

**Project Title:**  
**NON-FOR-LESL :**  
**Non-formal Learning can Prevent**  
**Early School Leaving**  
**Project Number: NI-2014-1-DE03-KA201-001570**

## **Intellectual Output 1**

**Comparative Study Analysis Report:**  
**Preventing Early School Leaving**  
**through the recognition and validation**  
**of non-formal learning,**  
**within formal education –**  
**from theory to school practice**

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Erasmus+

Non-formal Learning Can Prevent Early School Leaving



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PIXEL ASSOCIAZIONE CULTURALE



INGENIOUS KNOWLEDGE



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PLATON SCHOOLS



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## 1. Introduction

The NONFORLESL project addresses one of the main educational challenges in Europe: Early School Leaving (ESL). Therefore, it contributes to the efforts of EU countries to meet the headline target set in the *Europe 2020 Strategy* to reduce ESL to less than 10%.

According to the European Commission Staff Working Paper on Reducing Early School Leaving (2013): “reducing ESL to less than 10% by 2020 is a headline target for achieving a number of key objectives in the Europe 2020 strategy and one of the five benchmarks of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). Europe 2020 highlights three mutually exclusive reinforcing priorities: ‘smart growth’ based on knowledge and innovation, ‘sustainable growth’ promoting a greener economy and ‘inclusive growth’ fostering high employment and social cohesion. High rates of ESL are detrimental to the objective of making lifelong learning a reality and a constraint to smart and inclusive growth in Europe”.

Since 2003, when the Education Council set itself a benchmark to reduce the average rate of ESL to not more than 10% by 2010, member states have made many efforts to tackle ESL. Yet, in 2009 the ESL rate was 14.4%, measuring only 3.2% less than 2000. As a result, the council has renewed its commitment to the 10% benchmark with the new target 2020.

The above mentioned report reflects on the policies that member states have taken since 2003 in order to reduce ESL. The comprehensive strategies that have been taken by EU countries can be summarised in three main categories:

- Prevention (early school education and care, measures at system level), such as the “High quality preschool education for all” in Sweden, the prolongation of compulsory education in Poland, the Netherlands, Italy and Hungary, the integration policies taken in Hungary and Bulgaria, the positive affirmative actions taken in Cyprus through the allocation of additional resources to schools with a disadvantaged pupil population e.g. “Zones of Educational Priority” (Cyprus), The Ambition reussite programme (France), the increasing permeability of educational pathways, the strengthening of vocational pathways (e.g. Providing attractive alternatives to ESL (Spain).
- Intervention (measures at school level, student focused measures), such as “schools as learning communities” (rural education project in Romania), early warning systems (digital absence portal in the



Netherlands), enhancing the involvement of parents, (The Home-School Community Liaison in Ireland), Teacher education, empowerment and motivation (Comenius Project: THE GOLDEN 5 which aim to improve teachers' competences to handle difficult classroom situations), extra-curricular activities (open schools in Naples), personalised learning (personalised programs for educational success in France), improving guidance (career orientation and guidance in the Netherlands).

- Compensation (second chance opportunities, re-entering mainstream E&T, comprehensive support), such as the BelvarosiTanodaAlapitvany Foundation in Hungary which is a second change school, support to re-enter mainstream education (project learning for young adults in Slovenia, transition classes in France), recognition and validation of prior learning (New Opportunities Initiative in Portugal).

The NONFORLESL Project can be assigned to measures taken for intervention at the school level, since it addresses many of the aspects being explored by the EU countries (empowerment and motivation, personalised learning, student focused measures, extra-curricular activities). At the same time, it has elements for prevention of ESL, as it is geared towards students at risk in order to motivate them to change their decision. The NONFORLESL Projects comes to fill in the gap that appears in relation to practical measures which affect the educational policies and curriculum implementation, as well as teaching, learning and assessing.

Considering that and in order to promote the aims of the NONFORLESL project, the 6 partners of the consortium have been involved in a comparative analysis of the main issues under investigation: (a) Early School Leaving (ESL), (b) validation of non-formal learning within formal education and (c) students' assessment.

In the following report an attempt will be made to:

- Present the EU perspective of the two main issues under investigation: ESL and the validation of non-formal learning.
- Draw conclusions considering the results of the five national reports.
- Present the reports of the 5 partner countries (Romania, Italy, Greece, Germany and Cyprus) in relation to the main issues, both on the theoretical and the practical level. The used data was collected through a survey conducted among teachers and students.



## 2. EU perspective in relation to Early School Leaving

Early School Leaving (ESL) is a complex phenomenon and has been increasingly recognised as one of the main challenges faced by European societies. ESL can cause serious consequences, not only for students and their families but also on society as whole as it leads to economic and social costs.

The consequences of Early School Leaving can be extreme, as it reduces chances to participate in the social, cultural and economic aspects of society. Moreover, it increases the individual risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. It can affect lifetime earnings, as well as the personal wellbeing and health. The effects can even be passed on to the next generation as the decision to leave school early reduces children's chances of succeeding in school.

At the same time, there are reported consequences on the economical and the societal level, as high rates of early school leaving have long-term effects on the societal developments and on economic growth. Early school leavers tend to participate less in democratic processes and are less active citizens. Innovation and growth rely on a skilled labour force, not only for high-tech sectors but throughout the economy.

It is widely acknowledged that Europe's future depends on its youth. Through its Europe 2020 Strategy, the EU aims to support young people better and to enable them to develop their talents fully for their own as well as to their economy's and society's benefit. According to the European Commission Staff Working Paper on Reducing Early School Leaving (2013): "reducing ESL to less than 10% by 2020 is a headline target for achieving a number of key objectives in the Europe 2020 strategy and one of the five benchmarks of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). Europe 2020 highlights three mutually exclusive reinforcing priorities: 'smart growth' based on knowledge and innovation, 'sustainable growth' promoting a greener economy and 'inclusive growth' fostering high employment and social cohesion. High rates of ESL are detrimental to the objective of making lifelong learning a reality and a constraint to smart and inclusive growth in Europe".

In recent years, EU members have joined forces in order to tackle this problem, as ESL requires a strong political commitment. In June 2011, the EU published the council's recommended policies and encouraged all member states to follow the recommendations in order to reduce ESL to 10% by 2020. As a result, many actions have been taken in order to create comprehensive policies against early school leaving, focusing on prevention, intervention and compensation.



Although the reasons for ESL are highly individual, EU reports mention, nevertheless, that it is possible to identify some recurring characteristics. ESL appears to be strongly linked to social disadvantage and low educational backgrounds. ESL is also influenced by educational factors, by individual circumstances and by socio-economic conditions.

As reported in a European Commission's report ESL is a process rather than a one-off event. It often starts in primary school with first experiences of school failure and growing alienation from school. The main educational factors can be summed up as follows: transitions between schools or between different levels of education, mismatches between curriculum and students needs, insufficient targeted support for pupils to cope with emotional, social and educational difficulties and to remain in education, insufficient respond the different learning styles of pupils, insufficient support for teachers to fulfill the variable needs of students and insufficient personalised and flexible learning arrangements to motivate students to more active forms of learning.

### **3. EU perspective in relation to the validation of non-formal and informal learning**

The validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified.

The European Union is confronted with a serious economic crisis which has caused a surge in unemployment, especially among young people. In the context of an ageing population, the validation of relevant knowledge, skills and competences become even more important for improving the functionality of the labour market and in enhancing competitiveness and economic growth.

The European Council's recommendation (2012/C 398/01) from December 2012 urges member states to proceed with the validation of non-formal and informal learning as this type of learning is seen to play an important role in enhancing employability. At the same time it increases motivation for LLL, particularly in the case of socio-economically disadvantaged or low-qualified people.



Various efforts have been made on the school level to intervene and monitor students' motivation and interest for school. It is believed that the EU's efforts, which have been taken in the last five years in the area of formal, non-formal and informal learning, can contribute that. Introducing the need for recognition and validation of non-formal and informal knowledge which was gained in extra-curricular activities can play an important role for the completion of formal schooling.

Research has shown that although learning often takes place in formal settings, a great deal of valuable learning also takes place deliberately or informally in the everyday life and represents a "rich source of human capital" (OECD). However, much of this learning is not visible as the capabilities of the learner cannot be easily proved and validated and are useful to society. The 2010 OECD report states that recognition can allow people (students) to complete formal education more quickly, efficiently and cheaply while recognition of non-formal and informal learning can also help employers and workers to get a good job match.

According to the OECD (2010), validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning can create four types of benefits:

- Economic benefits by reducing direct and opportunity costs of formal learning and by allowing human capital to be used productively.
- Educational benefits which can support LLL and career development,
- Social benefits by improving equity and strengthening access to both further education and the labour market for disadvantaged groups and
- Psychological benefits by making individuals aware of their capabilities and acknowledging their self-worth.

Engaging all students and, perhaps more importantly, students at risk in self-directed and personalised learning through the use of ICT tools (OER) in Open Educational Environments can help societies to deal with current educational and social challenges, especially with Early School Leaving.



## 4. Intellectual Output 1: the procedure followed

As mentioned above, the first produced Intellectual Output as part of the NONFORLESL project was the Comparative Study Analysis Report: Preventing Early School Leaving through the recognition and validation of non-formal learning within formal education – from theory to school practice

The aims of the first Intellectual Output are:

- To investigate the current situation among partners concerning ESL, students' assessment and the recognition and validation of non-formal learning in formal schooling.
- To identify the main areas in relation to teaching, learning and assessing students' performance which need to be addressed for intervening at school level.
- To identify the view of students and teachers views on the mentioned issues with the help of surveys.

In order to achieve these goals, the partners were involved in three main activities described in the recommendation:

- Activity 1 (O1 A1): Quantitative survey study
- Activity 2 (O1 A2): Literature review – document analysis on main issues under investigation – procedures to be followed in order to implement the project ideas
- Activity 3 (O1 A3): Comparative report for all partners

## 5. Summary

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

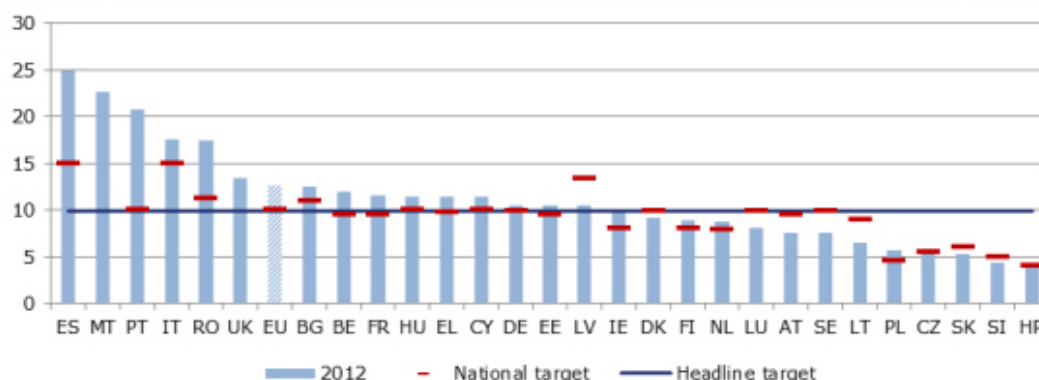




Based on the partners' reports, all countries of the consortium (Romania, Italy, Greece, Germany and Cyprus) have made great efforts to deal with this problem and have taken measures at all levels: prevention, intervention and compensation.

Based on the last official report, Early School Leaving is seen as a major challenge in Romania (17.4%) and Italy (17.6%), whereas in Greece (11.4%), Germany (10.5) and Cyprus (11.4%) the challenge of ESL seems to be under control.

**Figure 1. ESL rate 2012, Europe 2020 target and national targets**



Source: Eurostat (LFS).

[http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/29\\_early\\_school\\_leaving.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/29_early_school_leaving.pdf)

According to the reports, the most effective measures to deal with the Early School Leaving are:

- The "Second Chance Programme" implemented in Romania to "encourage students who dropped out of school to come back to classes and complete compulsory education and to obtain a vocational qualification" (compensation level).
- The "Zones of Educational Priority" implemented in Cyprus in socially disadvantaged areas with the aim to offer equal opportunities in education and to combat early school leaving, school failure, functional illiteracy, educational marginalization and social exclusion (prevention level).
- Abandoning of "Hauptschule and Realschule" as two separate schools and instead, merge them into one comprehensive school.

The survey conducted among students and teachers has shown the following results:

- **The main factors that influence students to leave school are:** low grades at school, weakness in the main subjects, lack of usefulness of school subjects, family and personal problems and bullying.



- **The possible changes that can be introduced in schools that could help students to complete schooling are:** better understanding in case of family or personal problems and better communication between school and family, recognition of students' talents and interests, acknowledging skills acquired in non-formal learning activities, introducing of more interesting school subjects.
- **The benefits of validating non-formal learning in schools are:** increased motivation for students to come to school and to study harder, better image for the students at risk, motivation for students to complete schooling and a better relationship between students and teachers.
- **The measures taken by teachers to prevent ESL are:** student and family counseling, close communication with students and their families, increased motivation of students and differentiation with regards to students' evaluation in order to prevent school failure.
- **The identified problems within the educational system which influence students to leave school early:** overcrowded classrooms with large number of students, unavailability of assistant teachers in the classroom who offer additional help to students in need, limited financial resources, too many subjects in the national curriculum and inadequacy of formal assessment to record other types of learning besides the subjects taught at school.
- **The identified problems within formal schooling which influence students to leave school early:** school assessment focuses on knowledge; teaching is theoretical with limited practical work due to time available, inappropriate communication channels, too many subjects and too much subject matter to cover.
- **The way the validation of non-formal learning can be introduced into the school procedures are:**
  - In the form of additional acknowledgement through a certificate which can be added to students' portfolio in order to encourage students' extra-curricular involvement and learning. Students will need to bring official proof of the non-formal learning acquired.
  - In the form of partial acknowledgement through credits which students can obtain and then add to their overall assessment.
  - In the form of internal acknowledgement within each individual school where students' will be asked to perform in order to show their acquisition of skills and knowledge.