

Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support

Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving

November 2013

Key Policy Messages

Early school leaving (ESL) is a multi-faceted and complex problem caused by a cumulative process of disengagement. It is a result of personal, social, economic, education or family-related reasons. Schools play an important role in addressing ESL but they cannot and should not work in isolation. Comprehensive approaches that focus on the root causes of ESL are required to reduce ESL. Reducing ESL can help towards the integration of young people into the labour market, and contribute to breaking the cycle of deprivation that leads to the social exclusion of too many young people.

Based on the work of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving, the following key policy messages identify the critical conditions for successful policies against ESL.

1. Ensure long-term political and financial commitment to reducing ESL and keep it high on the political agenda.
2. Ensure children and young people are at the centre of all policies aimed at reducing ESL. Ensure their voices are taken into account when developing and implementing such policies.
3. Develop and implement a sustainable national strategy to reduce ESL. This strategy should address all levels of education and training and encompass the right mixture of preventative, intervention and compensation measures.
4. Invest in the knowledge base of ESL, through regular and timely collection of accurate data and information. Ensure that data and information on ESL is accessible and used effectively in policy development. Ensure that the monitoring and evaluation of ESL measures steers policy development.
5. Ensure policy development and implementation is based on strong, long-term cooperation between national, regional/ local authorities and stakeholders, as well as between different policies, through for example establishing a coordinating body.
6. 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. Ensure access to high quality education throughout life (including early childhood education and care), and the provision of high quality Vocational Education and Training (VET).
7. Support schools to develop conducive and supportive learning environments that focus on the needs of individual pupils. Promote a curriculum that is relevant and engaging.
8. Promote and support multi-professional teams in schools to address ESL.
9. Support cooperation between schools, local communities, parents and pupils in school development and in initiatives to reduce ESL. Promote strong commitment from all stakeholders in efforts to reduce ESL at local levels, including local businesses.

10. Promote a better understanding of ESL in initial education and continuous professional development for all school staff, especially teachers. Enable staff to provide differentiated learning support for pupils in an inclusive and individualised way.
11. Strengthen guidance to ensure young people are aware of the different study options and employment prospects available to them. Ensure counselling systems provide young people with both emotional and practical support.
12. 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 who work in second chance schemes in their specific role.