen, Österbacka & Dahl, 2015; Przybylski, 2014), a greater risk of poor life chances and poor health outcomes (Christle, Jolivet & Nelson, 2007; Gallagher, 2011) and a greater

risk of wider social exclusion (Bäckman & Nilsson, 2016; Jahnukainen & Järvinen, 2005; Wilkins & Huckabee, 2014). Young people who are identified as having SEND seem likely to be particularly at risk of ESL and also at a greater risk of poor psycho-social outcomes in life (Humphrey, Wigelsworth, Barlow & Squires, 2013).

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5 <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/act1494bc-8a62-49ed-b874-052a75f29859/Early-school-leaving-factsheet.pdf>

6 Please consult our Report The Transition from Primary to Secondary Education to Prevent Early School Leaving from a Diversity Perspective: Context, Interviews & Good Practices ([https://567476e3-afa7-4559-a6e4-9a5b05d-04fd2.filesusr.com/ugd/632f44\\_ba49c41540de4b9f87f29c25d3c50b39.pdf](https://567476e3-afa7-4559-a6e4-9a5b05d-04fd2.filesusr.com/ugd/632f44_ba49c41540de4b9f87f29c25d3c50b39.pdf))

## IS ESL A COMMON PHENOMENON IN EUROPE?

In 2020, 9.9 % of 18-24 year olds in the EU had completed at most a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training (early leavers).

From an analysis conducted for the purposes of the DREAMS project<sup>6</sup>, the school enrolment rate decreases slightly in the transition from primary to secondary in all partner countries, Spain, Italy and Portugal, and decreases between 13% and 22% for the ages between 15 and 19 years old. However, between 18 and 24 years old, there is a substantial ESTL percentage.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL?

Transition from primary to secondary education is an important stage for a child, since it defines a transcendental change in the life of students: they find themselves in a process of change, adaptation and adjustment both in their relationship towards the education system as well as towards their development and entrance into teenagehood (Ruiz, Castro & Leon, 2010). The lack of adequate tools and guidance within the school community to facilitate this transition can result in an increased chance of Early School Leaving (ESL).



Although the transition from primary to secondary is not the only cause for ESTL, it is an important prevention stage to this problem which posts significant social and economic consequences. At this stage, ESL risk factors are already visible and can be identified with proper protocols.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TAKE DIVERSITY INTO ACCOUNT DURING THE TRANSITION TO PREVENT ESL?

The rate of ESL is especially worrying among male students and students from foreign backgrounds. This shows that a diversity-based approach has to be introduced in

order to assure intra-system equality at school.

## GENDER GAP

In 2020, 11.8 % of young men and 8.0 % of young women in the EU were early leavers from education and training.

The proportion of early leavers from education and training in 2020 in the EU was 3.8 percentage points higher for young men (11.8 %) than for young women (8.0 %). Nearly all EU Member States reported a higher proportion of early leavers for young men than for young women, with particularly large differences — of at least 5.0 percentage points — in Italy, Malta, Cyprus, Portugal and Spain.<sup>7</sup>

## MIGRANT GAP

On average across the EU, twice as many young people from the first generation of migrants abandon school early compared to their native peers (26% versus 13%).

In Greece, Spain and Italy more than 40% of young migrants are early school leavers. A few countries such as Portugal, the UK and Norway show lower rates of early school leavers among migrants compared to natives.

In several Member States early school leaving is especially high among disadvantaged minorities such as the Roma population.<sup>8</sup>

## BULLYING FACTOR

Among the factors contributing to ESL, bullying represents one of the major ones, as it hurts the victim by provoking psychological effects and sometimes depression disorders. Bullying and cyberbullying victims are at risk of ESL and social marginalisation. Researches proved that victims tend to encounter more difficulties in studying and

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7 [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training#Analysis\\_by\\_sex](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training#Analysis_by_sex)

8 Data are taken from the European Labour Force Survey (LFS), which is conducted in the 27 Member States, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey.

9 Ministero dell'Interno, Abbandono scolastico e bullismo: quali rischi tra i giovani, Programma Operativo Nazionale "Sicurezza per lo sviluppo – Obiettivo Convergenza 2007-2013" Obiettivo Operativo 2.6 "Contenere gli effetti delle manifestazioni di devianza".

they can develop learning difficulties that can potentially lead them to refuse school and eventually drop out (Blaya, 2007, p. 19).<sup>9</sup>

## **DISABILITIES AND/OR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS LEARNERS**

Young people identified as having SEN or disabilities are at particular risk of ESL. Across the EU, ESL is almost three times higher among people with disabilities than non-disabled people (Limbach-Reich & Powell, 2016, p. 8).

## **WHAT EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES DO CHILDREN FACE DURING TRANSITION?**

In Spain, a study conducted with 853 seventh graders indicated that 50% considered the transition from sixth grade to be very rough.

They experienced feelings of difficulty to adapt to the new curricula and to their new relational environment, as well as difficulty with dealing with the loss of friends and a familiar context. An interview to a similar number of sixth graders pointed out that their main worries about the transition to secondary school were academic difficulties (11%), possibility of school failure and grade repetition (13%), and being objects of violence (10,7%). When asked about their expectations, sixth graders expected secondary school to be difficult (21%), cool (13%), and violent (10%). These perceptions are closely tied to the academic performance: a study of 2005 indicated that in sixth grade 93% of students pass, and mostly do it with high grades. However, in seventh grade the percentage of passing students drops to 73%. (Ruiz, Castro & León, 2010).

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